

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Joseph 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, Joseph Benjamin, 1934-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Joseph Johnson,
<b>Dates:</b>	May 7, 2003
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2003
<b>Physical Description:</b>	4 Betacame SP videocassettes (1:59:12).
<b>Abstract:</b>	College president and university president Joseph Johnson (1934 - 2018 ) is the former president of both Grambling State University and Talladega College. Johnson retired in 1998. Johnson was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on May 7, 2003, in Fairburn, Georgia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2003_100
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Joseph Benjamin Johnson, the youngest of three children, was born September 16, 1934, in New Orleans, Louisiana to Lillie and Sidney. Johnson attended public school in New Orleans and went on to Grambling College to earn his B.S. in 1957. He later attended the University of Colorado at Boulder to earn an M.S. in 1967 and a Ph.D. in education in 1973. Johnson also did post-doctoral work at Harvard University.

Johnson started his educational career in 1962 as a high school teacher in Shreveport, Louisiana, moving on to Greenville Park High School a year later. In 1969, Johnson went to work as the assistant to the president of the University of Colorado, a position he held until 1977. In that year, he returned to his alma mater, Grambling State University, to become the president of the school. During his tenure, he reversed the trend in decreased enrollment and helped erase the school's debt. In 1991, Johnson left Grambling for Talladega College, a small liberal arts college. Once again, Johnson increased the school's revenue base before retiring in 1998.

In addition to his academic work, Johnson has served as a member of many organizations including the United Negro College Fund, the Commission on Leadership Development of the American Council of Education. He is also the past chairman of the Academic Advisory Committee of Black Entertainment Television, as well as a member of the National Collegiate Athletic Association President's Commission and the University of Colorado Board of Directors of the National Alumni Association. He has been honored with numerous awards, such as the Thurgood Marshall Educational Achievement Award and the Jewish Tree of Life Award. He has received honorary doctorates from Western Michigan University and the Gandhigram University of India, and an honorary doctor of laws degree from Grambling State University.

Johnson passed away on January 2, 2018 at age 83.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Joseph Johnson was conducted by Larry Crowe on May 7, 2003, in Fairburn, Georgia, and was recorded on 4 Betacame SP videocassettes. College president and university president Joseph Johnson (1934 - 2018 ) is the former president of both Grambling State University and Talladega College. Johnson retired in 1998.

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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, Joseph Benjamin, 1934-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Johnson, Joseph Benjamin, 1934- --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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Talladega College

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Grambling State University

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## Occupations:

College President

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University President

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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 Joseph Johnson, May 7, 2003. 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 Joseph Johnson, Section A2003\_100\_001\_001, TRT: 0:29:30 ?

Joseph Johnson describes his family background. Johnson was born on September 16, 1934 in New Orleans, Louisiana. His mother, Lillie Mickens Johnson, was born in Burnside, Louisiana in 1907. She was a housewife, a maid,

and an avid churchgoer. His father, Sidney Johnson, was born in New Orleans in 1907. His father owned a cleaning business in the 1930s with a white man and when clients found out that he was an owner, not a cleaner, they stopped patronizing their business. His father was active in the NAACP and Elks Club, organized strikes, and taught people how to vote out of his living room as a member of the Progressive Voters League. Johnson talks about his favorite teachers at Lafone Elementary School and Booker T. Washington High School in New Orleans where he graduated in 1953. He recalls the segregation of his neighborhood. As a child, he liked to play ball, read, and worked as a delivery boy for a pharmacy in order to pay for his class ring and tuxedo for the prom.

Video Oral History Interview with Joseph Johnson, Section A2003\_100\_001\_002, TRT: 0:29:40 ?

Joseph Johnson describes his education and career. At Booker T. Washington High School, he played football and basketball. He received a basketball scholarship to attend Grambling State University in Grambling, Louisiana and was the first in his family to go to college. In addition to joining Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Johnson was coached by legendary Eddie Robinson who recruited many great black athletes and encouraged their academic success. After Johnson graduated with his B.S. Degree in 1957, he taught at several schools in Louisiana until he was drafted to serve in the U.S. Army. Johnson then attended the University of Colorado at Boulder to earn his M.S. degree in 1967 and a Ph.D. in education in 1973. In 1969, Johnson became assistant to the president of the University of Colorado, a position he held until 1977. In that year, he returned to his alma mater, Grambling State University, to become the president of the school where he faced a \$5 million deficit.

Video Oral History Interview with Joseph Johnson, Section A2003\_100\_001\_003, TRT: 0:29:30 ?

Joseph Johnson talks about improving facilities and recruiting faculty as president of Grambling State University in Grambling, Louisiana. As president, he enjoyed building relationships with students and seeing them flourish. Yet he also had to deal with tragic accidental student deaths. After serving as president at Grambling from 1977 to 1991, Johnson left to become president at Talladega College, a small, private liberal arts school in Talladega, Alabama where he served from 1991 to 1998. He details his efforts to raise money and explains the importance of having a well-connected board of directors and using extracurricular activities and public relations to promote the school. At Talladega, Johnson refurbished the campus and increased enrollment. Johnson comments on the financial difficulty that all black colleges face and Grambling State University's recent accreditation troubles. Johnson also talks about the future and importance of black colleges and ensuring that black faculty are employed there.

Video Oral History Interview with Joseph Johnson, Section A2003\_100\_001\_004, TRT: 0:30:32 ?

Joseph Johnson describes the cultural mission of black colleges as teaching students real world skills for success rather than simply focusing on academic knowledge. Johnson hopes that affluent black people will give back to their community by donating money to black colleges. He expresses concern that the number of black males incarcerated exceeds the number in colleges. Johnson reflects upon his legacy and concludes the interview by narrating his photographs.