

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

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Johnson, Willard R., 1935-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Willard Johnson,
Dates:	December 9, 2005
Bulk Dates:	2005
Physical Description:	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:45:19).
Abstract:	Political science professor and genealogist Willard Johnson (1935 -) was a core leader in the creation of TransAfrica, a national lobbying group for African liberation and support. He is professor emeritus of political science at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and the founder and director of the Kansas Institute for African American and Native American Family History. Johnson was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on December 9, 2005, in Newton, Massachusetts. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2005_260
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Willard R. Johnson is professor emeritus of political science at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). For over thirty years (1964-1996), his academic focus was on international relations and development policies and institutions with an emphasis on Africa. Throughout his career, he combined scholarship and teaching with political activism. In addition to African studies and comparative politics, he devoted energy and time to the economic development of inner city America. Johnson was a core leader in the creation of TransAfrica, a national lobbying group for African liberation and support.

Johnson was born in 1935 in St. Louis, Missouri. Both of his parents were born in Kansas. His father was a bacteriologist with the U.S. Public Health Service, which led the family to move several times as his father's career advanced. His family included a brother and twin sisters. They moved to Tuskegee, Alabama, and then to Pasadena, California, in 1946, where Johnson joined the Pasadena Boys' Club. Johnson graduated from Muir High School in Pasadena and went on to receive his B.A. degree in international relations at the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA), where he was president of the student body during his senior year. At UCLA, he was a founding member of a chapter of the NAACP, which brought W.E.B. DuBois to the UCLA campus as a speaker. Johnson received his M.A. degree in African Studies with distinction from John Hopkins School of International Studies and his Ph.D. degree from Harvard University. His dissertation was on "Cameroon Reunification: The Political Union of Several Africas." In 1964, he was appointed Assistant Professor of political science at MIT.

In 1966, Johnson returned to Cameroon to extend his research and then turned his Harvard dissertation into a book, *The Cameroon Federation*, that was published by Princeton University Press. On leave from MIT from 1968 to 1970, he helped to establish and served as the executive director of a community-owned, non-profit economic development promotion complex, Circle, Inc., in Boston's Roxbury neighborhood. Circle included a small

business development center, an investment fund, a management-training institute and a consulting firm.

In 1972, Johnson directed the Africa Policy Task Force for the George McGovern for President committee. During the 1970s, he served on the Democratic Party Advisory Council's Foreign Affairs Study Group. His earlier public service included two terms on the U.S. National Committee for UNESCO.

Johnson was one of the founders and senior advisors to the Boston Pan-African Forum, Inc. He led the Boston unit of TransAfrica in its "Free South Africa Movement" campaign, making the banning of South African Kruggerrand coins part of the anti-apartheid agenda of the U.S.

In 1991, Johnson founded and now directs the Kansas Institute for African American and Native American Family History (KIAANAFH). The Institute promotes the preservation, documentation and appreciation of family identity, traditions and achievements of members of African American and Native American communities of the Midwest. The *Black History Bulletin* (Jan. – Dec. 2001, Vol. 64) carries an article by Johnson on "The Great Escape" of Indians and Blacks into Kansas during 1861 and 1862.

Johnson co-authored with his wife, Dr. Vivian Johnson (whom he met as a UCLA student), *West African Governments and Volunteer Development Organizations: Priorities for Partnership*. The Johnsons, residents of Newton, Massachusetts, are the parents of two married daughters, Kimberley Johnson Ogadhoh, born in 1963, and Caryn Johnson, born in 1960.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Willard Johnson was conducted by Robert Hayden on December 9, 2005, in Newton, Massachusetts, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. Political science professor and genealogist Willard Johnson (1935 -) was a core leader in the creation of TransAfrica, a national lobbying group for African liberation and support. He is professor emeritus of political science at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and the founder and director of the Kansas Institute for African American and Native American Family History.

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, Willard R., 1935-
- Hayden, Robert (Interviewer)
- Burghelea, Neculai (Videographer)

Subjects:

- African Americans--Interviews
- Johnson, Willard R., 1935---Interviews

African American political scientists--Interviews

Genealogists--Interviews

Lobbyists--Interviews

African American political activists--Interviews

Organizations:

- HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)
- The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection
- Massachusetts Institute of Technology
- Kansas Institute of African American and Native American Family History

Occupations:

- Political Science Professor
- Genealogist

HistoryMakers® Category:

CivicMakers|EducationMakers

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 Willard Johnson, December 9, 2005. 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).

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 Willard Johnson, Section A2005_260_001_001, TRT: 0:30:30 ?

