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Ebony Fashion Fair exhibition to open March 2013
Chicago History Museum to reveal powerful American Story through Fashion

CHICAGO (March 14, 2012) - The Chicago History Museum and Johnson Publishing Company announce the first ever exhibition on the *Ebony Fashion Fair*, to open March 16, 2013. Partnering with the Johnson Publishing Company, the Museum will showcase priceless garments collected over the 50 year history of the *Ebony Fashion Fair*. The exhibition will connect to themes and energy that were ever present at the fashion shows and will explore the legacy, importance and entrepreneurial spirit that still has Johnson Publishing Company among the top American enterprises. The exhibition will be open at the Chicago History Museum through January 4, 2014.

“The Ebony Fashion Fair is an extension of my Mother’s confidence, grace and beauty, and I am extremely excited that the Chicago History Museum is bringing her vision to life again,” said Linda Johnson Rice, chairman, Johnson Publishing Company. “The fashion show is a big part of Johnson Publishing’s history and is steeped in the richness of the African American experience.”

Themes of vision, power, creativity and identity will place museum visitors in the midst of an impactful American story by exploring the experience of attending the show, the untold stories of those involved and how Johnson Publishing Company represented a launching pad for success in African American communities.

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“Our exhibition on the Ebony Fashion Fair offers an unprecedented opportunity to show how fashion became a vehicle for African American empowerment, pride, and achievement,” states Gary T. Johnson, president, Chicago History Museum. “The Museum is proud to play a major role in telling this story and sharing with the public the opportunity to be inspired by Eunice Johnson’s vision and life, and to understand the legacy of the show.”

The exhibition will also explore the connections that were forged with *Ebony Fashion Fair* audiences. For some visitors, the exhibition will be an introduction to the fashion show, its fundraising ability (the show donated more than \$55 million dollars to African American charitable organizations) and its function as a driver of subscriptions for the Company’s magazines EBONY and JET. For others, it will be a chance to reconnect with the fashion show as a unique social event that was a spectacle of fashion and performance. The approximately 5,200 sq. ft. exhibition will feature 60 garments from the *Ebony Fashion Fair* archive. The exhibition will feature works from icons of fashion history such as **Oscar de la Renta, Christian Dior, Yves Saint Laurent, Patrick Kelly, and Christian Lacroix** among others.

Additionally, the *Ebony Fashion Fair* exhibition will explore the life and force behind the show, **Eunice W. Johnson**. As producer and director of the *Ebony Fashion Fair* and secretary-treasurer of Johnson Publishing Company, Mrs. Johnson took it upon herself to create theatrical fashion presentations that brought high fashion and scholarship to communities that may have otherwise lacked the type of exposure. At the inception of the show, Mrs. Johnson would travel to Europe to buy clothes, but was said to have been turned away as certain designers thought that White women would not value their designs if they were worn by Black women. The exhibition will examine how, despite the reluctance of some designers, Mrs.

Johnson became among the first African Americans to buy from French haute couture fashion houses. As time progressed she would spend a million dollars each year on the 200 complete ensembles featured in the *Ebony Fashion Fair's* hour and a half presentation. Mrs. Johnson had an eye for the undiscovered, amassing a collection of future fashion greats before they were world-renowned including **Valentino Garavani**, **Roberto Cavalli**, and **Pierre Cardin**.

The Chicago History Museum boasts the second largest fashion collection in the world, making it the ideal venue to re-launch the embodiment of what *Ebony Fashion Fair* represented. Exhibition curator **Joy Bivins** is working closely with the Johnson Publishing Company to collect the stories from past *Ebony Fashion Fair* shows in an attempt to recreate some of the same elements in the exhibition. The exhibition will prove the significant impact Johnson Publishing Company and *Ebony Fashion Fair* has and had on American culture, and the show's impact on American fashion.

Exelon is the local presenting sponsor for the *Ebony Fashion Fair* exhibition, with additional support from the Costume Council of the Chicago History Museum.

More detailed information 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 with the Chicago Historical Society and acknowledges the Chicago Park District's generous support of all the Museum's activities.

Johnson Publishing Company, LLC, founded by John H. Johnson and Eunice W. Johnson in 1942, is the leading, independently-owned, Black American media publisher. Headquartered in Chicago, with New York and London offices, the Company publishes EBONY and JET, which rank No. 1 and No. 3, respectively, among Black American magazines, and owns Fashion Fair Cosmetics, a global prestige cosmetics brand for women of color launched in 1973. Johnson Publishing operated the *Ebony Fashion Fair*, the world's largest touring fashion show, until 2009; it raised more than \$55 million for scholarships and various charitable causes. Additional Information about Johnson Publishing Company, LLC is available at www.johnsonpublishing.com.