

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Vivian R. Johnson

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## Overview of the Collection

<b>Repository:</b>	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
<b>Creator:</b>	Johnson, Vivian R., 1935-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Vivian R. Johnson,
<b>Dates:</b>	October 11, 2012 and September 13, 2007
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2007 and 2012
<b>Physical Description:</b>	10 Betacame SP videocassettes uncompressed MOV digital video files (4:41:07).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Education professor Vivian R. Johnson (1935 - ) was a member of the faculty at Boston University's School of Education as an associate clinical professor in the Department of Administration, Training, and Policy Studies. Johnson was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on October 11, 2012 and September 13, 2007, in Boston, Massachusetts and Newton Center, Massachusetts. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2007_260
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Retired educator Vivian R. Johnson was born in Chicago, Illinois and grew up in Los Angeles, California where she graduated from Polytechnic High School in 1952 and entered the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA). In 1955, she became the first African American elected as a Women's Representative on the Student Council. Influenced by the UCLA University Religious Conference (URC), Johnson was chosen to participate in the URC sponsored Project India in 1953 where she worked with Indian students to build a one-room school house in a village near Calcutta, India. Following receipt of her B.A. degree in English/Speech from UCLA in 1956 and a year of graduate studies, she traveled to the East Coast with her husband, Willard R. Johnson. For four years, she served as a scholarship assistant placing students from newly independent African nations in American universities for the Africa-American Institute in Washington, D.C. and Harvard University's African Scholarship Program of American Universities.

From 1968 to 1972, Johnson served as a social studies curriculum writer for the Newton Massachusetts Public Schools. In Boston, Massachusetts, she founded a resource center on African American culture and directed Reading is Yours to Keep, Inc. from 1973 to 1978 in which parents were trained to tutor students. In 1974, she received the Certificate of Advanced Study and in 1975 the Doctorate in Education in Administration, Planning and Social Policy from the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

From 1976 to 1980, Johnson served as a consultant to a number of educational institutions including multicultural film evaluation for WGBH Boston, curriculum development for University of Nairobi and Kenyatta University College and school-staff development for Boston University's African Studies Outreach Program. After serving as Co-Coordinator of the Collaborative Planning Study for the College and University Planning Program with the Boston Public Schools, in 1980, Johnson began a six-year tenure as the Campus Coordinator for Boston University School of Medicine's Strengthening Health Delivery Systems Program operating in twenty countries in central and

west Africa.

In 1987, Johnson was a Scholar in Residence at the Rockefeller Foundation Bellagio Center in Bellagio, Italy, where she completed the book *West African governments and volunteer development organizations : priorities for partnership*, co-authored with her husband. In 1989, she joined the faculty at Boston University's School of Education as an Associate Clinical Professor in the Department of Administration, Training and Policy Studies. During her time at Boston University, Johnson received the prestigious Fulbright Summer Seminar Award to study multicultural education in Indonesia.

After retiring from Boston University as Associate Professor Emerita in 2003, Johnson's work in her specialties continued. In 2005, she joined her colleagues in teaching a summer course in Geneva, Switzerland, and she co-authored a book on family, school and community partnership in education published in 2007.

Throughout her career, Johnson has been involved with numerous civic organizations including serving on the Board of Directors of the Trust for Public Land, National Audubon Society, Oxfam America and the National Center of Afro-American Artists.

Vivian R. Johnson was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on September 13, 2007.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Vivian R. Johnson was conducted by Larry Crowe on October 11, 2012 and September 13, 2007, in Boston, Massachusetts and Newton Center, Massachusetts, and was recorded on 10 Betacame SP videocassettes uncompressed MOV digital video files. Education professor Vivian R. Johnson (1935 - ) was a member of the faculty at Boston University's School of Education as an associate clinical professor in the Department of Administration, Training, and Policy Studies.

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## 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®.

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## 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.

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## Controlled Access Terms

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

## Persons:

Johnson, Vivian R., 1935-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

## Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Johnson, Vivian R., 1935---Interviews

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African American women educators--Interviews

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African American women educators--Massachusetts--Boston

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African American educators--Interviews

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## Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

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The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

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Boston University. School of Education

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## Occupations:

Education Professor

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## HistoryMakers® Category:

EducationMakers

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## 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 Vivian R. Johnson, October 11, 2012 and September

13, 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 5/30/2023 by The HistoryMakers® staff. The finding aid was created adhering to the following standards: DACS, AACR2, and the Oral History Cataloging Manual (Matters 1995).

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## 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.

