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Howard "Stretch" Johnson papers 9681555

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Summary Information

Repository:	Rare Book and Manuscript Library
Creator:	Johnson, Howard Eugene, 1915-2000
Title:	Howard "Stretch" Johnson papers
ID:	9681555
ID:	MS#1634
Date [inclusive]:	1923-2011
Date [bulk]:	1980-2000
Physical Description:	5 linear feet 6 document boxes, 2 flat boxes, 1 index card box
Language of the Material:	English .
Abstract:	<p>The Howard "Stretch" Johnson Papers document the life of Howard Johnson, known for most of his life as "Stretch." Johnson was a tap dancer with the Duke Ellington Orchestra and performed in Harlem at the Cotton Club and the Apollo Theater in the 1930s. After joining the Communist Party of the United States of America in 1940, Johnson went on to engage in social activism for most of his life, living in a number of places, including Brazil, Galveston, Texas, Hawaii, Paris, and St. Croix. The Papers contain correspondence, both personal and work related, as well as a nearly finished typescript of Stretch's autobiography. There are a number of photographs, mainly copies of the various performers at the Cotton Club, as well as audio and videocassettes, and ephemera. Additionally, the collection contains a family scrapbook with photos from the late 1940s and early 1950s.</p>

Preferred Citation

Identification of specific item; Date (if known); Howard "Stretch" Johnson Papers; Box and Folder; Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University Library.

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Biographical Note

Howard "Stretch" Johnson was born in 1915 in Orange, New Jersey. He lived a colorful life, tap dancing with the Duke Ellington Orchestra at the Cotton Club and the Apollo in Harlem, serving in World War II in the army's segregated Buffalo Soldier unit, joining the Communist Party USA in 1940, and finally teaching about the history of jazz and engaging in social activism. Johnson was given the nickname "Stretch" for his long and lanky frame, which he maintained throughout most of his life.

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Biographical Note

Johnson's father gained stardom by playing on the black baseball teams of the Negro League. Stretch, however, more closely identified with his uncle, James Anderson, who was the founder of *The Amsterdam News*, an influential black newspaper in New York City. The Johnson family moved to Harlem in 1932, where Stretch's sister, Winnie became one of the featured dancers at the Cotton Club. She enlisted Stretch and later their brother Bobby to join the chorus line. The Johnson siblings performing under the name The Three Johnsons were featured in the "New Faces of 1936" and the "Duke Ellington Revue of 1937" at the Apollo Theater. Stretch Johnson also acted in a Harlem production of the Clifford Odets play, *Waiting for Lefty*.

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Biographical Note

Johnson was active with the NAACP since he was 15 years old. In 1940, when the Cotton Club decided to suspend its male chorus line, Johnson joined the Young Communist League of Harlem, a youth affiliate of the Communist Party of the United States of America. He was active in forcing Major League Baseball to accept a black player, passing out petitions at Yankee Stadium.

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Biographical Note

Amidst objection, Johnson married Martha Sherman, a fellow communist. The couple had three children, all girls. Sherman and Johnson eventually divorced. Johnson earned a general equivalency high school diploma, then a degree from Columbia University's College of General Studies, and taught black studies at the Fieldston School in the Bronx. He administered the Upward Bound program, which provided federal money for programs to steer disadvantaged youths to college for a participating institution, the Ethical Culture Society. He later taught sociology at the State University of New York at New Paltz.

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Biographical Note

Stretch spent his later years with Ann Anthony, whom he met at an Art Appreciation course at Columbia University in 1962. The two lived in numerous places, engaging in activist causes wherever they went. This included a campaign to recognize Martin Luther King Jr. Day in Hawaii, in the Virgin Islands he set up a social services network, and in Galveston, Texas, he helped set up a community center in an impoverished neighborhood.

