

BIOGRAPHY JANET LANGHART COHEN

“The First Lady of the Pentagon”

Janet Langhart Cohen's life has been an extraordinary adventure. She transitioned from the world of the segregated housing project of Indianapolis in which she grew up to the inner circles of the Civil Rights movement to becoming “First Lady of the Pentagon,” a celebrated author and now an acclaimed playwright.

After attending Butler University on a full scholarship, studying education and comparative religions, and attending Indiana University, Janet joined the prestigious Ebony Fashion Fair where she traveled the country and was featured on the cover of Jet Magazine.

She moved to Chicago where, living under the roof and mentorship of Mahalia Jackson, Janet met Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Andrew Young, Muhammad Ali, Dick Gregory, Jesse Jackson, and many more iconic figures from various walks of life. Janet often says, “I was blessed to call these amazing human beings my friends. I’m still learning from Martin to this day. He continues to enlighten, to teach.”

While working as a model in Chicago, she was awarded the title of Miss Chicagoland. This title was followed by her first on camera job as the weather girl on Channel 26 News in Chicago, with Don Cornelius, who later became the mastermind and host of Soul Train. Soon after, Janet became a popular fixture on the WBBM-TV (CBS) weekend newscast. She commuted between Indianapolis and Chicago so she could also host her own weekday show, Indy Today. This was her first opportunity to interview notable people and celebrities, for which she and her co-producer received the city's most prestigious community service award, the CASPER.

The next knock on her door came from the ABC affiliate in Boston that sought her out to host “Good Morning,” a local 90-minute show. In 1975, “Good Morning” went national, making Janet the first African American host of a nationally syndicated program. Janet made news with her provocative and insightful interviews with heads of state, politicians, celebrities, scientists, artists, and musicians.

Janet was offered her first national television post on NBC's “America Alive,” co-hosting with Olympian Bruce Jenner and entertainer Jack Linkletter. The show was short lived, but opened the door for her to star in “You Asked For It,” for which she traveled to Kenya, Egypt, France, Great Britain, Spain, and South America. She also worked on “Entertainment Tonight,” and the WABC-TV morning show in New York City.

Janet was asked to co-host the Washington, D.C. produced “America's Black Forum” with Civil Rights activist Julian Bond. Subsequently, she was once again asked to pull double duty to host two programs on BET -- “On Capitol Hill with Janet Langhart” and “Personal Diary,” a show that profiled notable African Americans. During this time, she had one of her most memorable interviews -- with Rosa Parks. During the interview they shared their individual experiences with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Mrs. Parks' historic display of courage during the Montgomery Bus Boycott

Janet's accomplishments as a broadcast journalist were acknowledged recently when she was inducted into the Indiana Broadcasters Hall of Fame and presented with the prestigious Pioneer Award.

During her time in Boston, Langhart met her future husband Senator William S. Cohen. As a young Republican Congressman, Cohen had made headlines and the cover of Time Magazine for his role in the Watergate investigation and ultimately his vote to impeach President Nixon. Time Magazine named Cohen “one of America's 200 future leaders.” In 1996, President William Clinton asked Cohen to serve as his Secretary of Defense, making him the first official in recent history to do so for a President of the opposite party.



With Cohen's appointment to the Cabinet, Janet Langhart Cohen became the "First Lady of the Pentagon". She said, "When I walked through the doors of the Pentagon, the experience of seeing men and women of all ethnicities serve bravely and selflessly reminded me of the pride my father expressed in serving his country despite the inequality and injustice he endured during WWII. I remembered that every male in my family had served this nation by fighting for freedom abroad despite not having freedom themselves at home. That made me ask, 'If this isn't my country, then whose is it?'"

During those Pentagon years, Janet hosted and produced a TV show for the Armed Forces Network that was broadcast globally, "Special Assignment with Janet Langhart Cohen." She also established the Citizen Patriot Award, The First Military Families Forum, and created and produced an annual musical salute to our military called "The Pentagon Pops." She single-handedly established a multimedia corridor in the Pentagon so visitors could see America's finest being entertained by famous celebrities while they were on duty far away from their families.

President Clinton in his last State of the Union Address praised everything that Janet has done for the military. It was the first time a cabinet minister's wife had been so honored. She said, "It was the greatest accolade I have ever received."

After Secretary Cohen's term was complete, they both went into private practice. Bill established an international consulting firm, and Janet returned to her position as President of Langhart Communications, a media firm that advises clients how to make their very best appearances before a camera, a boardroom or congressional committee.

Langhart Cohen wrote her memoir *From Rage to Reason, My Life in Two Americas*, followed by *Love in Black and White: Race, Religion and Romance*, written with her husband about a subject they know first-hand --- interracial marriage. Maintaining her commitment to racial and ethnic equality, they wrote a third book, *Race and Reconciliation in America*, and promoted the importance of the dialogue through a national conference tour where they published the transcripts of the speeches delivered.

Janet Langhart Cohen then wrote what has become a celebrated one act play, "Anne & Emmett." It is an imaginary conversation between Anne Frank and Emmett Till, two teen victims who lived in societies that failed to protect them.

While Anne Frank is known worldwide on a grand scale, Emmett Till, whose horrific death sparked the Civil Rights movement, is not as well known. However, Janet recalls the brutal photo of his tortured body in *Jet Magazine*. The play is her way of honoring the contribution Till's death made to the Civil Rights movement. The play debuted in 2009 at George Washington University and Vice President Joe Biden, Dick Gregory, General Colin Powell, Sidney Poitier and Michael Douglas were among the hundreds in attendance.

Janet is president and CEO of Langhart communications, where she provides expert media and public speaking training to people who find themselves in the public eye.

Currently she is writing three more plays and is working to get "Anne & Emmett" into America's classrooms and to Broadway.

