

Shift Scholarship Application

**The George F. Johnson Dream Center for
Community Empowerment**

A ministry of Sarah Jane Johnson Memorial
United Methodist Church
308 Main Street, Johnson City, NY

**Winners of this scholarship
receive a personal computer**

**Eligibility: Graduating Seniors who are the first
generation to graduate, or go on to secondary
education in their family.**

Instructions for Scholarship:

1. Read the complete story on the life of George F. Johnson in one sitting.
2. Answer the questions at the end in a way that reflects that you have an understanding of the purpose of this scholarship.
3. Return the application to: 308 Main Street, Johnson City before June 30.

*Make Your Dream a Reality,
And in the Manner and Legacy of George F. Johnson,
Change a Nation.*



"The hope of the world lies in progress and constant improvement. We look with confidence into that future- rapidly approaching- when all may have a more equal share in the good things of life, when the rights of humans are more sacred than the rights of dollars, when ill-will be the same vice -and the same crime- whether committed in broadcloth, or in rags."--George F. Johnson, circa 1919 We live in an age when sports figures and Hollywood stars are held up in America as heroes and role models. In this biography, we honor a truly great American.

JOHNSON COMES TO NEW YORK

George F. Johnson, having already worked for some 10 years in shoe and boot-making factories in his home state of Massachusetts, came to the Susquehanna Valley of New York in 1881. At the age of 24, Johnson became a boss of a treeing room in the old Lester Brothers shoe factory in Binghamton. Though the company fell on hard times due to previous mismanagement and its aging ownership, young Johnson stood out not only as a talent at what he did, but as a visionary who wanted to build the ideal company. The hard times of the 1890's caused Lester Brothers to borrow heavily from a man named Henry B. Endicott of Boston, an industrialist and investor. Endicott saw the need to come to Binghamton personally to more closely supervise his investment.

He saw in the younger Johnson an energetic, honest, forward- looking man who would one day not only put the company back on its feet, but make it prosperous. Johnson eventually worked--and then purchased--his way to being a co-owner of what became Endicott-Johnson Shoe Company. Such was Johnson's success in building perhaps the greatest, if not the most noble, company in American history, that Endicott even financed Johnson's entire purchase himself. Years later, in recounting this time and his vision to author William Inglis for the 1935 book, *George F. Johnson And His Industrial Democracy*, Johnson said: "From the time I was 20 years old--yes, from the time I was 18--my picture of a real factory was the shop out in the open country, with the homes around it in a little village. Then the men and their families could have gardens, could get fresh air and the sun, and bring up their children decently, away from the crowded city."

The Endicott-Johnson Shoe Company, headquartered in the Southern Tier of Upstate New York, was for decades the largest shoe manufacturer in America. Almost single-handedly, in fact, this former industrial giant equipped the U.S. armed forces in both World War I and World War 2. Its workers were paid and well-cared for even in the Great Depression. In fact, the thousands of workers employed by "E-J" were so well-treated--and the company's owner and patriarch, George F. Johnson, was revered and loved by company employees who repeatedly rebuffed outside attempts to unionize them, even in the tough 1930's. For over half a century, the Endicott-Johnson Corporation (E-J) served as the model in how a major company should treat its workers: as equals of its owners, yet prosperous at the same time.

VISIONARY EMPLOYER

Over the years, Johnson built his dream into a reality--but not without the help, labor and gratitude and loyalty of tens of thousands of workers. He treated his laborers as his friends--and equals. To sum up his life, one could say, he never became wealthy and then forgot where he came from. George F. was a man who saw the value in every person, due to his Christian faith, a faith passed on to him from his mother, Sarah Jane Johnson. Since the time George was a child, living in the servant's quarters of the Inn his father and mother managed, George did not like the practice of treating people based on their lot in life or their status. He abhorred the treatment of workers without respect, seeing them as merely a commodity. As a result, Johnson built a virtual paradise for those in the Southern Tier of New York.

The Endicott-Johnson Shoe Company was a prosperous manufacturer of shoes based in New York's Southern Tier, with factories mostly located in the area's Triple Cities of Binghamton, Johnson City, and Endicott. An estimated 20,000 people worked in the company's factories by the 1920s, and an even greater number worked there during the boom years of the mid-1940s when, helped by footwear it produced for the military during the war years, it was producing 52 million pairs of shoes a year. During the early 1950s, the work force was still approximately 17,000 to 18,000.

The Endicott Johnson Corporation grew out of the Lester Brothers Boot and Shoe Company which began in Binghamton in 1854. In 1890, the Lester Brothers moved their business west to a nearby rural area, which in 1892 was incorporated as the Village of Lestershire and in 1916 became Johnson City, because the worker's wanted to honor their Patriarch. Financial problems in 1890 forced the sale of the company to a creditor and fellow shoemaker, Henry Bradford Endicott of Massachusetts, who founded the Endicott Shoe Company and in 1899 made factory foreman George F. Johnson his partner after years of faithful service to the company.

