

Gerald W. Johnson: Champion of Diversity at 101

By Kato Cooks

Gerald W. Johnson is a living, breathing LEGEND; reserved, dynamic, brilliant. He is a quiet cannon of activism. He is history alive.

Johnson is perhaps best known as co-founder, along with his spouse and business partner, Valerie Voorhies, of the San Francisco-based Small Business Exchange (SBE) newspapers in 1984. SO much happened before that.

First, Rewind

On March 2, 1955, Claudette Colvin, then fifteen years old, was arrested in Montgomery, Alabama, for refusing to relinquish her seat, on a public bus, to a white woman. In 1956, she, along with fellow plaintiffs Aurelia Browder, Susie McDonald, and Mary Louise Smith, prevailed at the United States Supreme Court (*Browder v. Gayle*) in striking down discrimination in public transportation.

Of course, we all remember Rosa Parks, also in Montgomery, Alabama, in the same situation

on December 1, 1955 (nine months after Claudette Colvin's arrest), which launched the successful Montgomery Bus Boycott. This shot the name of Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. into the national consciousness.

In 1967, the Black-owned National Economic Growth and Reconstruction Organization (NEGRO), opened bus routes in Watts, an impoverished area of Los Angeles—this owing to the inferior, when it existed at all, bus service provided to residents.

But in 1946, nine years before Montgomery, Alabama, and nearly twenty years before the 1965 Watts Rebellion, and more than twenty years prior to the NEGRO bus service in Watts, Gerald W. Johnson was handling our business.

He Refused to Move

Johnson had just returned to his hometown of New Orleans, Louisiana, in 1946, after World War II service in the United States Navy. Johnson and a companion were on a bus headed home when the driver directed him to move behind a "Coloreds Behind This Sign" demarcation. Johnson refused. The driver threatened to call the



police; still, Johnson refused with this retort: "You can call yo' mama. I ain't sittin' behind no sign." Some of us understand.

Prudence prevailed sufficiently for Johnson and his companion to disembark at the next stop.

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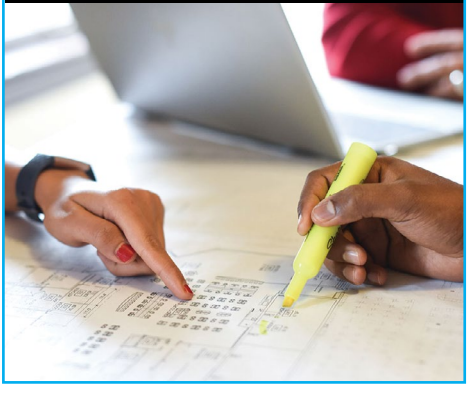
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For more info contact Valerie Voorhies at vvv@sbeinc.com



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VIRTUAL EVENTS FOR YOUR BUSINESS

2026

Federal Contracting for Small Businesses Webinar
Tuesday, February 10, 2026, 11:00 am–12:30 pm CST Online
Main Sponsor(s): US Small Business Administration
Contact: Irene Gonzalez, 208-334-1673, irene.gonzalez@sba.gov
Fee: Free; registration required

Learn the essentials of federal contracting for small businesses. This event will cover the basics of navigating the federal contracting process, as well as the various certifications available to help your small business succeed in the government marketplace. Certifications include: 8(a) Business Development Program, HUBZone Certification, Woman Owned Small Business (WOSB/EDWOSB), and Veteran Owned Small Business (VOSB). Don't miss this opportunity to gain valuable insights and resources to help your small business. Register at https://www.eventbrite.com/e/federal-contracting-basics-and-certifications-for-small-businesses-tickets-1977729717825

SBA 101: Introduction to SBA Programs Webinar
Monday, February 23, 2026, 8:00 am–9:00 am CST Online
Main Sponsor(s): US Small Business Administration, Rhode Island District Office
Contact: Brian Hopkins, 401-528-4575, brian.hopkins@sba.gov
Fee: Free; registration required

This free workshop, presented by the Rhode Island

District Office, is designed to help entrepreneurs understand the various SBA programs and services available to help them as they start, expand, grow, and recover their businesses. This overview presentation covers: Introduction to the SBA; SBA Resource Partner Network—Business Training and One-on-One Counseling; Selling to the Federal Government—SBA Contracting Certification Programs; Access to Capital—Loan and Surety Bond Programs; International Trade Assistance; Emergency Preparedness and Disaster Assistance Loans. Register online for the free workshop webinar at https://www.sba.gov/event/77581

Federal Contracting: Woman-Owned Small Business (WOSB) Certification Program Webinar
Tuesday, March 17, 2026, 1:00 pm–3:00 pm CST Online
Main Sponsor(s): US Small Business Administration
Contact: Patrice Dozier, patrice.dozier@sba.gov
Fee: Free; registration required

SBA is creating a space for Woman-Owned Small Businesses, via WOSB certification! Are you a woman owner of a small business? The federal government's goal is to award at least five percent of all federal contracting dollars to woman-owned small businesses each year. Join us for training on how to register for SBA's Woman-Owned Small Business (WOSB) program, which helps eligible small businesses to qualify for federal contracting opportunities. The monthly sessions include an overview of the self-certification process, and a discussion of the NAICS codes that qualify as WOSB or EDWOSB. Register at https://www.eventbrite.com/e/woman-owned-small-business-wosb-certification-program-tickets-1977995825761

CERTIFICATION

Small Business Exchange, Inc. is DBE certified by the Louisiana UCP.

