

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with The Honorable Eddie Bernice Johnson

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Johnson, Eddie Bernice, 1934-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Eddie Bernice Johnson,
Dates:	June 18, 2012, June 26, 2012 and March 7, 2012
Bulk Dates:	2012
Physical Description:	13 uncompressed MOV digital video files (6:22:10).
Abstract:	U.S. congresswoman The Honorable Eddie Bernice Johnson (1935 -) serves in U.S. House of Representatives, where she has been a leading voice on issues of civil rights, health care and science education. Johnson was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on June 18, 2012, June 26, 2012 and March 7, 2012, in Washington, District of Columbia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2012_094
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

U.S. Congresswoman Eddie Bernice Johnson was born on December 3, 1935 to Lee Edward Johnson and Lillie Mae White Johnson in Waco, Texas. She and her three siblings grew up attending Toliver Chapel Baptist Church, where her mother was an active church member. After attending A.J. Moore High School, Johnson graduated at the age of sixteen and moved to Indiana to attend Saint Mary's College of Notre Dame, where she graduated in 1955 with her nursing certificate.

Johnson then began work as a psychiatric nurse at La Rue Carter Psychiatric Hospital in Indianapolis, Indiana until she passed the boards. Then Congresswoman Johnson returned to Texas and started working at the Dallas Veterans Administration Hospital in 1956. While still employed at the hospital, Johnson earned her B.S. degree in nursing in 1967 from the Harris School for Nursing at Texas Christian University in Fort Worth, Texas. That same year, she was promoted to chief psychiatric nurse. She left the hospital in 1972 to run for public office in the Texas House of Representatives. There, she made a name for herself fighting for minority and women's issues. In 1976, Johnson earned her M.P.A. degree from Southern Methodist University in Dallas, and in 1977, President Jimmy Carter appointed her as the principal official of Region VI for the Department of Health, Education and Welfare (H.E.W.). She remained with the H.E.W. until 1981, when she left public office to found her own business, a real estate company. In 1986, Johnson was elected to public office once again, but this time to the Texas Senate, where she worked tirelessly to improve health care and to end racial discrimination. In 1992, Johnson ran for the U.S. House of Representatives and was elected.

As a U.S. Congresswoman, Johnson has led the battle on legislation to improve health care, the environment, civil rights, women's issues, science research and education. She is a member of the Committee of Science and Technology and the Committee of Transportation and Infrastructure. In 2001, Johnson served as Chairwoman of the Congressional Black Caucus. In 1993 and 1994, she was named by *Ebony* magazine as one of the 100 Most

Influential African Americans and in 2001, the magazine named her one of the 10 Most Powerful African American Women.

Johnson has one son, Dawrence Kirk Johnson, and three grandsons.

Eddie Bernice Johnson was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on March 7, 2012

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with The Honorable Eddie Bernice Johnson was conducted by Larry Crowe on June 18, 2012, June 26, 2012 and March 7, 2012, in Washington, District of Columbia, and was recorded on 13 uncompressed MOV digital video files. U.S. congresswoman The Honorable Eddie Bernice Johnson (1935 -) serves in U.S. House of Representatives, where she has been a leading voice on issues of civil rights, health care and science education.

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, Eddie Bernice, 1934-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Johnson, Eddie Bernice, 1934- --Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

U.S. Congresswoman

HistoryMakers® Category:

PoliticalMakers

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 Eddie Bernice Johnson, June 18, 2012, June 26, 2012 and March 7, 2012. 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 Eddie Bernice Johnson, Section
A2012_094_001_001, TRT: 1:29:47 ?

Eddie Bernice Johnson was born on December 3, 1935 in Waco, Texas to Lillie Mae White Johnson and Edward Johnson. Her maternal grandparents, Thomas White and Sarah Burks White, worked as sharecroppers in Waco, where her mother was born. Johnson's paternal family owned farmland in Brenham, Texas, where her father was born. He later moved to Waco to attend the A.J. Moore Academy. He earned his high school diploma, and met Johnson's mother there. After they married, Johnson's father worked as a businessman until joining the U.S. Navy during World War II, while her mother raised their children. After he returned from the war, he opened a tailor shop and trucking business in Waco. Johnson's father also helped build Interstate 35. Johnson grew up in East Waco, and lived across the street from her maternal grandparents. Her mother changed her birth certificate so that she could begin school with her older sister, and Johnson enrolled one year early at East Waco Elementary School.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Eddie Bernice Johnson, Section
A2012_094_001_002, TRT: 2:34:14 ?