The E-J story is in the history books because of George F. Johnson (1857–1948), or George F., as he was popularly called, who rose through the shoe factory ranks to become the half-owner of E-J, and its highest executive until his death in 1948. George F's reign was marked by his Square Deal version of what has come to be known as, "Welfare Capitalism" that, like progressive movements begun by people of faith, during the early twentieth century, advocated providing parades and churches and libraries to "uplift" and celebrate American workers. George F's Square Deal consisted of worker benefits even in harsh economic times that were generous and innovative for their time.

Over an area of six-hundred square miles grew a system of comfortable homes, factories, hospitals, libraries, playgrounds, parks, golf courses, concert halls, and more. This system was the realized vision of a man unique in industrial history; a man who donated unknown millions to a community he created out of his imagination to make life happy on behalf of others. Johnson, his son and nephew worked their way up to management positions from entry level positions and consistent with their faith, socialized as equals with the workers when they got to the top. In 1919, E-J became one of the first companies in America to create a profit-sharing plan for its employees. For workers, the Square Deal consisted of a chance to buy E-J built and E-J financed homes, a profit sharing program, health care from factory-funded medical facilities and later (built in 1949) two worker recreational facilities.

George F. owned a modest home among the worker's homes, many of which were built by the corporation and sold sometimes, at a loss. But the Square Deal was more than an employee benefit program. E-J and the Johnson family also provided or helped to finance two libraries, theaters, a golf course, swimming pools, carousels, parks and food markets, many of which were available to the community without charge. One of the many items donated by Johnson was a tract of land on the west side of Binghamton which became "Recreation Park," with a carousel, tennis courts, pool, play ground, and bathhouse. Reminders of the source of that generosity were everywhere. Endicott was a community planned by E-J and incorporated in 1906. It was named after Henry B. Endicott. The vast majority of the shoe factories were located in Endicott with a few satellite locations in Johnson City and Binghamton. George F's home was donated to the village after his death and became the public library.

Most of the jobs were classified as "piece work." Racks of shoes moved through the factories with "coupons" attached to each rack. When the worker completed his/her operation on the rack of shoes, he or she removed the appropriate coupon which was worth a few pennies. At the end of the week the worker turned in his coupons from which the payroll department calculated pay. The work was hard, but the extensive benefits were offsets. The company needed a large labor pool and initiated a recruitment program aimed at southern Italy and the Slavic countries, making Endicott a small town with a rich, ethnic mix. Many of the sons and daughters of these immigrants

graduated from Union-Endicott High School and went on to become teachers, doctors, lawyers, engineers, and successful business people.

The entrance to Johnson City on Main Street from Binghamton is marked with a stone arch embossed with the words, "Home of the Square Deal." There was a corresponding arch on the other end of Main Street that served as the entrance to Endicott. E-J workers paid for and erected these arches. Both arches were dedicated on September 6, 1920. One of the E-J swimming pools was shaped in the outline of a gigantic shoe sole. The Triple Cities contain a number of statues of the Johnson family, including Johnson City's statue of Harry L. Johnson (the youngest brother to George F.), and Binghamton's statue of George F. Johnson in the George F. Johnson Recreation Park, and, also in Recreation Park, the Harry L. Johnson memorial. Endicott had En-Joie Park (with E and the J capitalized to evoke E-J). The Triple Cities Parks contained a carousel called "Merry go rounds" and they also contained playground equipment, a baseball diamond and picnic areas, a large swimming pool and a band stand. In the summer, the Endicott-Johnson workers band performed concerts every Sunday evening in the Endicott En-Joie Park. There were also Recreation Center buildings in Endicott and Johnson City. They contained subsidized bowling alleys in the basement and a large banquet room on the main floor. Retirement dinners were given on a regular basis in the Recreation Centers. Any employee could attend the dinners for 25 cents. Various roads and bridges refer to the Johnsons, including CFJ Boulevard in Johnson City, and the C. Fred Johnson Bridge over the Susquehanna River (part of Expressway Route 201) which was named in honor of Charles F. Johnson (an older brother of George F.).

The word "Ideal" appeared in many places, including E-J's first (1901) factory in Endicott, Endicott's "Ideal Home Library," and "Ideal Hospital," which later became Wilson Hospital. The library was later demolished for municipal facilities and the library was relocated to George F's former home. The use of repetitions and iterations of "ideal," "En-Joie," and other words (such as "Endwell" used for both a line of E-J shoes, and later in the renaming of the hamlet of Hooper to Endwell, New York) were to point up that E-J's Square Deal was the "ideal" relationship between capital and labor. Labor organizer Samuel Gompers visited E-J on several occasions, and spent time with both rank and file employees and with the Johnsons. When asked why no attempt had been made to organize E-J workers, Gompers said that E-J already gave workers more than unions had achieved elsewhere, and that the Federation of Labor was working to bring other workforces to the pay and benefits levels E-J provided on its own initiative.