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Summary

This small collection contains the personal papers of Howard "Stretch" Johnson. The materials range in date from 1923-2000 and consist of correspondence, clippings, and printed material as well as photographs, negatives, slides, audio and video cassettes, a scrapbook, and ephemeral material. Included are Johnson's notes and typescript for his nearly finished autobiography, as well as numerous letters and correspondence, both personal and work-related. A number of folders are present which present Johnson as "Social and Political Figure." These folders contain material which relates to work that Johnson did with the Communist Party USA and also later as a social activist in Brazil, Galveston, Texas, Hawaii, Paris, and St. Croix. A transcript is present of Johnson testifying under the Smith Act trials as a witness for the defense. There is material related to work that "Stretch" did as a professor at the State University of New York at New Paltz, under the folder title "The Educator." Several of Johnson's writings are present, including a pamphlet he wrote for the National Veterans Committee of the Communist Party USA under the folder title "Author." There are a number of photographs in the collection, mainly copies, of performers at the Cotton Club as well as articles and

clippings about the Cotton Club, and jazz more generally. The collection contains several audio and video cassettes, of note are various interviews with Johnson. The scrapbook is made up of family photographs, mainly of Stretch, his wife, and their children ranging in date from 1945-1952.

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Administrative Information

Publication Statement

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Revision Description

xml instance created by Adrien Hilton EAD was imported spring 2019 as part of the ArchivesSpace Phase II migration. 2012-10-02 2019-05-20

Restrictions on Access

This collection is located off-site. You will need to request this material at least three business days in advance to use the collection in the Rare Book and Manuscript Library reading room.

Restrictions on Access

This collection has no restrictions.

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Immediate Source of Acquisition

2012.2013.M044: Source of acquisition--Wendy Johnson. Method of acquisition--Purchase; Date of acquisition--09/14/2012.

Processing Information

Papers processed Adrien Hilton 09/18/2012.

Processing Information

Finding Aid written Adrien Hilton 09/19/2012.

Accrual

No additional material expected

Accruals

Materials may have been added to the collection since this finding aid was prepared. Contact rbml@columbia.edu for more information.

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Controlled Access Headings

- Tap dancing
- Harlem Renaissance
- Audiocassettes
- Photographs
- Scrapbooks
- Videotapes
- Digital Images
- Video recordings (physical artifacts)
- Sound recordings
- Apollo Theatre (New York, N.Y. : 42nd Street)
- Communist Party of the United States of America
- Cotton Club
- Duke Ellington Orchestra

Collection Inventory

Series I: Howard "Stretch" Johnson Papers, 1923-2011

Title/Description	Instances
Documents, Photographs, and Negatives	
Political and Social Figure	
New Paltz, New York, 1947-1963, 1971-1982, undated, 1947-1963, 1971-1982, undated	box 1
Brazil, 1988	box 1
St. Croix, 1991	box 1
Paris, 1995-1996	box 1
Galveston, Texas, 1996-1999	box 1
Obituaries, 2000	box 1
Dr. Martin Luther King Interim Commission Report, 1990	box 1
Hawaii, 1986-1990 <u>Physical Description:</u> 2 folders	box 1
Smith Act Trail--Transcript of Johnson's Testimony, Witness for the Defense,, 1949	box 1
Jackie Robinson Project, 1995, undated	box 1
Cotton Club Venue	
Copies, 1928-1933, 1980, undated, 1928-1933, 1980, undated	box 1
Photographs of Frequenters, 1923-1932, undated, 1923-1932, undated	box 2
Related Articles, 1928-1977, 1984, undated, 1928-1977, 1984, undated	box 2
Photographs of Performers, Bands, and Show Details, 1933-1937, undated, 1933-1937, undated	box 2
Cotton Club Film	
Articles and Related Writings, 1980-1984, undated, 1980-1984, undated <u>Physical Description:</u> 2 folders	box 2
Stretch and the Government--the Ongoing Battle, 1981-1995, undated, 1981-1995, undated	box 2

Literature on Harlem and Jazz, 1930, 1988-1995, undated, 1930, 1988-1995, undated <u>Physical Description</u> : 2 folders	box 2
Health, 1999, undated	box 2
Negatives, undated	box 2
Slides, undated	box 2
Copies of Photographs, 1934-1947, undated, 1934-1947, undated	box 2
Telegram, 1945	box 3
Interview "Stretch's Life" Kay Takora, Honolulu, Hawaii, 1988	box 3
Interview "Stretch's Life" Kay Takora, Honolulu, Hawaii--CDs, 1988	box 3
"The Performer", 1936, 1942, 1983, undated, 1936, 1942, 1983, undated	box 3
Interview and Letters on Stretch, 2011, undated	box 3
Term Papers, NYU, 1973	box 3
Notes for Autobiography, undated	box 3
"Stretch" Autobiography, undated	box 3
Bibliography and Chronological Autobiography, undated	box 3
"Author", 1947-1995	box 3
Newspaper Clippings, 1946-2001	box 3
Private Correspondence (Non-Work Related) and Personal Papers, 1957-1997, undated, 1957-1997, undated	box 3
"The Educator", 1974-1999, undated, 1974-1999, undated	box 4
Further Research, 1982-1995, undated, 1982-1995, undated	box 4
Handwritten, 1975-1978, undated, 1975-1978, undated	box 4
Letters, 1982-1995, undated, 1982-1995, undated	box 4
Miscellaneous, 1946-2000, undated, 1946-2000, undated <u>Physical Description</u> : 3 folders	box 4
Books	
<i>Melanin: The Chemical Key to Black Greatness</i> , 1988	box 5
<i>Natal Horoscope of Dr. Howard Johnson</i> , undated	box 5
Report to the Governor of the State of Hawaii, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Interim Commission,, 1989	box 5

