



Sincerely,

Eleanor Esser Gorski, AIA Deputy Commissioner  
Planning, Design and Historic Preservation Division Department of Planning and  
Development  
cc:

ends.

*Alderman Sophia King, 4th Ward (via email without enclosure)*

121 NORTH LASALLE STREET, ROOM 1000, CHICAGO, ILLINOIS 60602

**ORDINANCE**

**Johnson Publishing Company Building 820 S.  
Michigan Avenue**

WHEREAS, pursuant to the procedures set forth in the Municipal Code of Chicago (the "Municipal Code"), Sections 2-120-630 through -690, the Commission on Chicago Landmarks (the "Commission") has determined that the Johnson Publishing Company Building (the "Building"), located at 820 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois, legally described in Exhibit A attached hereto and incorporated herein, satisfies four (4) criteria for landmark designation as set forth in Section 2-120-620 (1), (3), (4) and (5) of the Municipal Code; and

WHEREAS, the Building exemplifies the importance of the Johnson Publishing Company, a nationally significant African American owned and operated media company; and

WHEREAS, the Building is the only high rise office building in downtown Chicago built by an African American, publisher John H. Johnson; and

WHEREAS, the Building served as a center for African American journalism that became a prominent voice of black America; and

WHEREAS, Johnson Publishing Company's Ebony and Jet magazines celebrated the achievements of African Americans at a time when the mainstream media largely ignored this segment of American society; and

WHEREAS, Johnson Publishing's magazine's helped shape the civil rights movement by chronicling its milestones and activists and by providing positive images of African Americans that changed attitudes of both blacks and whites; and

WHEREAS, John Johnson, founder and head of the Johnson Publishing Company, is regarded as one of the most successful and influential African American business leaders in the country; and

WHEREAS, for six decades John Johnson remained at the helm of Johnson Publishing, growing it into a multi-million-dollar business that in addition to publishing branched out into fashion, cosmetics, radio and television; and

WHEREAS, Johnson's business acumen allowed him to overcome racial discrimination and economic

segregation to build the largest African American owned publishing company; and

WHEREAS, Johnson shared his success by donating millions of dollars to the United Negro College Fund and additional millions to black colleges and universities; and

WHEREAS, over the course of his life Johnson received thirty-five honorary doctoral degrees and numerous awards including the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1996; and

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WHEREAS, with its strong horizontal emphasis and three-dimensional quality, the Building is a boldly original and late interpretation of the International Style of architecture; and

WHEREAS, the three basic elements of the design - the horizontal spans, the vertical columns and ribbon windows - are each placed in separate planes, creating areas of solid and void that animate the facade with the interplay of light and shadow; and

WHEREAS, the Building contributes to the celebrated "street wall" of architecturally distinguished buildings facing Michigan Avenue and Grant Park; and

WHEREAS, the Building was designed by John Moutoussamy, a prominent and pioneering African American architect working in Chicago in the post-World War II era; and

WHEREAS, Moutoussamy was the first African American to become a partner in a large Chicago Architectural firm, Dubin, Dubin, Black & Moutoussamy; and

WHEREAS, Moutoussamy studied architecture at IIT under Mies van der Rohe and throughout his career remained true to the tenets of the Modern Movement in architecture; and

WHEREAS, Moutoussamy's work in Chicago includes a number of public and private institutional buildings and large scale housing developments.; and

WHEREAS, the Building also meets the additional requirements for designation outlined in the Post-World War II Era Context Statement for the Historic Michigan Boulevard District adopted by the Commission on May 5, 2016; and

WHEREAS, consistent with Section 2-120-630 of the Municipal Code, the Building has a significant historic, community, architectural, or aesthetic interest or value, the integrity of which is preserved in light of its location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, and ability to express such historic, community, architectural, or aesthetic interest or value; and

WHEREAS, on October 5, 2017, the Commission adopted a resolution recommending to the City Council of the City of Chicago (the "City Council") that the Building be designated a Chicago Landmark; now, therefore,

BE IT ORDAINED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF CHICAGO: SECTION 1. The above

recitals are hereby adopted as the findings of the City Council.

SECTION 2. The Building is hereby designated a Chicago Landmark in accordance with Section 2-120

-700 of the Municipal Code.

SECTION 3. For purposes of Sections 2-120-740 and 2-120-770 of the Municipal Code governing permit review, the significant historical and architectural features of the Building are identified as:

a) All exterior elevations of and rooflines of the Building visible from public rights-of-way.

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- b) The rooftop sign with the Johnson Publishing Company logo and reading "Ebony" and "Jet" on the east elevation.
- c) The east elevation of the building is primary because it is most visible and the building's architectural design and expression are largely confined to that elevation.
- d) The north, south and west elevations are secondary because they are less visible and have minimal architectural design and expression. The Commission may approve more significant changes to secondary elevations of the building that are reasonable to meet new needs, including recessing a portion of the north elevation and adding windows, doors and terraces to provide light and ventilation required by code for a new use such as residential. The foregoing is not intended to limit the Commission's discretion to approve other changes.

SECTION 4. The Commission is hereby directed to create a suitable plaque appropriately identifying the Building as a Chicago Landmark.

SECTION 5. If any provision of this ordinance shall be held to be invalid or unenforceable for any reason, the invalidity or unenforceability of such provision shall not affect any of the other provisions of this ordinance.

SECTION 6. All ordinances, resolutions, motions or orders in conflict with this ordinance are hereby repealed to the extent of such conflict.

SECTION 7. This ordinance shall take effect upon its passage and approval.

