

Ronald Johnson: Oklahoma's First Black State Trooper

Objective: Students will learn about Oklahoma's first Black State Trooper from a newspaper published in the event of his death. They will recognize discrimination tactics used against Ronald Johnson and compare the culture in Oklahoma today.

State Standards:

PS.7.2 Explain how bias, discrimination and use of stereotypes influence behavior regarding gender, race, sexual orientation and ethnicity as demonstrated in the studies of the Brown Eyed/Blue Eyed Experiment and the Clark Doll Experiment.

USH.9.3 Examine the ongoing issues to be addressed by the Donald Trump and subsequent administrations, including taxation, immigration, employment, climate change, race relations, religious discrimination and bigotry, civic engagement, and perceived biases in the media.

4.A.4-5.1 Quote accurately from a text when explaining the text explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

4.A.9-12.1 Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, evaluating features such as author, date, and origin of information.

Overview: Students will use newspaper articles to read and comprehend the story of Oklahoma's first Black Highway Patrolman, Ronald Johnson. Ronald Johnson was from Claremore, OK and graduated from Lincoln High School, Claremore's segregated school prior to integration.

Required Materials:

- Worksheet
- Newspaper article

Claremore Progress, November 20, 2011

Written after his death, this article tells the story of Johnson's life and his determination to work in law enforcement despite discrimination from the Oklahoma Highway Patrol office.

Vocabulary:

- Secondary Source
- Discrimination
- Moral imperative

Further Reading: Other articles about Ronald Johnson and others from our Black History collection can be found in our virtual archives on our website. Objects once belonging to Ronald Johnson are on display in our museum.

A True Pioneer: Johnson served with integrity



Read the article by Larry Larkin published in the Claremore Progress on November 20, 2011. Use the article to answer the following questions.

Is this article a primary or secondary source of information? _____

Who is the subject of this article? _____

Why was Johnson's initial application "officially" rejected by the Oklahoma Highway Patrol Academy? Describe how and why this tactic was used to discriminate against Johnson.

How did Johnson respond to being turned down by the Oklahoma Highway Patrol Academy in 1967?

Moral imperative - A strongly felt principle that compels that person to act

"When Lt. Johnson became a highway patrolman, there was still a lot of civil unrest in our nation... The civil rights movement was in full swing, and many people were still having trouble with the moral imperative of equality"- Chief Colonel Kerry Pettingill. It has been over 50 years since the events described in this article. Do you think that Americans are still struggling with the "moral imperative of equality"? Why or why not?

A True Pioneer: Johnson served with integrity

By **LARRY LARKIN**
Progress Correspondent

A true pioneer was laid to rest this past week. Claremore's own Ronnie L. Johnson, the first Oklahoma Highway Patrol black trooper died November 13. He was 79.



RONNIE JOHNSON

"Lieutenant Johnson was a trailblazer who led the way for countless other African American troopers to serve with distinction," Governor Mary Fallin said in a news release, "The law enforcement community and the entire state of Oklahoma owe him a debt of gratitude for his service, his commitment to law enforcement, and the courage he displayed by being the first of a long and still growing list of African-American state troopers."

During his entire career Johnson met all challenges with professional distinction

and courage. At the start it was extremely tough being a "black cop" in an up until then white profession.

There was criticism, doubt, even anger, across the state at the time of his appointment. For his friends back home in Claremore, both black and white, they knew Johnson could accomplish whatever he set out to do.

As a teenage student and athlete at Lincoln High School, Johnson proved this time after time.

Currence Johnson and Maryetta Vann were the parents of Ron and his twin brother Donald Gene. The lived in the Bushyhead Creek area in Wagoner County. In 1944 the Johnson family moved to Claremore so the boys could attend the all-black high school here.

Following graduation Ronald Lee Johnson joined

the U.S. Air Force for four years service. Shortly afterwards he married Vanilla Lee White, also of Claremore.

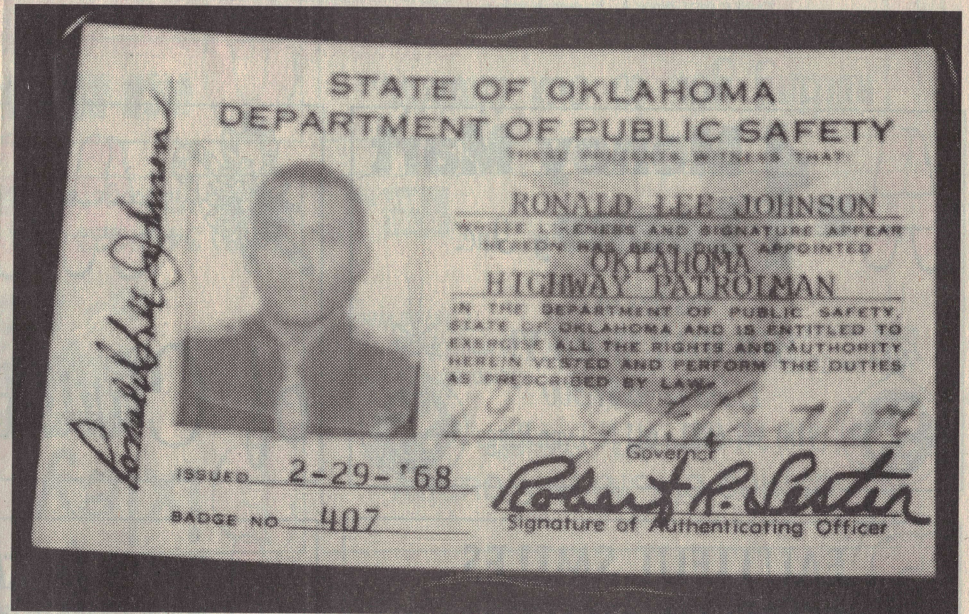
Needing a steady job to support his wife and family, he was hired by the Oklahoma Turnpike Authority. He was the first of his race to become a toll gate attendant, a position he held for two and a half years.

Johnson was 34 years old when he graduated from the Oklahoma Highway Patrol Academy in 1968. As an Air Force veteran, Johnson first applied for the academy the year before.

Following a lengthy period of time with no word from the state officials, Johnson questioned why and was told "...your application was apparently lost."

He was also told by the commander at that time that "...the department wasn't ready for a black trooper."

Disappointed but with no thought of giving up, Johnson applied the following year. Having the support of Representative Bill Biscoe,



a white man, this time he was accepted along with 25 other recruits. He was one of seven men to graduate the academy in 1968.

"When Lt. Johnson became a highway patrolman, there was still a lot of civil unrest in our nation," said OHP Chief Colonel Kerry Pettingill, "The civil rights movement was in full swing and many people were still having trouble with the moral

imperative of equality.

"Lt. Johnson believed in the law enforcement community and embarked on a long career marked by determination to overcome the challenges posed in the early years by his race."

Both his co-workers and friends knew Johnson was proud of his position, but never did he abuse it despite the circumstances.

"There's prejudice everywhere," Johnson said at a 2008 luncheon for the Central State Troopers Association, an organization of Oklahoma black troopers. "Not just inside law enforcement. And not just in these 50 states, but

everywhere. But if you get angry, they control you."

On June 30, 1987, Johnson accepted a position with the United States Marshall Service. He officially retired in September, the same year.

Before his retirement Johnson also served as recruiting officer for the Department of Safety and executive officer of the State Capitol Police.

As an Oklahoma Highway Patrolman, Johnson's badge number was 407.

Johnson's service revolver and OHP I.D. card are on display at the J.M. Davis Gun & Historical Museum.

Lt. Johnson enjoyed fish

Rogers County

SCHOOL LUNCH MENU