

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with The Honorable Sterling Johnson, Jr.

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Johnson, Sterling, 1934-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Sterling Johnson, Jr.,
Dates:	May 21, 2001
Bulk Dates:	2001
Physical Description:	5 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:30:47).
Abstract:	Federal judge The Honorable Sterling Johnson, Jr. (1934 -) was appointed to the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of New York in 1991. Previously, Johnson was Assistant United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York. Johnson began his long law career as a police officer for the New York City Police Department in 1956. Johnson was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on May 21, 2001, in Brooklyn, New York. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2001_043
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Throughout his long and varied career, Judge Sterling Johnson has been a socially progressive force and has served with conscientious integrity. Johnson was born on May 14, 1934, in Brooklyn, New York, growing up with his parents, three sisters and one brother in the Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhood. Restless as a youth, Johnson graduated from high school only because his father insisted he do so in order to join the U.S. Marine Corps. Johnson joined the U.S. Marines and served for three years.

Johnson then returned to New York and joined the New York City Police Department in 1956 where he steadily moved up the ranks. At the same time, he began night school at Brooklyn College and obtained his degree after eight and a half years of part time study. After finishing, Johnson then went on to Brooklyn Law School graduating in 1966 in the top ten percent of his class.

In 1967, Johnson began the second phase of his law enforcement career as an Assistant United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York acquiring a reputation as a tough prosecutor. After three years, Johnson was appointed as executive director of the Civilian Complaint Review Board, investigating allegations of police misconduct and brutality. In 1974, Johnson was named executive liaison officer for the Drug Enforcement Administration in Washington, D.C. Subsequently, Johnson became the Special Narcotics Prosecutor for New York City for fourteen years garnering acclaim for his outspoken stance on the "war on drugs."

In 1991, President George Bush appointed Sterling Johnson as a federal judge to the United States District Court for the Eastern District of New York. Johnson credits his varied background in law enforcement for bringing a fresh and unique perspective to the federal court.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with The Honorable Sterling Johnson, Jr. was conducted by Julieanna L. Richardson on May 21, 2001, in Brooklyn, New York, and was recorded on 5 Betacame SP videocassettes. Federal judge The Honorable Sterling Johnson, Jr. (1934 -) was appointed to the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of New York in 1991. Previously, Johnson was Assistant United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York. Johnson began his long law career as a police officer for the New York City Police Department in 1956.

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, Sterling, 1934-
- Richardson, Julieanna L. (Interviewer)
- Bieschke, Paul (Videographer)

Subjects:

- African Americans--Interviews
 - Johnson, Sterling, 1934---Interviews
-

Organizations:

- HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)
-

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Federal Judge

HistoryMakers® Category:

LawMakers

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 The Honorable Sterling Johnson, Jr., May 21, 2001. 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 The Honorable Sterling Johnson, Jr., Section
A2001_043_001_001, TRT: 0:29:59 ?

Federal Judge Sterling Johnson begins by detailing his family background, sharing stories of his family history that go back to days of slavery. He describes his mother, father, and siblings, and talks about his brother's death. Johnson also shares memories of his childhood and family life growing up in the Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhood Brooklyn and his elementary school years. He also

explains why he joined the Marines and describes his service in the Corps.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Sterling Johnson, Jr., Section
A2001_043_001_002, TRT: 0:29:38 ?

Federal Judge Sterling Johnson details his life as a police officer while finishing college and supporting a family. After over eight years in college, Johnson was encouraged to pursue a legal career. He recalls the intellectual challenges and triumphs while at Brooklyn Law School as well as some humorous anecdotes. Johnson then discusses the beginning of his career in the narcotics unit of the United States Attorney's Office in New York.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Sterling Johnson, Jr., Section
A2001_043_001_003, TRT: 0:29:46 ?

Federal Judge Sterling Johnson details his years of experience working as a narcotics prosecutor for the U.S. Attorney's office in New York. Johnson shares many detailed stories of different cases he worked on and explains how the drug trade works in the United States, particularly the heroin trade. Johnson also shares stories from his undercover work and describes the social effects of the drug trade.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Sterling Johnson, Jr., Section
A2001_043_001_004, TRT: 0:30:19 ?

Federal Judge Sterling Johnson describes his appointment to the bench and outlines the federal judicial nomination process. He discusses his accomplishments in that post, and discusses issues in judgeships and clerkships, especially a lack of diversity. He talks about his own attempts to diversify judicial clerkships and to educate young people about the justice system.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Sterling Johnson, Jr., Section
A2001_043_001_005, TRT: 0:31:05 ?

Federal District Judge Sterling Johnson shares his hopes and concerns for the black community and tells a story of when he was a victim of racial profiling. Finally, Johnson reflects on his parents and his legacy.