**EXHIBIT A**

**Building Address**

820 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois

**Permanent Index Numbers**

17-15-305-015-0000  
016-0000

17-15-305-

**Legal Description**

LOT 5 (EXCEPT THE NORTH 52.17 FEET THEREOF) AND THE NORTH  $\frac{1}{2}$  OF LOT 8 IN BLOCK 17 IN FRACTIONAL SECTION 15, TOWNSHIP 39 NORTH, RANGE 14, EAST OF THE THIRD PRINCIPAL MERIDIAN IN COOK COUNTY, ILLINOIS.

**CITY OF CHICAGO COMMISSION ON CHICAGO LANDMARKS**

**October 5, 2017**

**RECOMMENDATION TO THE CITY COUNCIL OF CHICAGO THAT CHICAGO LANDMARK  
DESIGNATION BE ADOPTED FOR**

**JOHNSON PUBLISHING COMPANY BUILDING 820 South Michigan  
Avenue**

**Docket No. 2017-03**

**To the Mayor and Members of the City Council of the City of Chicago:**

Pursuant to Section 2-120-690 of the Municipal Code of the City of Chicago (the "Municipal Code"), the Commission on Chicago Landmarks (the "Commission") has determined that the Johnson Publishing Company Building (the "Building") is worthy of designation as a Chicago Landmark. On the basis of careful consideration of the history and architecture of the Building, the Commission has found that it satisfies the following four (4) criteria set forth in Section 2-120-620 of the Municipal Code:

1. *Its value as an example of the architectural, cultural, economic, historic, social, or other aspect of the heritage of the City of Chicago, State of Illinois, or the United States.*
3. *Its identification with a person or persons who significantly contributed to the architectural, cultural, economic, historic, social, or other aspect of the development of the City of Chicago, State of Illinois, or the United States.*
4. *Its exemplification of an architectural type or style distinguished by innovation, rarity, uniqueness, or overall quality of design, detail, materials, or craftsmanship.*
5. *Its identification as the work of an architect, designer, engineer, or builder whose individual work is significant in the history or development of the City of Chicago, the State of Illinois, or the United States.*

The Building also meets the additional requirements for designation outlined in the Post-World War II Era Context Statement for the Historic Michigan Boulevard District adopted by the Commission on May 5, 2016, which state the following:

- The building must be built during the post-World War II era, or between 1930 and 1972, and be located within the boundaries of the Historic Michigan Boulevard District.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- The architectural style of the building must reflect the influence of the Modern Movement in architecture.

- » The building must have been built as an entirely new structure and not be a new facade or remodeling of an earlier building.
- The height, massing and orientation of the building must contribute to the Michigan Avenue street wall which is a character-defining feature of the Michigan Boulevard District.
- The building must reflect the historic context of the Historic Michigan Boulevard District in the post-World War II era.

## **I. BACKGROUND**

The formal landmark designation process for the Building began on February 2, 2017, when the Commission approved a preliminary landmark recommendation (the "Preliminary Recommendation") for the Building as a Chicago Landmark. The Commission found that the Building meets four (4) of the seven (7) criteria for designation, as well as the integrity criterion, identified in the Chicago Landmarks Ordinance (Municipal Code, Section 2-120-580 et seq.). The Commission also found that the Building also meets the additional requirements for designation outlined in the Post-World War II Era Context Statement for the Historic Michigan Boulevard District adopted by the Commission on May 5, 2016. The Preliminary Recommendation, incorporated herein and attached hereto as Exhibit A, initiated the process for further study and analysis of the proposed designation of the Building as a Chicago Landmark. As part of the Preliminary Recommendation, the Commission preliminarily identified the "significant historical and architectural features" of the Building as:

- All exterior elevations of and rooflines of the Building visible from public rights-of-way; and
- the east elevation of the building is primary because it is most visible and the building's architectural design and expression are largely confined to that elevation;  
and , - . -
- the north, south and west elevations are secondary because they are less visible and have minimal architectural design and expression. The Commission may approve more significant changes to secondary elevations of the building that are reasonable to meet new needs, including recessing a portion of the north elevation and adding windows, doors and terraces to provide light and ventilation required by code for a new use such as residential. The foregoing is not intended to limit the Commission's "discretion to approve other changes.

**Also, as part of the Preliminary Recommendation, the Commission adopted a Designation Report, dated February 2, 2017, incorporated herein and attached hereto as Exhibit B.**

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In a letter dated June 9, 2017, the Commission officially requested the consent to the proposed landmark designation from the owner, Columbia College, of the Building. On September 15, 2017, the Commission received a consent form, dated September 13, 2017, and signed by Dr. Kwang-wu Kim, President and CEO of Columbia College, the owner of the Building, consenting to the proposed landmark designation of the Building.

## **II. FINDINGS OF THE COMMISSION ON CHICAGO LANDMARKS**

WHEREAS, pursuant to Section 2-120-650 of the Municipal Code, the Commission shall notify the owner of its determination with respect to the proposed Chicago Landmark designation within 45 days after receipt of the owner's consent; and

WHEREAS, pursuant to Section 2-120-690 of the Municipal Code, the Commission has reviewed the entire record of proceedings on the proposed Chicago Landmark designation, including the Designation Report and all of the information on the proposed -landmark designation of the Building; and

WHEREAS, the Building exemplifies the importance of the Johnson Publishing Company, a nationally significant African American owned and operated media company; and

WHEREAS, the Building is the only high rise office building in downtown Chicago built by an African American, publisher John H. Johnson; and

WHEREAS, the Building served as a center for African American journalism that became a prominent voice of black America; and

WHEREAS, Johnson Publishing Company's Ebony and Jet magazines celebrated the achievements of African Americans at a time when the mainstream media largely ignored this segment of American society; and