The Honorable Eddie Bernice Johnson grew up in the close-knit African American community of East Waco, Texas. The town's black business district was located on Bridge Street, which was named after the Waco Suspension Bridge, where Johnson often played as a child. Most of the local business owners lived in Johnson's neighborhood, as did her teachers from East Waco Elementary School. Johnson was a strong student, and spent her high school years at the A.J. Moore Academy in Waco. She decided to become a nurse after her paternal grandmother fell ill and joined her family's household. Her father, Edward Johnson, was unable to find a nursing school in Texas that accepted African Americans, so Johnson enrolled at Saint Mary's College in Notre Dame, Indiana. At this point, Johnson remembers the tornado that destroyed most of Bridge Street in 1953. She also talks about her paternal family, who lived in Brenham, Texas and were the descendants of Scotch-Irish indentured servants.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Eddie Bernice Johnson, Section
A2012_094_001_003, TRT: 3:29:39 ?

The Honorable Eddie Bernice Johnson attended the majority-white Saint Mary's College in Notre Dame, Indiana, where she lived in an integrated dormitory. Although public accommodations in Indiana were not segregated by law, Johnson still experienced discrimination in towns like South Bend, Indiana. There, she was permitted to eat with her white friends; but, when her family visited, they were refused service at a local restaurant. After Johnson passed the registered nursing examination, she moved to Dallas, Texas, where she became the first African American nurse at the Dallas VA Hospital. In 1956, she married Lacey Kirk Johnson, who was a teacher in the Dallas Independent School District. Johnson worked as a nurse until the birth of her son, Kirk Johnson, in 1958. After that time, Johnson became more involved in the Civil Rights Movement. She served on a committee of leaders from the YWCA and the National Council of Jewish Women, and organized boycotts of the segregated department stores in Dallas.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Eddie Bernice Johnson, Section
A2012_094_001_004, TRT: 4:34:16 ?

The Honorable Eddie Bernice Johnson worked as a psychiatric nurse at the Dallas VA Hospital in Dallas, Texas, where she was also active in the Civil Rights Movement. She was living in Dallas when President John Fitzgerald Kennedy was assassinated in 1963, and she was among the crowd when his

assassin, Lee Harvey Oswald, was shot and killed. In the aftermath of the president's assassination, the City of Dallas formed a number of interracial committees to address problems in the community. Around this time, Johnson co-founded the Fifty Sensitive Black Women with community leaders like Yvonne Ewell, Imelda Brooks and YWCA branch director Marion Dillard, who was Johnson's mentor. Together, they protested against the segregation of public accommodations in downtown Dallas. Johnson also developed the civil rights and affirmative action policies for the Dallas VA Hospital, and organized the institution's first labor union. In response to her efforts, Johnson's peers began encouraging her to run for public office.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Eddie Bernice Johnson, Section A2012_094_001_005, TRT: 5:29:26 ?

The Honorable Eddie Bernice Johnson's involvement in the City of Dallas, Texas attracted the attention of Elizabeth Cabell, who was the wife of Mayor Earle Cabell. She offered to help Johnson run for office, but Johnson agreed to help raise money for a lawsuit against the city's single member legislative district system instead. Johnson was also appointed to a committee that screened black candidates for the Texas House of Representatives. When state representative Zan Wesley Holmes, Jr. added her name to the list of candidates, Johnson resigned from the screening committee and from her position as a VA nurse. During her campaign, Johnson worked at the Neiman Marcus department store, which was one of the first in Dallas to integrate. She learned about the retail industry, and was mentored by Edward Marcus and Stanley Marcus. In 1972, Johnson was elected to represent District 33-0 in the Texas House of Representatives, and became the first black woman to hold public office in Dallas.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Eddie Bernice Johnson, Section A2012_094_002_006, TRT: 6:31:02 ?

The Honorable Eddie Bernice Johnson served in the Texas House of Representatives from 1973 to 1977. During this time, she helped implement the School Breakfast Program in the state's public schools. In 1975, she worked on the renewal of the Voting Rights Act with U.S. Senator Lloyd Bentsen and U.S. Representative Barbara Jordan. The following year, Johnson received a master's degree in public administration from Southern Methodist University. During President Jimmy Carter's administration, Johnson worked for the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare. She returned to Dallas in 1980. Six years later, Johnson was elected to the Texas Senate. There, she called for the investigation of Judge Craig T. Enoch, whose campaign staffers had placed signs in polling places that threatened prosecution against minority voters. After Enoch removed the signs, Johnson agreed to confirm his appointment to the Texas Fifth District Court of Appeals. Johnson also served on the National Task Force on AIDS Prevention.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Eddie Bernice Johnson, Section A2012_094_002_007, TRT: 7:30:22 ?

The Honorable Eddie Bernice Johnson used her influence as a state senator to challenge the all-white Texas Board of Regents. Her efforts secured the appointment of an African American to the board of the University of Texas System and Texas A&M University System. In 1991, Johnson served as the chairperson of the Texas Senate's reapportionment committee. She helped implement single member voting districts, which enabled the election of more minorities to public office. In 1992, Johnson was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in a landslide victory. During her first term, she joined the

Congressional Black Caucus. Her freshmen class doubled the membership of the caucus to over thirty congresspersons, who were mentored by veteran legislators like Louis Stokes, Cardiss Collins and Charles B. Rangel. After the midterm elections of 1994, the Republican Party took control of the U.S. House of Representatives, and Speaker Newt Gingrich defunded the Congressional Black Caucus.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Eddie Bernice Johnson, Section A2012_094_002_008, TRT: 8:31:32 ?

