



OFFICE OF THE MAYOR
CITY OF CHICAGO

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 2, 2017

CONTACT:

Mayor's Press Office

312.744.3334

press@cityofchicago.org

**MAYOR RAHM EMANUEL ANNOUNCES JOHNSON PUBLISHING BUILDING TO BE CONSIDERED
FOR LANDMARK STATUS**

Building Served as Longtime Home to Nation's Largest Black-Owned Businesses

Mayor Rahm Emanuel today announced Chicago's former Johnson Publishing Co. building on South Michigan Avenue will be considered for landmark status. The move will help protect and celebrate the 11-story building's iconic, International Style design and its decades-long affiliation with black business and culture.

"As we celebrate Black History Month, it is the perfect time to honor this building that stands tall as a decades-long epicenter of black history and culture," Mayor Emanuel said. "This designation will cement this building's status as a landmark that is not just part of the legacy of the city of Chicago, but the history of our nation."

The landmark designation process started today with a preliminary recommendation at the Feb. 2, 2017, meeting of the Commission on Chicago Landmarks.

"My father started Johnson Publishing Company to inform, empower and uplift the African American community," Linda Johnson Rice, Chairman of Johnson Publishing Company and Chairman Emeritus of Ebony Media Holdings said. "With my mother Eunice by his side, they built an iconic brand. I am thrilled that the building that housed our company for so many years is being considered for landmark status. It is a true testament to the hard work of my parents and all the people who called Johnson Publishing Company home for decades. I am grateful to Mayor Emanuel and Alderman King for supporting this effort."

Completed at a cost of \$8 million in 1971, the building at 820 S. Michigan Ave. was constructed by Johnson Publishing Co. The company was founded in 1942 by John H. Johnson who, over the next six decades, grew the organization into the largest black-owned business in the nation. In 1982, Johnson became the first black man to appear on Forbes' list of 400 wealthiest Americans, and the Johnson Publishing building remains the only office structure in downtown Chicago built by an African American.

"I am immensely honored to champion the landmark designation status of the Johnson Publishing company building, the first African-American constructed and owned building in downtown Chicago, located in the 4th Ward," Ald. Sophia King said. "As the alderman and longstanding fan of Johnson Publishing, it gives me great pride to support this designation which will allow the

economic, social and cultural imprint of Johnson Publishing to be appropriately etched in Chicago's skyline and history."

Johnson used his company to celebrate achievement and success by black Americans, which was largely ignored or stereotyped by the mainstream media throughout the 20th century, according to a staff report by the Commission on Chicago Landmarks. Tapping into a huge demand for accurate and positive coverage of black life, his "Ebony" and "Jet" magazines became staples in black households across the country. Johnson's philanthropic work focused on education and, over his lifetime, he donated \$55 million to the United Negro College Fund and additional millions to black colleges and universities

The 110,000-square-foot building was designed by black architect John Warren Moutoussamy, who studied at Chicago's Tilden Technical and Englewood high schools. After serving in World War II, Moutoussamy enrolled at the Illinois Institute of Technology to study architecture under Mies van der Rohe. He later became the first African American to become partner in a large architectural firm, Dubin, Dubin, Black & Moutoussamy.

When design began on the building in 1969, Johnson told Moutoussamy that he "did not want one of those 'shirt front' glass and steel buildings" that were designed or influenced by van der Rohe and other International style contemporaries. Instead, Johnson wanted a unique, modern building that he said would convey his company's "openness to truth, openness to light, openness to all the currents swirling in all the black communities of this land."

The building's clearly-expressed structure, rectilinear forms, open floor plans, and absence of ornament are hallmarks of the International style.

"The design is a fitting reflection of the incredible business that it served to support, as well as Chicago's role advancing the concepts of equality and civil rights," said David L. Reifman, commissioner of the Department of Planning and Development, which provides staff services to the Landmark Commission.

The building is currently owned by Columbia College Chicago. Johnson Publishing's current office is at 200 S. Michigan Ave.

The Commission's preliminary recommendation for landmark status would apply to the building's exterior elevations and rooflines that are visible from public rights-of-way. A final recommendation could occur later this year, which would be forwarded to City Council for consideration.

###