WHEREAS, Johnson Publishing's magazine's helped shape the Civil Rights Movement by chronicling its milestones and activists and by providing positive images of African Americans that changed attitudes of both blacks and whites; and

WHEREAS, John Johnson, founder and head of the Johnson Publishing Company, is regarded as one of the most successful and influential African American business leaders in the country; and

WHEREAS, for six decades John Johnson remained at the helm of Johnson Publishing, growing it into a multi-million-dollar business that in addition to publishing branched out into fashion, cosmetics, radio and television; and

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WHEREAS, Johnson's business acumen allowed him to overcome racial discrimination and economic segregation to build the largest African American owned publishing company; and

WHEREAS, Johnson shared his success by donating millions of dollars to the United Negro College Fund and additional millions to black colleges and universities; and

WHEREAS, over the course of his life Johnson received thirty-five honorary doctoral degrees and numerous awards including the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1996; and

WHEREAS, with its strong horizontal emphasis and three-dimensional quality, the Building is a boldly original and late interpretation of the International Style of architecture; and

WHEREAS, the three basic elements of the design - the horizontal spans, the vertical columns and ribbon windows - are each placed in separate planes, creating areas of solid and void that animate the facade with the interplay of light and shadow; and



WHEREAS, the Building contributes to the celebrated "street wall" of architecturally distinguished buildings facing Michigan Avenue and Grant Park; and

WHEREAS, the Building was designed by John Moutoussamy, a prominent and pioneering African American architect working in Chicago in the post-World War II era; and

WHEREAS, Moutoussamy was the first African American to become a partner in a large Chicago Architectural firm, Dubin, Dubin, Black & Moutoussamy; and

WHEREAS, Moutoussamy studied architecture at IIT under Mies van der Rohe and .. throughout his career remained true to the tenets of the Modern Movement in architecture; and

WHEREAS, Moutoussamy's work in Chicago includes a number of public and private institutional buildings and large scale housing developments; and

WHEREAS the Building meets the four (4) criteria for landmark designation set forth in Sections 2-120-620 (1), (3), (4) and (5) of the Municipal Code; and

WHEREAS, the Building also meets the additional requirements for designation outlined in the Post-World War II Era Context Statement for the Historic Michigan Boulevard District adopted by the Commission on May 5, 2016; and

WHEREAS, consistent with Section 2-120-630 of the Municipal Code, the Building has a significant historic, community, architectural, or aesthetic interest or value, the integrity of which is preserved in light of its location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, and

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ability to express such historic, community, architectural, or aesthetic interest or value; now, therefore,

THE COM MISSION ON CHICAGO LANDMARKS HEREBY:

1. Adopts the recitals, findings and statements of fact set forth in the preamble and Sections I and II hereof as the findings of the Commission; and
2. Adopts the Designation Report, as revised, and dated this 5th day of October 2017; and
3. Finds, based on the Designation Report and the entire record before the Commission, that the Building meets the four (4) criteria for landmark designation set forth in Section 2-120-620 (1), (3), (4) and (5) of the Municipal Code; and
4. Finds that the Building also meets the additional requirements for designation outlined in the Post-World War II Era Context Statement for the Historic Michigan Boulevard District adopted by the Commission on May 5, 2016.
5. Finds that the Building satisfies the "integrity" requirement set forth in Section 2-120-630 of the Municipal Code; and

6. Finds that the significant historical and architectural features of the Building are identified as follows:
  - All exterior elevations of and rooflines of the Building visible from public rights-of-way.
  - The rooftop sign with the Johnson Publishing Company logo and reading "Ebony" and "Jet" on the east elevation.
  - The east elevation of the building is primary because it is most visible and the building's architectural design and expression are largely confined to that elevation.
  - The north, south and west elevations are secondary because they are less visible and have minimal architectural design and expression. The Commission may approve more significant changes to secondary elevations of the building that are reasonable to meet new needs, including recessing a portion of the north elevation and adding windows, doors and terraces to provide light and ventilation required by code for a new use such as residential. The foregoing is not intended to limit the Commission's discretion to approve other changes.
7. Recommends the designation of the Building a Chicago Landmark.

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This recommendation was adopted

. Houlihan, Vice-Chair 'Commission on Chicago Landmarks Serving as Chair pursuant to Article I.A.2.D. of the Rules and Regulations

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EXHIBIT A

Resolution by the  
Commission on Chicago Landmarks on the  
Preliminary Landmark Recommendation for the

JOHNSON PUBLISHING COMPANY BUILDING

820 S. Michigan Ave.

February 2, 2017

Whereas, the Commission on Chicago Landmarks (the "Commission") preliminarily finds that:

- the Johnson Publishing Company Building (the "Building"), located at the address noted above, meets four (4) criteria for landmark designation as set forth in Section 2-120-620 (1), (3), (4), and (5) of the Municipal Code of Chicago (the "Municipal Code"), as specifically described in the Preliminary Summary of Information submitted to the Commission on this 2<sup>nd</sup> day of February, 2017, by the Department of Planning and Development (the "Preliminary Summary"); and
- the Building satisfies the historic integrity requirement set forth in Section 2-120-630 of the Municipal Code as described in the Preliminary Summary; and

The Building also meets the additional requirements for designation outlined in the Post-World War II Era Context Statement for the Historic Michigan Boulevard District adopted by the Commission on May 5, 2016, which state the following:

- The building must be built during the between 1930 and 1972, and be located within the boundaries of the Historic Michigan Boulevard District.
- The architectural style of the building must reflect the influence of the Modern Movement in architecture.
- The building must have been built as an entirely new structure and not be a new facade or remodeling of an earlier building.