Willard Johnson was born on November 22, 1935 in St. Louis, Missouri to Dorothy Stovall Johnson and Willard Johnson. His maternal grandmother, Gertrude Smith Stovall, lived with her Cherokee relatives in Tahlequah, Oklahoma after being orphaned before returning to her hometown of Humboldt, Kansas. Johnson's maternal grandfather, James Stovall, was a carpenter and Baptist minister of English ancestry. Johnson's paternal grandfather was born to a former slave owner. Johnson's mother was born in 1909 in Humboldt and attended Kansas State Teachers College in Emporia. Johnson's father was born in Leavenworth, Kansas in 1901 and attended the University of Kansas. After he and Johnson's mother married, they moved to Nashville, Tennessee. Johnson's father taught general science courses at Tennessee Agricultural and Industrial State Normal College, founded the diagnostic laboratory at Peoples Hospital in St. Louis, Missouri and worked at the Tuskegee Veterans Administration Medical Center.

African American political scientists--Interviews.

Genealogists--Interviews.

Lobbyists--Interviews.

African American political activists--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Willard Johnson, Section A2005_260_001_002, TRT: 0:30:05 ?

Willard Johnson's paternal grandfather, Joseph Johnson, was born to a former

slave owner named Butler and Elizabeth, a woman of Madagascan and Native American descent who fled from the Butlers with her children in fear that they would be taken from her. Johnson's grandfather married Hattie McClanahan, whose family was Irish and African American. Johnson remembers his family's house in Tuskegee, Alabama, running soap box derbies, the class segregation on Tuskegee Institute's campus and attending George Washington Carver's funeral in 1943. Johnson entered John Adams Elementary School, then enrolled at Chambliss Children's House. Upon moving to Pasadena, California, he attended George Washington Junior High School, where he began teaching a class once when the teacher left the room. As a member of the Boys Club of Pasadena, he was mentored by Robert Morgan, who ran a craft shop. He attended high school at John Muir Junior College. Johnson also describes his family's religious outlook and church attendance.

Video Oral History Interview with Willard Johnson, Section A2005_260_001_003, TRT: 0:30:56 ?

Willard Johnson attended John Muir Junior College as it transitioned into Pasadena City College. He participated in Model United Nations and studied international relations. At the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) Johnson founded an NAACP chapter, which was shut down by the administration for inviting W.E.B. DuBois to speak on campus. Johnson also was elected student body president and met his wife, HistoryMaker Vivian R. Johnson. After graduating with his B.A. degree in political science, Johnson worked at the National Student Association. He traveled to Cuba and met with Fidel Castro to talk about improving relations with the U.S. Johnson earned his master's degree from Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies and attended Harvard University for his Ph.D. He traveled to Cameroon as a Foreign Area Fellow for his dissertation, later published as 'The Cameroon Federation.' Johnson was then hired as an assistant professor in African affairs at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Video Oral History Interview with Willard Johnson, Section A2005_260_001_004, TRT: 0:29:21 ?

Willard Johnson took a leave of absence from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) to join HistoryMakers Melvin King and Hubie Jones in founding the Circle, Inc., an organization of local community leaders in Boston. Their goal was to give African Americans a stronger voice in the economy and in job creation, and through the organization, Johnson created the Roxbury Institute of Business Management. Johnson left the Circle to return to MIT, where he received tenure. He then created the Business Management for Economic Development and travelled to Africa to study the African-Arab Cooperation program. Johnson helped create TransAfrica, a lobbying group that focused on U.S. foreign policy for Africa and the Caribbean. He also participated in establishing the African Heritage Studies Association, which focused on the repeal of the Byrd Amendment of 1971 and ending sales of the South African Krugerrand coin in the United States during apartheid.

Video Oral History Interview with Willard Johnson, Section A2005_260_001_005, TRT: 0:29:22 ?

Willard Johnson remembers Nelson Mandela's first visit to Boston, Massachusetts after Mandela's release from prison. With his wife, HistoryMaker Vivian R. Johnson, Willard studied in Indonesia and the Ivory Coast, where they wrote and published their book, 'West African Governments and Volunteer Development Organizations.' After his maternal grandmother's death, Johnson planned to turn her home into a museum and created the Kansas Institute for African American and Native American Family History. Johnson was aware of his maternal grandmother's Cherokee ancestry, and through his research at the institute, he discovered the Dawes Rolls and history of African Americans who

traveled the the Trail of Tears with Native Americans. Johnson reflects upon the Trail of Tears and his family's connection to its history. He talks about Native American involvement in the Civil War, and the ceremony he created, 'Tracing Trails of Blood on Ice.' Johnson reflects upon the perception of black Native Americans and his own life.

Video Oral History Interview with Willard Johnson, Section A2005_260_001_006, TRT: 0:15:05 ?

Willard Johnson describes his hopes and concerns for the African American community and how he would like to be remembered. He concludes the tape by narrating his photographs.