Videocassettes	
<i>Blues Land: A Portrait in American Music</i> , 1993	box 5
<i>Career Awareness Program Interview Howard Johnson on Harlem Renaissance</i> , undated	box 5
<i>Imitation of Life</i> , 1959	box 5
London Lindy Hop Festival Cabaret's Jiving Lindy Hoppers on TV, 1996, 1998, 1996, 1998	box 5
Paul Robeson: Here I Stand, 1999; Paul Robeson Jr. and Ossie Davis, 1999; A Hymn for Alvin Ailey, 1999; Flying High: The Nicholas Brothers, 1999, 1999;, 1999;, 1999;, 1999	box 5
<i>A Walk through Harlem</i> , 1999	box 5
<i>Heir to an Execution (the Rosenbergs)</i> , Ivy Meeropol, 2004	box 9
<i>Paul Robeson</i> , undated	box 9
<i>Seeing Red</i> James Klein and Julia Reichert,, undated	box 9
DVDs	
Photographs on DVD (unknown content), undated	box 9
<i>Seeing Red</i> , James Klein and Julia Reichert, undated (3 DVDs), undated	box 9
CDs	
<i>Felix Mendelssohn Violin Concerto in E Minor</i> , 1998	box 5
<i>Johannes Brahms Sonata no. 1 for cello and piano Sonata no. 2</i> ; Yo-Yo Ma and Emmanuel Ax, 1985	box 5
<i>Play On Broadway Musical</i> , 1997	box 5
Audiocassettes	
Discussion of Operation Desert Storm, 1991	box 6
George, Dr. Herman--Race Relations, 1982	box 6
Jamal, Mumia Abu--Speech at Press Conference at Unesco, Paris, France, 1995 (2 tapes), 1995	box 6
Jamal, Mumia Abu Evening Centre Cult de la Clef, 1995	box 6
Johnson, Howard--Interview, 1984 (4 tapes), 1984	box 6
Johnson, Howard--Interview, 1995	box 6
<i>Mood Indigo Ellington Suites</i> , undated	box 6
People of Color I and II Presentation by Howard Johnson, 1995 (2 tapes), 1995	box 6

Radzin, Stenka-- <i>Cradle Will Rock</i> ,, undated	box 6
Rehm, Diane-- <i>Seeing Red</i> , 1984	box 6
Scott-Heron, Gil and Jackson, Brian-- <i>Winter in America</i> , undated	box 6
Thakar, Vimala-- <i>Mediation as a Way of Life</i> ,, 1983	box 6
Scrapbooks and Other Photographs	
Souvenir Photographs, undated (2 photos), undated	box 7
Photographs, 1995-1999 undated, 1995-1999, undated <u>Physical Description</u> : 2 folders	box 7
Scrapbook, 1944-1952 undated, 1944-1952, undated <u>Physical Description</u> : 6 folders	box 7
Ephemera	
Reproduction of \$20 Gold Piece	box 8
Brazilian Workers Banner	box 8
Soviet Union Banner with 22 Pins from Trip to Moscow	box 8
Business Cards, Paris, France Address (5 items)	box 8
Silver AA Medallion with Chain	box 8
Green and Black Buffalo Soldier Pin	box 8
Soviet Union Pin, CCCP	box 8
Lacquered Russian Boxes (2 boxes)	box 8
USA Olympic Pin	box 8
Unidentified Pin	box 8
Subway Tokens (5 tokens)	box 8
Blanket in African-American Colors	box 8

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