- The height, massing and orientation of the building must contribute to the Michigan Avenue street wall which is a character-defining feature of the Michigan Boulevard District.
- The building must reflect the historic context of the Historic Michigan Boulevard District in the post-World War II era.

*Be it resolved by the Commission on Chicago Landmarks:*

Section 1. The above recitals are expressly incorporated in and made part of this resolution as though fully set forth herein.

Section 2. The Commission hereby adopts the Preliminary Summary and makes a preliminary landmark recommendation concerning the Building in accordance with Section 2-120-630 of the Municipal Code.

Section 3. For purposes of Section 2-120-740 of the Municipal Code governing permit review, the significant historical and architectural features of the Building are preliminarily identified as:

- All exterior elevations of and rooflines of the Building visible from public rights-of-way; and
- the east elevation of the building is primary because it is most visible and the building's architectural design and expression are largely confined to that elevation; and
- the north, south and west elevations are secondary because they are less visible and have minimal architectural design and expression. The Commission may approve more significant changes to secondary elevations of the building that are reasonable to meet new needs, including recessing a portion of the north elevation and adding windows, doors and terraces to provide light and ventilation required by code for a new use such as residential. The foregoing is not intended to limit the Commission's discretion to approve other changes.

Section 5. The Commission hereby requests a report from the Commissioner of the Department of Planning and Development which evaluates the relationship of the proposed designation to the City's governing plans and policies and the effect of the proposed designation on the surrounding neighborhood in accordance with Section 2-120-640 of the Municipal Code.

Rafael M. Leon  
Commission on Chicago Landmarks

*This recommendation was adopted by the Commission on Chicago Landmarks on February 2, 2017.*

*Dated: February 2, 2017*

EXHIBIT B

# Preliminary Summary of Information

Submitted to the Commission on Chicago Landmarks in February 2017

(1922-1995)

# Johnson Publishing Company Building

820 S. Michigan Boulevard

CITY OF CHICAGO Rahm Emanuel, Mayor

Department of Planning and Development David Reifnian, Commissioner

## Johnson Publishing Company Building

820 S. Michigan Avenue

Built: 1969-71 (Dedicated 1972)

Architect: John W. Moutoussamy, of Dubin, Dubin, Black and  
MOUTOUSSAMY

On May 16, 1972, over 1,000 politicians, business leaders, and celebrities gathered on Michigan Avenue to dedicate the new and boldly modern headquarters of the Johnson Publishing Company. It was the first and only structure in downtown Chicago built by an African American, publisher John H. Johnson. A unique interpretation of the International Style, the building was designed by Chicago architect John W. Moutoussamy, the first African American to become partner in a large Chicago architectural firm, Dubin, Dubin, Black & Moutoussamy. The dedication speech by Johnson, the founder of the nationally-significant publishing company, described the architecture as a reflection of his publishing company's "openness to truth, openness to light, openness to all the currents swirling in all the black communities of this land."

Johnson founded his publishing company in 1942 on a shoestring and over the next six decades grew it into one of the most influential African American businesses in the nation. Johnson used his media platform to shine a positive light on African American achievement and success, a part of American life that was largely ignored or stereotyped by the mainstream media. In doing so he tapped into a huge demand for accurate and positive coverage of African American life, and his Ebony and Jet magazines became staples in black households. At the building's dedication, Johnson described his publishing as a "vehicle for building and projecting the image of black people in America - an image that had been distorted by media oriented primarily toward non-blacks. I felt that America could never take its rightful place in the front ranks of the struggle for human dignity as long as millions at home were shackled by the crippling effects of damaged self images." In this light, Johnson Publishing's contribution to the civil rights movement cannot be overestimated.

Perhaps more than any other office building in downtown Chicago, the Johnson Publishing Company Building is imbued with symbolic value, standing as a source of pride for the African American community. This iconic quality attached to the building from its first day, when Johnson claimed

*This new building reflects our faith in the strength and vitality of that long line of black men and women who have contributed so much to this country and this community...it is a poem in glass and marble which symbolizes our unshakeable faith that the struggles of our forefathers were not in vain and that we shall indeed overcome.*

The Johnson Publishing Company Building was identified as an associated building in the Post-World War II Era Context Statement for the Historic Michigan Boulevard District, adopted by the Commission on Chicago Landmarks on May 5, 2016. Readers should refer to the context statement for additional information on the larger historic context of Michigan Boulevard after World War II.

The Johnson Publishing Company Building meets designation criteria 1, 3, 4 and 5 and has sufficient integrity to convey those values. The building also meets the additional requirements for designation outlined in the Post-World War II Era Context Statement for the Historic Michigan Boulevard District.

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*The Johnson Publishing Company is located at 820 S. Michigan Boulevard Building, it shown here a year after it was completed in 1971. (Hedrich-Blessing photograph collection, Job file HB-35849, Chicago History Museum)*

## **John Johnson and the Johnson Publishing Company**

John H. Johnson was born into poverty in rural Arkansas in 1918, the son of Leroy and Gertrude Johnson Williams. Because his home town did not offer high school education to blacks, his mother joined the Great Migration to Chicago in 1933 so that Johnson could attend high school. In later life, Johnson credited his business success to his mother's insistence on education. He excelled academically at Du Sable High School (a designated Chicago Landmark) and got his first taste of publishing by editing the school paper.

After graduating in 1936, Johnson went to work for Harry Pace at the Supreme Life Insurance Company, an African American owned company that at the time was one of the largest African American businesses in the country (the Supreme Life Insurance Company was located at 3501 S. King Drive and the building is part of the Black Metropolis - Bronzeville Chicago Landmark District). At Supreme Life, Johnson was asked to research magazines and newspapers for news related to the African American community, and summarize these in brief reports.