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## Detailed Description of the Collection

### Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with Vivian R. Johnson, Section A2007\_260\_001\_001, TRT: 0:29:31  
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Vivian R. Johnson was born on July 24, 1935 in Chicago, Illinois to Lillian Wilson Miller and Lonnie Robinson. Her maternal grandfather, Joseph B. Wilson, was born in Arkansas to a family of college-educated landowners. He met Johnson's maternal grandmother, Ethel Wilson, at Arkansas Industrial University's Branch Normal College in Pine Bluff, Arkansas. The couple moved in search of work to Muskogee, Oklahoma, where Johnson's mother was born; and later lived in Nashville, Tennessee, where Johnson's grandfather worked as a contractor for the National Baptist Publishing Board. Eventually, Johnson's maternal family settled in Chicago, where her mother graduated from Wendell Phillips High School, and attended Crane Junior College. Johnson's father was born in 1905 in Tiptonville, Tennessee, where his family were landowners. His sister, Myrtle Robinson, influenced Johnson to become an educator. As a child, Johnson moved from Chicago to Los Angeles, California, and read the Chicago Defender and California Eagle.

African Americans--Arkansas--History.

Arkansas Agricultural and Mechanical College.

African American families.

African American fathers.

African Americans--Education--History.

Grandfathers.

Slavery--Arkansas.

Video Oral History Interview with Vivian R. Johnson, Section A2007\_260\_001\_002, TRT: 0:30:01  
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Vivian R. Johnson's father was born in Tiptonville, Tennessee, and moved as a teenager to Chicago, Illinois, where he worked as a repairman during the Great Depression. After her parents' divorce, Johnson moved with her mother, Lillian Wilson Miller, and brother, Wilson Robinson, to Lake Charles, Louisiana. She attended the segregated Second Ward School, where her mother worked as a

substitute teacher. When Johnson was seven years old, her mother married Herman Miller, and they moved to Los Angeles, California. There, Johnson became active in the Baptist Young People's Union of America at Trinity Baptist Church, which was also a community center, and hosted speakers like politician Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. and author Sue Bailey Thurman. In Los Angeles, Johnson attended the 36th Street School, where she was taught by the noted educator Birdielee V. Bright. She remembers visits to the library, and her maternal grandfather's involvement in the Universal Negro Improvement Association.

African American families--Louisiana.

African American families--California--Los Angeles.

Segregation in education--Louisiana.

African Americans--Religion--California--Los Angeles.

African Americans--Education.

African American children.

Courtship.

Video Oral History Interview with Vivian R. Johnson, Section A2007\_260\_001\_003, TRT: 0:29:16 ?

Vivian R. Johnson was taught by Birdielee V. Bright in the fourth and sixth grades at 36th Street School in Los Angeles, California. There, Bright's stern and devoted guidance influenced Johnson to become an educator. In Bright's classes, Johnson studied the statue of Christ the Redeemer of the Andes, and read books like 'Pioneers of Negro Origin in California' by Sue Bailey Thurman. In junior high school, Johnson was introduced to the works of William Shakespeare by Bright's sister, who was also a teacher. She brought Johnson's class to the Shakespeare festival, and invited African American actors to read Shakespeare's plays in the classroom. Johnson lived in the community of West Los Angeles, where her stepfather owned a café, and future politician Diane E. Watson was her neighbor. At John H. Francis Polytechnic High School, Johnson aspired to become a mathematician, and received special instruction from her math teacher. Johnson also joined the school's debate team.

African Americans--California--Los Angeles.

African Americans--Education--California--Los Angeles.

American newspapers--20th century.

African American business enterprises.

Video Oral History Interview with Vivian R. Johnson, Section A2007\_260\_001\_004, TRT: 0:30:24 ?

Vivian R. Johnson graduated in 1952 from John H. Francis Polytechnic High School in Los Angeles, California. She enrolled at the University of California, Los Angeles, where her peers included publisher Bennett Johnson and author Haki Madhubuti. As a member of the University Religious Conference, Johnson lived in the diverse Stevens House; took part in the conference's Panel of Americans, which featured a multicultural discussion of racial issues; and addressed the Lions Clubs International. After a lecture by Pastor James Herman Robinson, Johnson was inspired to join the University Religious Conference's Project India program. She travelled to India, and worked with Indian students on social service projects like building schoolhouses. The program was funded by the Ford Foundation and the Hoover Company, and became a model for the Peace Corps. Johnson also talks about her brother, Wilson Robinson, who was the vice president of student affairs at Golden Gate College in San Francisco,

California.

African Americans--California--Los Angeles.

African Americans--Education (Secondary)--California--Los Angeles.

University of California, Los Angeles--African American students.

Universities and colleges--Religion.

Foreign study--India.

