

Biography of Gary T. Johnson

Gary T. Johnson was named the eighth President of the Chicago History Museum in August 2005. Mr. Johnson's leadership focuses on community outreach and building the institution's capacity to serve its mission of sharing Chicago's stories.

At a White House ceremony in 2016, the Chicago History Museum received the top award in the United States for museums and libraries, the National Medal from the Institute of Museum and Library Services.



Mr. Johnson came to the museum after 28 years as a lawyer and partner in the Chicago offices of two global law firms, Mayer Brown and Jones Day. Mr. Johnson is admitted to practice law in Illinois and New York and as a Solicitor of the Supreme Court of England and Wales. As a solicitor, he also is a member of the Law Society of England and Wales. His practice focused primarily on international matters and included extensive work in Europe, Latin America, and Asia.

Mr. Johnson led the 2006 reinvention of the Chicago Historical Society into today's Chicago History Museum: "We are 'the reinvented museum always reinventing.' The way to keep moving forward as a nonprofit is with thought leadership. The tools of social entrepreneurship are particularly useful for putting thoughts into action. I am proud that the oldest cultural institution in town now offers virtual reality and augmented reality platforms and was the first museum anywhere to ask the community to assign the topic for a future exhibition. 572 ideas came in and the crowd chose the winner through a series of online voting sessions with the museum serving only as the vote counter." In 2019, Chicago Innovation presented the museum its Social Innovator Award.

Visiting Chicago's grade schools with artifacts from the museum's collection is a personal commitment for Mr. Johnson. So far, he has visited over 350 classrooms in neighborhoods throughout Chicago. "My desire for Chicagoans is not only for them to access our collections and programs, but also to experience their own Chicago stories."

Another theme for Mr. Johnson's years has been putting its extensive Lincoln collection to work both in the museum itself and on loan. "Lincoln has something to say to every generation because he wrestled with fundamental questions of liberty, equality and government." The museum's approach to the 2009 Lincoln bicentennial was startling in its novelty: alongside an exhibition on President Lincoln was a parallel exhibition on Lincoln's contemporary, President Benito Juárez. Mexico loaned national treasures to the Chicago History Museum, some of which had never before been on display in museums.

In March 2020, the Chicago History Museum announced that Mr. Johnson plans to step down as president with a target date of January 2021. A search for his successor is in progress.

Mr. Johnson also served from 2008-2017 as President of Museums in the Park, the association of eleven of Chicago's major museums, and also led fifteen cultural institutions in their Museums Work for Chicago legislative campaign in Springfield and Chicago.

In leadership service to the museum field, Mr. Johnson served on a special task force for the American Alliance of Museums to reform the accreditation process. He also served for several years as a Presidential Counselor for the National World War II Museum. For Chicago's Pritzker Military Museum and Library, Mr. Johnson has served since 2007 either as chair or as member of the selection committee for the Pritzker Literature Award, which recognizes an author who has made a significant contribution to the understanding of military history.

Mr. Johnson has a record of leadership in the civic arena, particularly in civil rights and justice reform. From 2001-2003, he was co-chair of the national Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law and currently is a life trustee. From 1987-1996, he was a member of the board of directors of the Legal Assistance Foundation of Metropolitan Chicago, which offers legal services to the poor. He was its president from 1994-1996.

In justice reform matters, he served during the 1980s as vice chair of the Special Commission on the Administration of Justice in Cook County, Illinois and as a member of the Illinois Supreme Court Special Commission on the Administration of Justice and of the Criminal Justice Project of the Circuit Court of Cook County (these were known as the "Solovy Commissions"). He was the principal author of a series of commission reports, including reports on judicial conduct and ethics. He has served in the American Bar Association's governing body (the House of Delegates), where in 2000, he was the principal draftsman of a statement of ABA ethics policy. For this work, he received the Presidential Commendation of the Illinois State Bar Association.

Mr. Johnson is a member of the American Law Institute and a Life Fellow of the American Bar Foundation and of the Illinois State Bar Association Foundation. He was president of the Chicago Council of Lawyers, a bar association in that city, from 1981 to 1983. Among his civic commitments in Chicago, he is a long-time member of the Radio Committee of WFMT, which oversees Chicago's classical music station.

He was educated at Harvard Law School (J.D.); Oxford University (Rhodes Scholar; M.A. Modern History); and Yale College (B.A. History and Political Science.) For over ten years, he led the Rhodes Scholarship selection process for the district that includes Illinois.

In 2018, Lake Forest College awarded Mr. Johnson an honorary Doctor of Humanities degree. Mr. Johnson teaches two undergraduate courses as a visiting lecturer at Lake Forest College: "Nonprofit Leadership and Management" and "Social Innovation in Chicago." Both courses

are in the college's Entrepreneurship and Innovation program. He is the co-author with Russell Lewis of the book *Lessons Learned about Nonprofit Management and Finance*.

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