After work, Johnson took night classes in business and journalism at the University of Chicago, though he stopped short of a degree. Nevertheless, he was gifted with an entrepreneurial mind that saw the opportunity of taking the news summaries that he wrote for his boss to a larger African American audience. With a \$500 loan secured by his mother's furniture, in November 1942 Johnson published the first issue of Negro Digest. The monthly magazine published articles, poems and short stories by black and white writers, and reported on issues not covered in the mainstream press such as the displacement of southern farm workers and discrimination against blacks in unions. By 1943 the magazine had a circulation of 50,000; it doubled by 1949.

Based on the success on Negro Digest, in 1945 Johnson rolled out Ebony, an African American version of the popular Life and Look large-format photo-rich magazines. The African American public was so in need of recognition in print that the first run of 25,000 copies of Ebony sold out within hours. Johnson recalled that "before I started Ebony you'd never know from reading other publications that blacks got married, had beauty contests, gave parties, ran successful businesses, or carried on any normal living activities." The magazine also showcased the work of talented African American journalists such Era Bell Thompson, and Pulitzer Prize winning photographer Moneta Sleet, Jr.

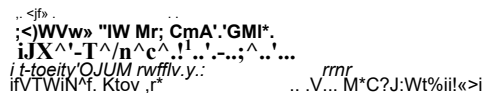
Despite its popularity, Ebony-would not be.-commercially\_ viable-as a\_ mass-circulation magazine unless it could generate advertising revenue. Before Ebony there were other magazines catering to blacks, yet these failed due to lack of advertiser interest. In 1955 the editors of Ebony summed up the advertiser's misconceptions: "few, if any, of America's major advertisers believed there was any need for inviting Negroes to buy the best food, the 'label' brands of clothing, the better cars or even the popular brands of toothpaste and nail polish." One of Johnson's greatest successes was convincing corporations and Madison Avenue that they were missing out the multibillion-dollar African-American consumer market-The-first-success-came-in 4 946 when Johnson landed Zenith. That account attracted other brands to Ebony's pages like Quaker Oats, Pepsi Cola and Colgate. For a decade, every week Johnson sent advertising sales representatives to Detroit automakers until he finally landed ads for the Chrysler. These corporations tailored their ads to the magazine's audience with real world portrayals of African

Americans using their products.

In November 1951, Johnson launched Jet, a pocket-sized weekly that replaced Negro Digest. Jet covered news related to African American life. Over the years Johnson Publishing developed a variety of other magazines, yet Jet and Ebony remained the company's mainstays. The scope of their coverage included culture, music, black history, domestic and foreign politics. The pages also showcased successful lawyers, physicians and scientists, black colleges and hospitals, black entertainers and athletes. But the magazines were not solely focused on the professional class, successful farmers, school teachers, ministers and chorus girls were also chronicled.

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John Johnson launched his publishing company from an office (marked with an arrow) in the Supreme Life Insurance Company. Located at 3501 S. King Drive, the building is part of the Black Metropolis - Bronzeville Chicago Landmark District). (Johnson and Bennett's Succeeding Against the Odds)



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An early cover of Negro Digest from 1943. Johnson's first magazine laid the foundations for his publishing empire.

(Portland State University, Gates Collection)

Prior to the construction of his downtown headquarters, Johnson Publishing operated from a number of locations, including 5619 S. State St. (left), and a former funeral home at 1820 S. Michigan Ave. (below).

(Johnson and Bennett's Succeeding Against the Odds;

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Two iconic covers of-Eoony, Johnson recalled that "before I started Ebony you'd never-know from reading other publications that blacks got married, had beauty contests, gave parties, ran successful businesses, or carried bnany normal living activities." (May 1968 left, November 1947 right)

One of Johnson's business successes was convincing American companies that the they were overlooking multibillion-dollar African American consumer market. (Ebony, February 1962)

John Johnson on the terrace of the Johnson Publishing Company Building. (Jet, August 2005)

Johnson Publishing's editors also closely covered the civil rights movement. As early as 1945 the editors of Ebony wrote that "we will try to mirror the happier side of Negro life and the positive everyday achievements from Harlem to Hollywood, but when we talk about race as the No. 1 problem in America, we'll talk turkey." Ebony was one of the first magazines to cover Dr. Martin Luther King's work in the 1950s and Dr. King wrote a monthly column for the magazine entitled "Advice for Living" in 1957 and 1958. On September 15, 1955, Jet published photographs of Emmett Till's brutalized body, and the shocking photographs publicized the violence

of Jim Crow which helped galvanize the civil rights movement. Historians have yet to fully measure the contributions Johnson Publishing's magazines made to the civil rights movement, though it can hardly be overstated.

For six decades John Johnson remained at the helm of Johnson Publishing, growing it into a multi-million-dollar business that in addition to publishing branched out into fashion, cosmetics, radio and television. In 1982 Johnson became the first African American on Forbes magazine's list of wealthiest Americans, and from 1983 to 1986 Johnson Publishing was the nation's largest African American-owned business. Johnson's philanthropic work focused on education and included \$51 million donated to the United Negro College Fund and additional millions to black colleges and universities. Over the course of his life Johnson received thirty-five honorary doctoral degrees and numerous awards including the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1996. John H. Johnson died in 2005 at age 87. At his funeral, then-Senator Barack Obama said "Only a handful of men and women leave an imprint on the conscience of a nation and on the history they helped shape. John Johnson was one of these."

