

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Jack Johnson

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Johnson, Jack, 1949-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Jack Johnson,
Dates:	April 26, 2007
Bulk Dates:	2007
Physical Description:	7 Betacame SP videocassettes (3:00:25).
Abstract:	State deputy attorney and county government official Jack Johnson (1949 -) was elected County Chief Executive of Prince George's County, Maryland. Johnson was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 26, 2007, in Upper Marlboro, Maryland. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2007_163
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Jack Johnson was born on April 3, 1949 in Wadmalaw Island, South Carolina to Adolphus and Ermine Johnson. Johnson graduated from Haut Gap High School on John's Island, South Carolina in 1966 and received his B.S. degree from Benedict College in 1970. He attended Howard University School of Law, obtaining his J.D. degree in 1975. Johnson served in the United States Army Reserves as a combat medic during the Vietnam War.

In 1975, Johnson worked as an attorney in the Office of Chief Counsel with the Internal Revenue Service until 1984. For the next three years, he served as a law

professor at North Carolina Central University's School of Law. Johnson then became the Deputy State Attorney, managing the day-to-day operations of the prosecutor's office, before becoming the State's Attorney for Prince George's County, Maryland. In this position, Johnson recruited a diverse, highly motivated and well-trained staff of prosecutors, investigators, administrators and support personnel.

In December 2002, Johnson was elected the sixth County Executive of Prince George's County. He made history shortly after being elected to office by increasing the county's budget by more than \$1 billion. Johnson's budget priorities focused on education and public safety. He increased the school funding by over \$100 million and is also responsible for building the largest police force in the county's history and saving the county's hospital system. Johnson was re-elected to a second term in 2006.

Johnson has served as a board member of the Prince George's County United Way and the Coalition of Concerned Black Christian Men. He has received the NAACP President Award and the National Forum of Black Public Administrators' First Leadership Award.

Johnson resides in Mitchellville, Maryland with his wife, Leslie. They have three adult children.

Johnson was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on April 26, 2007.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Jack Johnson was conducted by Denise Gines on April 26, 2007, in Upper Marlboro, Maryland, and was recorded on 7 Betacame SP videocassettes. State deputy attorney and county government official Jack Johnson (1949 -) was elected County Chief Executive of Prince George's County, Maryland.

Restrictions

Restrictions on Access

Restrictions may be applied on a case-by-case basis at the discretion of The HistoryMakers®.

Restrictions on Use

All use of materials and use credits must be pre-approved by The HistoryMakers®. Appropriate credit must be given. Copyright is held by The HistoryMakers®.

Related Material

Information about the administrative functions involved in scheduling, researching, and producing the interview, as well as correspondence with the interview subject is stored electronically both on The HistoryMakers® server and in two databases maintained by The HistoryMakers®, though this information is not included in this finding aid.

Controlled Access Terms

This interview collection is indexed under the following controlled access subject terms.

Persons:

Johnson, Jack, 1949-

Gines, Denise (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Johnson, Jack, 1949---Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

Maryland

Prince George's County (Md.)

Occupations:

State Deputy Attorney

County Government Official

HistoryMakers® Category:

LawMakers|PoliticalMakers

Administrative Information

Custodial History

Interview footage was recorded by The HistoryMakers®. All rights to the interview have been transferred to The HistoryMakers® by the interview subject through a signed interview release form. Signed interview release forms have been deposited with Jenner & Block, LLP, Chicago.

Preferred Citation

The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Jack Johnson, April 26, 2007. The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection, 1900 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

Processing Information

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 2/5/2020 by The HistoryMakers® staff. The finding aid was created adhering to the following standards: DACS, AACR2, and the Oral History Cataloging Manual

Other Finding Aid

A Microsoft Access contact database and a FileMaker Pro tracking database, both maintained by The HistoryMakers®, keep track of the administrative functions involved in scheduling, researching, and producing the interview.

Detailed Description of the Collection

Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with Jack Johnson, Section
A2007_163_001_001, TRT: 0:28:40 2007/04/26

Jack Johnson was born on April 3, 1949 in Wadmalaw Island, South Carolina to Ermine Campbell Johnson and Adolphus Johnson, Sr. His maternal grandfather, Emmanuel Campbell, Sr., was a farmer and while his wife, Laura Singleton Campbell, occasionally worked as a domestic. They raised Johnson's mother in Edisto Island, South Carolina, where she attended Burrough School, a one-room schoolhouse headed by Jane Edwards. During the harvest season, Johnson's mother helped on the family's farm. Johnson's paternal grandfather, Mathaias Johnson, was a farmer and minister on Wadmalaw Island, where he raised Johnson's father after the untimely death of his wife, Victoria Middleton Johnson. Johnson's parents met at a dance in Edisto Island, and married shortly thereafter. They lived briefly in Charleston, South Carolina and later returned to Wadmalaw Island. Johnson grew up on the island with his nine siblings and extended paternal family.

