

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Reverend Dr. Johnnie Colemon

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Colemon, Johnnie
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Reverend Dr. Johnnie Colemon,
Dates:	June 15, 2000
Bulk Dates:	2000
Physical Description:	5 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:08:44).
Abstract:	Minister Reverend Dr. Johnnie Colemon (1920 - 2014) was the pastor of the New Thought Church, which has nearly 20,000 members. Colemon was the founder of Christ Universal Temple, the largest African American-owned public facility in Chicago. Colemon was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on June 15, 2000, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2000_016
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

The Reverend Dr. Johnnie Colemon, founder-minister of Christ Universal Temple, had a message: "Teaching People How To Live Better Lives". Often referred to as the first lady of America's religious community, she was the pastor of the thriving, spirited and progressive New Thought Church, which has nearly 20,000 members. Born in Columbus, Mississippi, Colemon was raised in a rich spiritual environment. Her parents, John and Lula Haley, were active members of the church and encouraged their only child to participate. Colemon demonstrated leadership skills early at Union Academy High School, graduating as valedictorian of her class. She received her B.A. at Wiley College and first became a teacher for the Chicago Public Schools and later an analyst for the Quarter Masters.

Open Your Mind and Be Healed is not only the title of her book, but her remarkable personal story of the use of universal principles of healing. After learning that she had an incurable disease in 1952, with encouragement from her mother, Colemon enrolled in the Unity School of Christianity, Lee's Summit, Missouri, where she received her teaching certificate and became an ordained minister.

Colemon was a builder and a teacher. She built six structures to spread the better living teachings: three churches, two institutions of learning and a restaurant and banquet facility. The first church was Christ Unity Temple built in 1956 and its addition in 1973. The congregation expanded to the current Christ Universal Temple, located on the sprawling campus grounds at 119th Street (named Rev. Johnnie Colemon Drive in 1996) and Ashland Avenue in Chicago. Close to 4,000 people flock every Sunday and are taught how to think, rather than what to think. Her experiences compelled her to share with others: "Change Your Thoughts and Change Your Life." Out of a sense of knowing that a need for a vital, new affiliation of independent New Thought Churches existed, Colemon's dynamic leadership led to the organization of the Universal Foundation for Better Living, Inc., an international association of New Thought Christian Churches and study groups located in the USA and abroad.

Her civic positions include Director of the Chicago Port Authority and Commissioner of the Chicago Transit Authority Oversight Committee, recognition as one of Chicago's Living Legends by the Institute for African American Youth Development. She was honored by DuSable Museum as an African American History Maker.

Colemon was the recipient of numerous honors and awards. She held the distinction of advancing the New Thought movement and received the Minister of the Century from the International New Thought Alliance (INTA). Coleman was awarded an honorary doctor of divinity degree from her alma mater, Wiley College in Wiley, Texas; the degrees of doctor of humane letters and doctor of divinity from Monrovia College, Liberia; and a Ph.D. in humane letters from Gospel Ministry Outreach (GMOR). Other honors include proclamations from the States of Illinois and Michigan; the City of Chicago; the Ohio House of Representatives; the Michigan Legislature; the City of Oakland, California; Miami, Florida and many others.

Colemon passed away on December 23, 2014 at the age of 94.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Reverend Dr. Johnnie Coleman was conducted by Julieanna L. Richardson on June 15, 2000, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 5 Betacame SP videocassettes. Minister Reverend Dr. Johnnie Coleman (1920 - 2014) was the pastor of the New Thought Church, which has nearly 20,000 members. Coleman was the founder of Christ Universal Temple, the largest African American-owned public facility in Chicago.

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:

Colemon, Johnnie

Richardson, Julieanna L. (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Colemon, Johnnie--Interviews

African American women clergy--Illinois--Chicago--Interviews.

African American religious leaders--Interviews.

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Minister

HistoryMakers® Category:

ReligionMakers

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 Reverend Dr. Johnnie Colemon, June 15, 2000. 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 Reverend Dr. Johnnie Colemon, Section A2000_016_001_001, TRT: 0:31:10 ?

Minister and civic leader Johnnie Colemon begins by describing her family background, discussing her relationship with her father, her mother, and her grandparents. Colemon recounts growing up in Columbus, Mississippi, focusing on her family life and her favorite childhood activities. She also explains her decision to attend Wiley College.

African American families.

Childhood and youth--Mississippi--Columbus.

Wiley College (Marshall, Tex.).

African American mothers.

African American fathers.

Video Oral History Interview with Reverend Dr. Johnnie Colemon, Section A2000_016_001_002, TRT: 0:31:09 ?

Minister and civic leader Johnnie Colemon recounts her higher education experience at Wiley College, focusing on her activities and the impact of skin color discrimination. After discussing her father's death, Colemon describes her career as a teacher and government worker, and explains receiving the call to become a minister. She focuses on her experiences at the Unity School of Christianity, and her recalls her efforts to desegregate public facilities in Missouri.

Wiley College (Marshall, Tex.).

Discrimination in education.

African American fathers--Death.

Segregation--Missouri.

Unity School of Christianity.

Religious awakening.

Video Oral History Interview with Reverend Dr. Johnnie Colemon, Section A2000_016_001_003, TRT: 0:29:26 ?

Minister and civic leader Johnnie Colemon details her personal and religious philosophy, sharing her ideas on faith, race, and community development. Colemon discusses her relationship with God and explains how her vocation has given her inner strength. She also describes the expansion of her ministry at the Christ Universal Temple over the years.

African Americans--Religion.

Faith.

Clergy.

Christianity.

Church--Illinois--Chicago.

Video Oral History Interview with Reverend Dr. Johnnie Colemon, Section A2000_016_001_004,
TRT: 0:31:19 ?

Minister and social activist Johnnie Colemon continues to share her personal and religious beliefs and also explains the beliefs of the New Thought Church. After discussing the role of women in her church, she reflects on her life and career, expressing gratitude for the impact she has made on many individuals.

Faith.

Christianity.

Women clergy.

African Americans--Religion.

Video Oral History Interview with Reverend Dr. Johnnie Colemon, Section A2000_016_001_005,
TRT: 0:05:40 ?

Minister and social activist Johnnie Colemon addresses the allegations that her church is a cult, and reiterates her spiritual beliefs. Finally, she shares her hopes and concerns for the African American community.

Cults.

Faith.

Church--Illinois--Chicago.