## Building Design and Construction

From Johnson Publishing's fledgling start at the Supreme Life Insurance Building in 1942 to the completion of its modern Michigan Avenue headquarters in 1971, the company operated from a series of rehabbed buildings. In 1943, Johnson purchased and rehabbed a one-story retail building at 5619 S. State Street in the Washington Park neighborhood (extant). The company quickly outgrew this space and in 1949 Johnson bought and rehabilitated the former Hursen Funeral Home at 1820 S. Michigan Ave (demolished). By 1959, Johnson was ready to move to Chicago's central business district. He purchased a lot at 1820 South Michigan Ave. a part of the city that was enjoying a period of redevelopment spurred on by highway construction feeding traffic into South Michigan Avenue and the opening of McCormick Place nearby.

When design began on the Johnson Publishing Company Building in 1969, the Second Chicago School was in full swing, rebuilding downtown Chicago with glass and steel office towers designed or influenced by Mies van der Rohe and the principles of the International Style. However Mr. Johnson wanted something different, and told his architect John Moutoussamy that "that he did not want one of those 'shirt front' glass and steel buildings." Instead, Johnson was determined to build a unique modern building that would convey Johnson Publishing's business success and architectural taste.

Completed in 1971, the Johnson Publishing Company building is an eleven-story, 110,000 square foot office building that cost \$8 million. The primary front elevation faces east and is part of the grand wall of buildings fronting Michigan Avenue and Grant Park. When it was built, the structure was abutted on its north and south elevations by neighboring buildings and these blank concrete walls have no architectural treatment. The rear elevation, facing west, is obscured by new construction.

To avoid placing bearing walls next to the neighboring structures, Moutoussamy placed the columns inward and cantilevered the floor slabs outward from these. This structural solution is forcefully expressed on the front facade where two columns extend from grade to the top of the building. In front of the columns, the front edges of the floor slabs turn upward to create prominent horizontal spans. These spans are given an independent and hovering quality by the placement of the columns behind them. Recessed behind the rectilinear structure

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*The Johnson Publishing Company Building's clearly expressed structure, rectilinear forms, open floor plans, and absence of ornament are hallmarks of the International Style. (EIDante C. Winston)*



The sculptural quality of the design is unusual for the style, although a very similar conceptual "Office Building of Reinforced Concrete" (right) was prepared by Mies van der Rohe in 1923. Moutoussamy worked for Mies van der Rohe while in school, and it is likely he saw this drawing. (Philip Johnson's Mies Van Der Rohe)

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*Deeply recessed windows maximizes the effect of light and shadow. (Hedrich-Blessing photograph collection, Job file HB-35849, Chicago History Museum)*

arc wide expanses of windows which extend across the full 40-foot width of the front facade. On floors 10 and 11, the windows are more deeply recessed creating outdoor terraces complimenting the executive offices and employee dining room.

The reinforced concrete columns and horizontal spans of the front facade were originally finished with a veneer of walnut travertine. Travertine was a favorite material of modernist architects, however its deeply-pitted texture, retained water making it vulnerable to Chicago's freezing weather. In 2005, the failed travertine was replaced with granite in a color chosen to closely match the original travertine.

### *The International Style*

The building is an original and late example of the International Style of architecture. Its clearly expressed structure, rectilinear forms, open floor plans, and absence of ornament are hallmarks of the style. The weightless appearance of the horizontal spans that is achieved by recessing the column is another common trait.

However, the sculptural quality of the front facade is not a common feature of the International Style which usually treated the exterior as a flat plane. The separation of the columns, horizontal spans and windows into three separate planes at Johnson Publishing is unusual, however architectural historian EIDante C. Winston, has pointed out the design of the Johnson Publishing Company Building resembles a conceptual design by Mies van der Rohe entitled "Office Building of Reinforced Concrete" and published in 1923 in *Gestaltung*, a German magazine. Mies van der Rohe went on teach architecture at the Illinois Institute of Technology and one of his students was John Moutoussamy.

## **John Warren Moutoussamy (1922-1995)**

John Warren Moutoussamy, the architect of the Johnson Publishing Company, was born in 1922 and studied at Chicago's Tilden Technical and Englewood High Schools. During World War II he served in the Army which opened the door to higher education through the GI Bill, and after the war he enrolled at the Illinois Institute of Technology (IIT) to study architecture under Mies van der Rohe.

When he graduated from IIT in 1948, Moutoussamy was entering the architectural profession at a time when black architects faced an uphill battle securing lucrative work. Years later his client John Johnson observed that African American architects "end up with a low volume of work and unadventurous clients, and they miss out on opportunities to do pioneering work, attract attention, and bask in the same lime-light as their majority peers."

In 1951 Moutoussamy went to work for the Chicago firm Schmidt, Garden and Erickson under the direction of modernist Paul D. McCurry (who also taught Moutoussamy at Tilden Technical High School). In 1956 he moved on to a new Chicago firm: PACE Associates headed by Charles Gethner. During Moutoussamy's time at PACE the firm was involved in planning the modernist campus at IIT and preliminary studies for the Chicago Federal Center in partnership with Mies van der Rohe.

In 1965 Moutoussamy left PACE to start his own practice to design a large-scale urban-renewal housing development known as the Lawless Gardens (3550 S Rhodes Ave.). He received the commission from a consortium of African American professionals including physician Dr. Theodore K. Lawless, publisher John H. Johnson and dentist Dr. William J. Walker. The complex was partially subsidized from the National Housing Act to support construction of middle-income housing. The remaining financing needed to come from banks, and because Moutoussamy was black they declined to support the project. Moutoussamy was required to team up with a more established firm. He chose to form a team with Dubin, Dubin and Black (DDB) because he had worked with John Black of that firm while at PACE. At the beginning Moutoussamy was merely an associate of (DDB) with a separate office where he was the lead designer for Lawless Gardens. At some point during construction Moutoussamy was asked to join the firm as partner, the first African American to attain partner at

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Architect John Moutoussamy was the first African American to become partner in a large architectural firm, Dubin, Dubin, Black & Moutoussamy.

