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Inspiring Beauty:
50 Years of Ebony Fashion Fair

CHICAGO (January 22, 2013) - The **Chicago History Museum** presents *Inspiring Beauty: 50 Years of Ebony Fashion Fair* a story of vision, innovation and power told through the history of **Eunice Johnson**, Chicago's **Johnson Publishing Company**, and the prism of iconic fashion from **Yves Saint-Laurent**, **Christian Dior**, **Oscar de la Renta**, **Pierre Cardin**, **Emanuel Ungaro**, and **Patrick Kelly** among others. This 7,000-square-foot exhibition, which is one of the largest special exhibitions in the museum's 157-year history, opens **March 16, 2013** and runs through **January 5, 2014**.

"Our exhibition on the Ebony Fashion Fair show offers an unprecedented opportunity to showcase how fashion became a vehicle for African American empowerment, pride and achievement," states **Gary T. Johnson**, president, Chicago History Museum.

The Ebony Fashion Fair began in 1958, and over the next 50 years the traveling fashion show blossomed into an American institution that raised millions for charity and helped Johnson Publishing Company reach its audience. Visitors will be introduced to the excitement of the Ebony Fashion Fair by entering the exhibition on a red carpet where three ensembles preview the more than 60 garments within the exhibition.

The exhibition introduces visitors to Eunice Walker Johnson, Ebony Fashion Fair's longtime producer and director. "My mother often spoke about the importance of African American women feeling beautiful," said **Linda Johnson Rice**, chairman, Johnson Publishing Company. "The Ebony Fashion Fair legacy represents an important part of the rich African American cultural experience in America, and I am extremely excited that the Chicago History Museum is bringing my mother's vision to life."

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Under Eunice Johnson, who became producer and director in 1963, the traveling show achieved new heights as she overcame racial prejudice to bring the pinnacle of European fashion to communities that were eager to see new aspirational images of black America—the hallmark of *Ebony* and *Jet* magazines.

“We hope visitors will have the impression of attending an exclusive event that was put together just for them where they will be wowed by fantastic garments and a powerful American story,” said exhibition curator **Joy Bivins**. “We want them to feel what it was like to attend this spectacular event and learn about Chicago, American and fashion history in the process.”

The exhibition is presented in three sections modeling the traveling show’s format. The first section of the exhibition, *Vision*, explores Eunice Johnson’s role as the creative force behind the Ebony Fashion Fair and features more than 30 costumes including some of the most revered names in 20th century fashion such as **Pierre Cardin, Emanuel Ungaro, Courreges, Givenchy, Christian LaCroix** and **Paco Rabanne**. Twelve ensembles answer the question of what power, affluence and influence look like. Another grouping of eight costumes reflects the use of color as a means to express beauty and risk-taking. The section concludes with six garments that celebrate female body, accentuating curves and showcasing skin.

The second section of the exhibition, *Innovation*, looks at boldness and experimentation of the Johnson Publishing Company story. That story is explored through media installations, supporting objects, and two costume groupings. One grouping includes seven costumes that highlight bold stylization, dynamic shapes and innovative technique. The other grouping features three ensembles that represent Ebony Fashion Fair’s response to the desires and influence of youthful audiences with looks by **Balizza, Emilio Pucci, and Angelo Marani**.

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The exhibition saves its most elaborate, luxurious and dramatic ensembles for the finale. The third section, *Power*, features 19 garments that reflect the glamour and showmanship that created the dynamic visual experience that audience members came to expect using pieces by **Valentino, Bob Mackie, Bill Blass, Lagerfeld, Eric Gaskins, McQueen, Valentino, Guy LaRoche, Halston** and **Dior**.

Virginia Heaven, assistant professor of Fashion Studies at Columbia College Chicago and the exhibition's consulting costume curator, aided the ensemble selection process, pouring over the more than 3,500 remaining pieces in Johnson Publishing Company's Ebony Fair Fashion archive.

"As we selected ensembles our challenge was not what to include, but what to leave out when presented with a collection that resembled a pirate's booty of extraordinary fashion significance," said Ms. Heaven. "This exhibition clearly reveals that Eunice Johnson had a flair for the glamorous, the luxurious and the dramatic."

Inspiring Beauty: 50 Years of Ebony Fashion Fair was developed by the Chicago History Museum and presented by the Costume Council of the Chicago History Museum in conjunction with Johnson Publishing Company. Exelon is the Chicago Presenting Sponsor. Additional support provided by Col. (IL) J.N. Pritzker, IL ARNG Ret., Tawani Foundation, Joyce Foundation, and Fifth Third Bank with support from the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity and the Illinois Department of Tourism.

Please see the exhibition and program fact sheets for more information about exhibition highlights, special events and public programming. Additional information, interviews and images are available upon request.

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The **Chicago History Museum**, a major museum and research center for Chicago and American history, is located at 1601 N. Clark Street. The Museum can be reached by CTA buses 11, 22, 36, 72, 73, 151, and 156. Parking is conveniently located one block north of the Museum at Clark and LaSalle Streets (enter on Stockton Drive). Admission to the Museum is \$14 adults with audio tour, \$12 seniors/students with audio tour, free for children 12 years and younger. Please call 312.642.4600 or visit us at www.chicagohistory.org. The Chicago History Museum is affiliated

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