The people of our community looked up to the Johnson family for all that they stood for and championed by example, for raising the standard for others to follow. This admiration is reflected in the inscription in the Harry L. Johnson memorial that states "This Fountain Was Given By the School Children In Memory Of their Friend Harry L. Johnson MCMXXII;" and in the inscription accompanying a statue of George F. Johnson which states "Have Faith In the People: George F. Johnson: Erected by an Appreciative Community to the Nobility Of his Character and his Great Benefactions to the People, 1923. Labor Is Honorable."

Carousel Capital of the World

George F. Johnson donated six carousels to the Triple Cities between 1919 and 1934, which are now among the fewer than 170 antique carousels remaining in the United States and Canada. All were built by the well-known carousel maker Allan Herschell of The Herschell Carousel Factory in North Tonawanda, New York. All contain wood-carved figures, and are open to the public from Memorial Day to Labor Day. Binghamton is accordingly associated with the nickname "Carousel Capital of the World," although only two of the Triple Cities' six carousels are actually located in Binghamton. The admission price to the carousels has never changed: free-- except, traditionally, to find and dispose of one piece of litter.

Contribution to economy

The company was responsible for nearly all of the shoe and footwear for the United States Army during World War I and World War II. At its peak, E-J was one of the largest shoe manufacturers in the U.S., with retail outlets in over 30 states. E-J was also substantially vertically integrated, with coal-fired, steam generating plants that powered its factory machinery and factories for tanning animal hides to make leather, and also for reclaiming rubber from used automobile tires for use as shoe soles. E-J's most long-lasting and important economic contribution may be its influence on its neighbor in Endicott, New York: International Business Machines Corporation, and IBM's predecessors.

This is due, at least in part, to the influence George F. Johnson had on Thomas J. Watson, who considered George F. a mentor. Endicott Johnson Shoes became the example as one of the earliest and most important providers of employee benefits, and went on to become famous for its elevation of workers, which brought to America an era of prosperity that lasted for three generations. Although IBM didn't provide free medical and hospital care, or build houses for employees, IBM recognized that good pay and benefits are key to a company remaining non-union. In today's global economy, competing with low wages, in an era where worker's rights have been devalued, American companies have reduced their benefit programs for employees and retirees.

A Continuing Legacy Depends On You

The demise of the E-J was rooted in the U.S. government's trade agreements with other nations and the sweeping changes these brought to the nation as America's manufacturing base moved overseas. E.J.'s founding principles of valuing labor were threatened by the availability of cheap, foreign labor and the rise of global shoemakers such as Nike. According to some sources, C.F. Johnson was a vehement critic of free trade and the unfair practices of removing tariffs from foreign goods due to the family's great admiration for the quality of work from the American worker. The Johnson's were staunchly Methodist, a branch of Christianity with a strong tradition of Social Justice, reform and Human Rights. These values were the backbone behind a family raised to lift up the human condition, to even the playing field for all men and women, and empower those who were looked down by others due to rank or status.

It is now up to you, as a member of the community to keep this legacy of goodwill and empowerment going for the common man, for the banding together of citizens to keep the dream alive for generations to come.

For further reading

<http://www.albany.edu/history/ej/origins/>

<http://www.endicottny.com/history.htm>

<http://www.nationalinvestor.com/EJ%20story.htm>

<http://www.jstor.org/pss/1903485>

http://www.bingwiki.org/wiki/index.php?title=Endicott-Johnson_Corporation

http://www.landmarks-stl.org/news/endicott_johnson_shoe_distribution_plant_listed_in_national_register_of_his/



Please answer each question in a sentence or two, briefly, but taking time to think each one through carefully on a separate sheet of paper, double spaced, margins 1" and Times New Roman Font # 12. Deadline: June 30.

1. Some have called George F. Johnson the greatest man in American industrial history. What do you think?
2. Why do you think so few leaders in history and today, lead the way George F. Johnson did?
3. From this story, please make a list that describes George F.'s values.
4. George F. Johnson's values were based on his faith. Rather than having to learn the hard way, or make up his values as he went along, he had a firm and sure basis as his guide. Have you ever reviewed what your values are? Please list a few of those values here.
5. How will you live by your values?
6. Character has been said to be what we do when no one is looking. A eulogy is what people say about us when we are no longer here. How would others describe you in your eulogy?
7. While you reflect on your character, please consider those areas you are not proud of. What is your plan to continuously improve your character and integrity?
8. How is George F. Johnson's life different from the celebrity life-style that is held up by the media today?
9. How do you hope your life will compare to George F. Johnson's life?
10. George F. believed in continuous improvement in all areas of life. Describe how one would live a life of continuous improvement, in regard to character, education and skills.
11. Why is it important to remember stories such as this?
12. How will you pass on the George F. Johnson story, so that it is known by generations after you?