- A. *A young Moutoussamy with Louis Harris Brown in the office of K. Roderick O'Neal (Brian O'Neal)*
- B. *From left, architects John Black, John Moutoussamy, Arthur Dubin, real estate developer Dempsey Travis and David Dubin in 1967. (Ebony, July 1967)*
- C. *Moutoussamy in 1969 standing in front of Lawless Gardens, an award-winning design that launched his career. (Ebony, June 1971)*
- D. *The Woodlawn Neighborhood Health Center, designed by Moutoussamy in 1972. (Archives of the American Institute of Architects)*

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In the 1970s and 1980s Moutoussamy remained a modernist architect even as modernism was falling out of fashion. Other examples of his work include:

- A. *Regents Park Apartments (1972-1974) (EIDante C. Winston)*
- B. *Harry S. Truman City College (1976) (Archives of the American Institute of Architects)*
- C. *Chicago Urban League (1982) (EIDante C. Winston)*
- D. *Alpha Kappa Alpha Headquarters (1983) (EIDante C. Winston)*

a large Chicago architecture firm.

Completed in 1969, Lawless Gardens consists of two 24-story apartment buildings and 54 low-rise town homes. Architectural historian Carl Condit described the design challenges of Lawless Gardens: "This large body of construction, with its relatively stringent limitations on cost and hence on design flexibility, brought to the fore the architectural firm of Dubin, Dubin, Black and Moutoussamy, who steadily improved the quality of planning until it stood not far below the average of unsubsidized work such as Manna City." In 1970 the Lawless Gardens design was awarded by the Chicago Chapter of the American Institute of Architects.

Dubin, Dubin, Black & Moutoussamy practiced from 1965 to 1978, and after John Black's retirement the firm continued as Dubin, Dubin & Moutoussamy until Moutoussamy's passing in 1995. In his three decades at the firm, Moutoussamy's work remained true to his training under Mies van der Rohe and staunchly modernist even as the style began to fall out of fashion in the 1980s.

During this time he designed a number of institutional buildings in Chicago for both public and private clients. Public institutions designed by Moutoussamy include three City Colleges: Harry S. Truman (1145 W Wilson Ave., 1976), Olive-Harvey (10001 S Woodlawn Ave., 1981) and Richard J. Daley College (7500 S Pulaski Rd., 1981), as well as the Carver Military Academy (13100 S Doty Ave., 1973) the Bessie Coleman Library (731 E 63rd St., 1993), and the Woodlawn Neighborhood Health Center (6337 S. Woodlawn Ave., 1972) for the City of Chicago. Private institutions also commissioned Moutoussamy, including the National Headquarters of the Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority (5656 S. Stony Island Ave., 1983), and the Headquarters of the Chicago Urban League (4510 Michigan Ave., 1982). Moutoussamy also designed the Regents Park Apartments (5050 S Lake Shore Dr., 1972-1974), a twin-tower residential complex designed with distinctive concrete lattice-frame exteriors.

In 1978 the American Institute of Architects honored Moutoussamy's contributions to the field of architecture by naming him a Fellow. He was a member of the Builder's Club and the Wayfarer's Club, the latter club included Bertrand Goldberg and Walter Netsch. Moutoussamy was married to Elizabeth Hunt and the couple raised three children. Moutoussamy designed the family home (361 East 89th Pl., 1954) in Chicago's Chatham neighborhood. His son, Claude Louis, received his architectural degree from the University of Illinois at Chicago, and became principal of Dubin, Dubin, & Moutoussamy. The elder Moutoussamy's daughter, Jeanne Moutoussamy-Ashe, is a prominent photographer who was married to the late tennis champion Arthur Ashe. John Moutoussamy died in 1995 at age 73.

## Criteria For Designation

According to the Municipal Code of Chicago (Section 2-120-620 and -630), the Commission on Chicago Landmarks has the authority to make a preliminary recommendation of landmark designation for an area, district, place, building, structure, work of art or other object within the City of Chicago if the Commission determines it meets two or more of the stated "criteria for designation," as well as possess sufficient historic design integrity to convey its significance. The following should be considered by the Commission on Chicago Landmarks in determining whether to recommend that the Johnson Publishing Company Building be designated as a Chicago Landmark.

### ***Criterion 1: Value as an Example of City, State or National Heritage***

*Its value as an example of the architectural, cultural, economic, historic, social, or other aspect of the heritage of the City of Chicago, State of Illinois, or the United States.*

- The Johnson Publishing Company Building exemplifies the importance of the Johnson Publishing Company, a nationally significant African American owned and operated media company.
- Johnson Publishing Company Building is the only high rise office building in downtown Chicago built by an African American, publisher John H. Johnson.
- The building served as a center for African American journalism that became a prominent voice of black America.
- Johnson Publishing Company's Ebony and Jet magazines celebrated the achievements of African Americans at a time when the mainstream media largely ignored this segment of American society.
- Johnson Publishing's magazine's helped shape the civil rights movement by chronicling its milestones and activists and by providing positive images of African Americans that changed attitudes of both blacks and whites.