Video Oral History Interview with Jack Johnson, Section
A2007_163_001_002, TRT: 0:29:00 2007/04/26

Jack Johnson's paternal great-grandfather, William Johnson, migrated from Jamaica, and there was speculation that he was then enslaved by the Johnson Tea Company prior to emancipation. He owned fifty-six acres of land in Wadmalaw Island, South Carolina, which he

bought with his earnings from his military service in the Civil War, and winnings from sailboat races. He raised three sons, including Johnson's paternal grandfather, Mathaias Johnson, who became a farmer and minister. Johnson's father was born on Wadmalaw Island, and met Johnson's mother at a dance on Edisto Island. Neither had more than a high school education, but his mother stressed the importance of education. Johnson's father farmed during the day and worked as a longshoreman for United Fruit Company at night. He was also a member of the International Longshoremen's Association, which was unheard of at that time. Johnson was raised in Wadmalaw Island, where he spent much of his time fishing and visiting with his paternal grandfather.

Video Oral History Interview with Jack Johnson, Section
A2007_163_001_003, TRT: 0:28:50 2007/04/26

Jack Johnson grew up in Wadmalaw Island, South Carolina, where the large population of West Africans created a unique Gullah language and culture. For fun, he attended the local oyster roasts, where he ate rice and fish. Johnson began his education at Rockville Elementary School at five years old, which was against the school's policy. Nevertheless, he was permitted to remain in the class when the teacher saw that he was a gifted student. Johnson was also mentored by the principal, Edith L. Frierson. The year that Johnson enrolled, a new facility was built as a result of the state government's ongoing part in the Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka case. Johnson was a smart and energetic student, who was eager to help his fellow classmates. He graduated to Haut Gap High School on Johns Island, where he was mentored by his teacher and football coach, Nathaniel Cook. Johnson continued to compete academically with his close friends, although many of them did not attend college due to financial restrictions.

Video Oral History Interview with Jack Johnson, Section
A2007_163_001_004, TRT: 0:29:20 2007/04/26

Jack Johnson joined the drama club, 4-H club, and student council while attending Haut Gap High School in Johns Island, South Carolina. He was excused from the draft due to his age, so he decided to enroll at Benedict College in

Columbia, South Carolina in 1966. There, Johnson became involved with the NAACP, and was voted president of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity. He majored in business administration and accounting, and was mentored by the department head, William Bartholomew, who encouraged him to apply to business school. Upon graduating in 1970, Johnson was accepted to Washington University in St. Louis, but he opted to work for The Equitable Life Insurance Society of America instead. At this time, the U.S. Army resumed its draft lottery, so Johnson joined the U.S. Army Reserve to avoid the war. He was first stationed at Fort Lewis in Washington, and then sent to train as combat medic at Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio, Texas. Six years later, Johnson decided to attend the Howard University School of Law.

Video Oral History Interview with Jack Johnson, Section
A2007_163_001_005, TRT: 0:29:15 2007/04/26

Jack Johnson was encouraged to attend Howard University School of Law as an undergraduate student at Benedict College in Columbia, South Carolina. He graduated from Howard University School of Law in 1975, and moved to Atlanta, Georgia, becoming the first African American attorney at the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) Southeast region office. His supervisor, Henry Stockel, was tough but fair, and Johnson never experienced racism from his coworkers. After a year of specializing in collection and bankruptcy law, he returned to Washington, D.C. to work in the interpretative division of the IRS's national Office of Chief Counsel. He also interpreted tax codes for corporations, and mentored the few African American lawyers there. After nine years with the IRS, Johnson became a tax law professor at North Carolina Central University School of Law. He also worked on the admissions committee, where he focused on increasing the enrollment of women, minorities, and rural students.

Video Oral History Interview with Jack Johnson, Section
A2007_163_001_006, TRT: 0:29:50 2007/04/26

Jack Johnson met his wife, Leslie E. Johnson, while attending Howard University School of Law. They married a year after Johnson graduated, and raised three

children together. In 1985, Johnson was contacted by Alexander Williams, Jr., an old friend from Howard University who was running for state's attorney in Prince George's County, Maryland. Johnson agreed to serve as his campaign treasurer, and helped Williams to become the first African American elected to a countywide position in Prince George's County. Williams then selected Johnson as his deputy. When Williams was appointed to a federal judgeship, Johnson ran for state's attorney, winning the election by a large margin. In office, he addressed the issue of police brutality and pushed to hire more African American attorneys. Despite criticism from the media, Johnson was elected county executive in 2002. He focused his administration on community beautification, education, and improving access to healthcare. Johnson reflects upon his life.

Video Oral History Interview with Jack Johnson, Section
A2007_163_001_007, TRT: 0:05:30 2007/04/26

Jack Johnson concludes the interview by sharing a message for future generations, and describing how he would like to be remembered.