



## EDWARD M. KENNEDY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

### **Interviewer's Briefing Materials** **Olati Johnson Interview, 03/22/2007**

Robert A. Martin, Research Director

#### **Miller Center Documents<sup>1</sup>**

- Olati Johnson Fact Sheet.

#### **Secondary Source Materials**

- Olati Johnson bio, Poverty & Race Research Action Council.
- Olati Johnson bio, Columbia Law School.
- *2002 Congressional Staff Directory* (Mount Vernon, VA: Congressional Staff Directory, 2002) p. 186.
- "Former NAACP Attorney Olati Johnson Wrote Controversial Staff Memo to Senator Kennedy," [www.cfif.org](http://www.cfif.org).
- Curt Levey, "Bollinger on the Spot," *The New York Sun*, 03/24/2006.

#### **Oral History Interviews**

- William Taylor interview, Kennedy Oral History Project, Miller Center, University of Virginia, 01/25/2006.

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<sup>1</sup> These are original documents created by Miller Center researchers for the Edward M. Kennedy Oral History Project. Please acknowledge credit for any use of these materials.

## EMK CIVIL RIGHTS STAFFER FACT SHEETS

*Prepared by Hilde Restad*

*Miller Center, University of Virginia, 03/05/2007*

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**Olatunde “Olati” Johnson** (September 6, 2001 – May 15, 2004)

### *Positions with EMK:*

- Counsel on the Judiciary Committee’s Subcommittee on Immigration (civil rights, First Amendment and religion, and judicial nominations)

### *Other positions:*

- Prior to working for EMK:

- Clerked for Justice John Paul Stevens of the U.S. Supreme Court from 1997-1998
- Assistant Counsel to the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund for four years (higher education affirmative action, employment discrimination, education policy, and welfare and low-wage employment policy)

- After working for EMK:

- Worked for the American Civil Liberties Union until May 2004
- Awarded the Kellis Parker Fellowship in Law, Columbia University

### *Issues that Johnson worked on for EMK:*

- The confirmation of Julia Smith Gibbons, a nominee to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit. In April 2002, Johnson writes a memo recommending a delay in the Judiciary Committee’s hearing for Gibbons so that her appointment will not (adversely) affect the Court’s decision in the case on the unconstitutionality of the University of Michigan’s race-based undergraduate admissions system. Melody Barnes, then EMK’s chief counsel on the Judiciary Committee, joins in the recommendation. Gibbons is confirmed on July 29, 2002, after the Court has rendered its decision. Subsequent leaks of the memo leads to calls for investigation, but of the leak, not the memo, since it turns out the memo is part of thousands of documents downloaded from Democrats by Republican staffers.

### *Issues that came up during her tenure:*

- The No Child Left Behind Act, an overhaul of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), cleared in the Senate on 12/18/2001. EMK is a chief sponsor.
- The border security bill (HR 3525) passes the Senate on April 18, 2002 and the president signs it into law on May 14. The bill is designed to strengthen border security and prevent terrorists from entering the country and is not aimed at illegal immigrants from Mexico and elsewhere. However, provisions that would have made it easier for illegal immigrants to apply for legal residency were dropped from the bill. (2002 *Congressional Quarterly Almanac*, p. 13-7)
- Partisan rancor over judicial nominations, with Democrats mounting the first coordinate filibuster attempt in over a quarter century, blocking six of President Bush’s picks from taking appeals court seats. (2003 *Congressional Quarterly Almanac*, p. 13-19)