The Honorable Eddie Bernice Johnson began her second term in the U.S. House of Representatives in 1994, when the U.S. Congress shifted to a Republican majority. That year, Johnson helped organize the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus. She later founded the Congressional Tri-Caucus, an alliance of the Congressional Black Caucus, Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus and Congressional Hispanic Caucus, which was formed to address issues of healthcare, poverty and education in minority communities. Johnson often sought the mentorship of Congressman Louis Stokes, who advised her on securing funds for housing projects and nonprofit organizations in her district. Because of her background in nursing, Johnson was tapped to work on President Bill Clinton's healthcare plan. The bill was later blocked by the Republican congressional majority. During her time as a U.S. Representative, Johnson also served on the Committee on Science, Space and Technology and the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Eddie Bernice Johnson, Section A2012_094_002_009, TRT: 9:30:19 ?

The Honorable Eddie Bernice Johnson negotiated with President Bill Clinton to keep the regional office of the U.S. Small Business Administration located in Dallas, Texas. Johnson also worked with the congressional women's caucus to draft the Women's Health Equity Act of 1996, which provided funds for women's health research. That same year, Johnson was elected to a third term in the U.S. House of Representatives, where she was a ranking member of the Committee on Science, Space, and Technology. At this point in the interview, Johnson reflects upon the Clinton administration, and remembers his efforts to build bipartisan relationships with legislators. Johnson met George Walker Bush prior to his gubernatorial campaign in Texas. Because of their shared Texan heritage, Johnson was able to cultivate a relationship with Bush when he assumed the presidency in 2000. During his administration, Johnson served as chairperson of the Congressional Black Caucus, where her concerns included the AIDS epidemic in Africa.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Eddie Bernice Johnson, Section A2012_094_002_010, TRT: 10:29:05 ?

The Honorable Eddie Bernice Johnson served on the Subcommittee on Water Resources and Environment, where she spearheaded improvements to the Trinity River flood protection system in 2000. Located in Dallas, Texas, the redevelopment project also included wildlife habitat and park facilities. President George Walker Bush vetoed the bill; and, in response, Johnson organized the only successful congressional override during Bush's eight-year presidency. Johnson also disagreed with President Bush on issues like trade and foreign policy, but nevertheless maintained a respectful relationship with him. Following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, Johnson founded an initiative called A World of Women for World Peace, which supported women's groups and worked with the United Nations to create an early educational curriculum about peacekeeping. Accordingly, Johnson voted against President

Bush's decision to declare war on Iraq in 2002. At this point, she reflects upon the criticisms of the Bush administration.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Eddie Bernice Johnson, Section A2012_094_003_011, TRT: 11:34:32 ?

The Honorable Eddie Bernice Johnson was reelected in 2002 to the 107th U.S. Congress, where she voted against the Iraq War. In 2003, President George Walker Bush urged Congress to stop participating in international discussions on climate change, but Johnson continued to attend conferences at The Hague in the Netherlands. She was a senior member of the U.S. House of Representatives Transportation and Infrastructure Committee in 2005, when the committee received reports about the poor condition of the levees in New Orleans, Louisiana. Despite their proposal for infrastructure improvements, the U.S. House of Representatives failed to address the issue, and New Orleans was devastated by floods following Hurricane Katrina. Johnson also talks about President Bush's energy and education legislation, including the No Child Left Behind initiative. She describes the challenges of running for reelection every two years, and remembers agreeing to support John Edwards in the 2008 Democratic presidential primary.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Eddie Bernice Johnson, Section A2012_094_003_012, TRT: 12:29:03 ?

The Honorable Eddie Bernice Johnson initially supported U.S. Senator John Edwards' bid for the presidential nomination in 2008. She stood by her word until he dropped out of the race, and then she decided to back U.S. Senator Barack Obama. While working on the presidential campaign, Johnson noticed the enthusiastic support that Obama received from young voters, something she had never previously witnessed. After the election, Johnson observed President Obama's interactions with the Congressional Black Caucus, where his policy decisions were sometimes attributed to his upbringing in a white household. She also witnessed his struggle to pass legislation after the midterm elections of 2010. Johnson supported the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, and worked to pass the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act of 2010 as well. She talks about the Obama family, and reflects upon her legacy as a U.S. Representative and her hopes and concerns for the African American community.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Eddie Bernice Johnson, Section A2012_094_003_013, TRT: 13:08:53 ?

The Honorable Eddie Bernice Johnson talks about her family and the philosophy that guided her career as a legislator. She concludes the interview by describing how she would like to be remembered.