### ***Criterion 3: Significant Person***

*Its identification with a person or persons who significantly contributed to the architectural, cultural, economic, historic, social, or other aspect of the development of the City of Chicago, State of Illinois, or the United States.*

- John Johnson, founder and head of the Johnson Publishing Company, is regarded as one of the most successful and influential African American business leaders in the country.
- For six decades John Johnson remained at the helm of Johnson Publishing, growing it into a multi-million-dollar business that in addition to publishing branched out into fashion, cosmetics, radio and television.
- Johnson's business acumen allowed him to overcome racial discrimination and economic segregation to build the

largest African American owned publishing company.

- Johnson shared his success by donating millions of dollars to the United Negro College Fund and additional millions to black colleges and universities.
- Over the course of his life Johnson received thirty-five honorary doctoral degrees and numerous awards including the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1996.

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*Criterion 4: Exemplary Architecture*

*Its exemplification of an architectural type or style distinguished by innovation, rarity, uniqueness, or overall quality of design, detail, materials, or craftsmanship.*

- With its strong horizontal emphasis and three-dimensional quality, the Johnson Publishing Company Building is a boldly original and late interpretation of the International Style of architecture.
- The three basic elements of the design - the horizontal spans, the vertical columns and ribbon windows -are each placed in separate planes, creating areas of solid and void that animate the facade with the interplay of light and shadow.
- The building contributes to the celebrated "street wall" of architecturally distinguished buildings facing Michigan Avenue and Grant Park.

**Criterion 5: Work of Significant Architect or Designer**

*Its identification as the work of an architect, designer, engineer-, or builder whose individual work is significant in the history or development of the City of Chicago, the State of Illinois, or the United States.*

- The building was designed by John Moutoussamy, a prominent and pioneering African American architect working in Chicago in the post-World War II era.
  - Moutoussamy was the first African American to become a partner in a large Chicago Architectural firm, Dubin, Dubin, Black & Moutoussamy.
  - Moutoussamy studied architecture at IIT under Mies van der Rohe and throughout his career remained true to the tenets of the Modern Movement in architecture.
- « Moutoussamy's work in Chicago includes a number of public and private institutional buildings and large scale housing developments.

The Johnson Publishing Company Building also meets the additional requirements for designation outlined in the Post-World War II Era Context Statement for the Historic Michigan Boulevard District adopted by the Commission on May 5, 2016, which states the following:

- The building must be built during the post-World War II era, or between 1930 and 1972, and be located within the boundaries of the Historic Michigan Boulevard District.
- The architectural style of the building must reflect the influence of the Modern Movement in architecture.
- The building must have been built as an entirely new structure and not be a new facade or remodeling of an earlier building.
- The height, massing and orientation of the building must contribute to the Michigan Avenue street wall which

is a character-defining feature of the Michigan Boulevard District.

- o The building must reflect the historic context of the Historic Michigan Boulevard District in the post-World War II era.

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### ***Integrity Criterion***

*The integrity of the proposed landmark must be preserved in light of its location, design, setting, materials, workmanship and ability to express its historic community, architecture or aesthetic value.*

John Johnson meticulously maintained the Johnson Publishing Company Building and it has excellent integrity. The most notable alteration is the replacement in 2005 of the failed travertine stone veneer. The stone was replaced with granite veneer matching the color and size of the original material. This alteration does not impair the building's ability to express its historic and architectural importance.

## **Significant Historical and Architectural Features**

Whenever a building, structure, object, or district is under consideration for landmark designation, the Commission on Chicago Landmarks is required to identify the "significant historical and architectural features" of the property. This is done to enable the owners and the public to understand which elements are considered most important to preserve the historical and architectural character of the proposed landmark.

Based upon its evaluation of the Johnson Publishing Company, the Commission staff recommends that the significant features be preliminarily identified as follows:

- All exterior elevations of and rooflines of the Building visible from public rights-of-way; and
- the east elevation of the building is primary because it is most visible and the building's architectural design and expression are largely confined to that elevation; and
- the north, south and west elevations are secondary because they are less visible and have minimal architectural design or expression. The Commission may approve more significant changes to secondary elevations of the building that are reasonable to meet new needs, including recessing a portion of the north elevation and adding windows, doors and terraces to provide light and ventilation required by code for a new use such as residential. The foregoing is not intended to limit the Commission's discretion to approve other changes.

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#### NEWSPAPERS AND PERIODICALS Chicago

Sun Times Chicago Tribune New York Times

Numerous issues of Ebony and Jet were consulted, and these have been scanned and made available online by Google Books.

**Acknowledgements** city of chicago  
Rahm Emanuel, Mayor

Department of Planning and Development

David Reifman, Commissioner  
Patricia A. Scudiero, Managing Deputy Commissioner, Bureau of Zoning and Land Use Eleanor Esser Gorski,  
Deputy Commissioner; Planning, Design & Historic Preservation Division

Project Staff

Matt Crawford, research, writing, photography, editing, layout . Melanie Bishop (intern), research  
and photography

Special thanks to EIDante C. Winston, PhD candidate, History Theory and Criticism of Architecture at MIT, for sharing  
his research on John Moutoussamy.

*The Commission on Chicago Landmarks, whose nine members are appointed by the Mayor and City Council, was established in 1968 by city ordinance. The Commission is responsible for recommending to the City Council that individual building, sites, objects, or entire districts be designated as Chicago Landmarks, which protects them by law. The Commission is staffed by the Chicago Department of Planning and Development, Planning, Design & Historic Preservation Division, City Hall, 121 North LaSalle Street, Room 1006, Chicago, IL 60602; (312-744-3200) phone; web site: [wivw.cityofchicago.org/landmarks](http://wivw.cityofchicago.org/landmarks) <<http://wivw.cityofchicago.org/landmarks>>*

*This Preliminary Summary of Information is subject to possible revision and amendment during the designation process. Only language contained within the final landmark designation ordinance as approved by City Council should be regarded as final.*