

# Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Ben Johnson

PERSON

Johnson, R. Benjamin

**Alternative Names:** Ben Johnson;

**Life Dates:** July 14, 1944-

**Place of Birth:** Marion , Arkansas, USA

**Residence:** Upper Marlboro, MD

**Work:** Upper Marlboro, MD

**Occupations:** Presidential Aide

## Biographical Note

Government official Robert Benjamin (Ben) Johnson was born on July 14, 1944 in Marion, Arkansas to Robert and Willie Johnson. Johnson was raised in South Bend, Indiana, where he graduated from high school. He went on to attend the Indiana Military Academy and was commissioned into the U.S. Army as a 2nd Lieutenant in 1967.

From 1967 to 1968, Johnson worked for WSBT-TV, where he became the first black television news reporter in South Bend, Indiana. Johnson then served as director of employment services for ACTION Inc., the St. Joseph County anti-poverty agency, and as managing director of the St. Joseph County Community Federal Credit Union. In 1975, he was the first African American to mount a serious campaign for mayor of South Bend, but was not elected. Two years later, in 1977, Johnson left South Bend for Washington, D.C., where he became director of the National Center for Urban Ethnic Affairs Credit Union Institute, and served as special assistant to the chairman of the board of the National Credit Union Administration.

In 1979, Johnson joined President Jimmy Carter's Administration as director of consumer programs and special assistant to Esther Peterson. From 1983 to 1987, he worked as the administrator of the Business Regulation Administration, where he oversaw the governing of corporations that conducted business in the District of Columbia. In 1988, Johnson was appointed administrator of the Housing and Environmental Administration and directed enforcement and compliance of housing and environmental laws in Washington, D.C. He was then named director of the District of Columbia's Department of Public Assisted Housing, where he worked until

1993, when he joined President Bill Clinton's White House staff as an associate director in the Office of Public Liaison. Johnson then served as special assistant to the President, and was responsible for all areas of outreach to the African American community. He later served as deputy assistant to the President; and, in 1999, was appointed assistant to the president and director of the White House Office on the President's Initiative for One America, where he oversaw the first free-standing White House office in history to help close the opportunity gaps that exist for minorities in the United States.

Johnson has also served as senior counselor to Porter Novelli, Ogilvy, the National Cancer Institute and Spectrum Sciences, among others. He has spoken at many institutions and organizations including Harvard University, the Brookings Institute, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, and the Aspen Institute. Johnson chaired the board of the One America Foundation, and served on the board of directors of the AFLAC Corporation. He was also a deputy chairman of the Democratic National Committee, and served on the DNC's Rules and the Bylaws Committee. His many awards include an honorary doctorate degree from Morgan State University and the Washington, D.C. Distinguished Government Service Award.

Johnson lives in Upper Marlboro, Maryland with his wife, Jacqueline. They have five children and eleven grandchildren.

Ben Johnson was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on March 19, 2014.

## Related Entries

**Indiana Military Academy** [STUDENTOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**U.S. Army Commission, 2nd LT.**

**ACTION, Inc.** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**Director of Employment Services**

**St. Joseph County Community Federal Credit Union** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**Managing Director**

**National Credit Union Administration** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**Special Assistant to the Chairman of the Board**

**District of Columbia's Department of Public Assisted Housing** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from ? to 1993]

**Director**

**White House Staff** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**Special Assistant to the President**

**White House Staff** [EMPLOYEEOF]

[from ? to 1999]

**Deputy Assistant to the President**

**National Center for Urban Ethnic Affairs Credit Union** [EMPLOYEEOf]

[from 1975 to ?]

**Director**

**United States Government** [EMPLOYEEOf]

[from 1979 to ?]

**Director of Consumer Programs, Special Assistant to Esther Peterson**

**Business Regulation Administration** [EMPLOYEEOf]

[from 1983 to 1987]

**Administrator**

**Housing and Environmental Administration** [EMPLOYEEOf]

[from 1988 to ?]

**Administrator**

**White House Staff** [EMPLOYEEOf]

[from 1993 to ?]

**Associate Director, Office of Public Liaison**

**President's Initiative for One America** [EMPLOYEEOf]

[from 1999 to ?]

**Director**

**White House Staff** [EMPLOYEEOf]

[from 1999 to ?]

**Assistant to the President**

**AFLAC Corporation** [MEMBEROf]

[from ? to ?]

**Board of Directors**

**Porter Novelli** [MEMBEROf]

[from ? to ?]

**Senior Counselor**

**Ogilvy** [MEMBEROf]

[from ? to ?]

**Senior Counselor**

**National Cancer Institute** [MEMBEROf]

[from ? to ?]

**Senior Counselor**

**Spectrum Sciences** [MEMBEROf]

[from ? to ?]

**Senior Counselor**

**South Bend Urban League** [MEMBEROF]  
[from 1966 to 1967]

**Youth Board Member**

**Positive Action** [MEMBEROF]  
[from 1971 to 1975]

**Member**

**One America Foundation** [MEMBEROF]  
[from 2001 to 2004]

**Chairman**

**Democratic National Committee** [MEMBEROF]  
[from 2003 to 2005]

**Deputy Chair**