Video Oral History Interview with Vivian R. Johnson, Section A2007\_260\_001\_005, TRT: 0:28:53  
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Vivian R. Johnson travelled to India in 1953 with Project India, a service program developed by the University Religious Conference at the University of California, Los Angeles. The trip was led by the organization's director, Adeline Gunther. During that time, Johnson's maternal grandfather, Joseph B. Wilson, was also abroad for his work with the National Baptist Convention Foreign Mission Board in Liberia. Johnson visited many Indian cities, including Bombay, where she celebrated her eighteenth birthday. She met India's vice president, Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, and learned about the Indian independence movement, which she recognized as similar to the Civil Rights Movement in the United States. She also befriended Lillian Granderson, who worked at the American embassy in Delhi. Later, she and Granderson collaborated to secure a scholarship for a Malawi student to attend Howard University. Johnson recalls the poverty she witnessed in India, as well as her travels to Africa in 1957.

Universities and colleges--Religion.

Foreign study--India.

African American college students--Race identity.

Video Oral History Interview with Vivian R. Johnson, Section A2007\_260\_002\_006, TRT: 6:29:40  
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Vivian R. Johnson studied at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), where she was the first African American woman elected as president of the student council. She married her classmate, Willard Johnson, upon graduating in 1956; and, the next year, began her graduate studies at UCLA. When her husband was hired by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Johnson moved to Cambridge, Massachusetts, where she tutored math students at the Cambridge Community Center. In 1970, Johnson joined educator Robert C. Hayden and her husband at the Circle Associates, and began developing a bibliography of books about African American children, as well as an educational resource center. During the desegregation of the Boston Public Schools, Johnson obtained funds from the Carnegie Corporation of New York to create Reading is Yours to Keep, a training program that helped parents teach their children literacy. Johnson also describes her admiration of librarian Mayme Clayton and civic activist Vassie D. Wright.

Video Oral History Interview with Vivian R. Johnson, Section A2007\_260\_002\_007, TRT: 7:28:24  
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Vivian R. Johnson created the Reading is Yours to Keep program to assist kindergarten students whose education was neglected during the desegregation of the Boston Public Schools. She saw positive results, and implemented the program in preschools with funds from The Boston Foundation. In 1978, Johnson tried to introduce the curriculum within the Boston Public Schools, but was blocked by the administration. In 1980, Johnson was hired by Professor David M. French at the Boston University School of Medicine. She served as his campus coordinator, and managed the transportation of medical supplies to his public health office in Cote d'Ivoire. In 1986, Johnson's husband, Willard

Johnson, received a Fulbright Fellowship to study volunteer development organizations in Africa. She and her husband co-authored 'West African Governments and Volunteer Development Organizations' in 1990. Johnson also describes her involvement with the American Museum of Negro History in Boston; and her mentor, Adelaide Cromwell.

Video Oral History Interview with Vivian R. Johnson, Section A2007\_260\_002\_008, TRT: 8:29:28 ?

Vivian R. Johnson joined the Institute for Responsive Education, which was founded by community education researcher Don Davies in 1973, as a research director in 1989. In this role, she studied 28 parent resource centers in 14 states. She also taught a course, called Social Context of Education, at the Boston University School of Education; and worked as a teacher trainer in Portugal, where she was impressed by children's language skills. In 1991, Johnson participated in the Fulbright-Hays Summer Seminars in Indonesia, where she studied families, communities and schools. In 1994, she trained instructors for the Strengthening Health Delivery Systems Project at Helen Keller International. Johnson served on the board of the Trust for Public Land, where she helped preserve community spaces from demolition or development, including a community garden in New York City, and the Martin Luther King Jr. National Historic Site in Atlanta, Georgia. She also remembers child psychiatrist Dr. James Comer as her mentor.

Video Oral History Interview with Vivian R. Johnson, Section A2007\_260\_002\_009, TRT: 9:34:09 ?

Vivian R. Johnson was a researcher at the Center on Families, Communities, Schools, and Children's Learning in Boston, Massachusetts. She also worked with the Hubert H. Humphrey Fellowship Program; the Young People's Project; Howard University, where she assisted Dr. William Leo Hansberry; and WGBH-TV, where she contributed to the station's civil rights project. Additionally, she attended the seventh annual conference of the Association for the Study of African American Life and History. Johnson retired from teaching at Boston University in 2003. However, she returned in 2005 to teach her Social Context of Education course at the university's satellite campus in Geneva, Switzerland, and co-taught a course with Professor Karen Boatman in 2009. Johnson published 'Beyond the Bake Sale,' a bestselling education text, in 2007. At the time of the interview, she was involved with the Tremont Crossing project at the National Center of Afro-American Artists, which was founded by arts educator Elma Lewis.

Video Oral History Interview with Vivian R. Johnson, Section A2007\_260\_002\_010, TRT: 10:11:21 ?

Vivian R. Johnson brought her daughters, Caryn Johnson-Carter and Kimberly Johnson Ogadhoh, on a tour of twelve African countries and three European countries in 1976, while her husband, Willard Johnson, was working on a development research project. During that time, Johnson supplemented her daughters' education by helping them conduct field studies of topics such as rice agriculture and community development in Africa. Johnson concludes the interview by describing how she would like to be remembered.