

James Johnson
Page, U.S. House of Representatives

The Long Struggle for Representation: Oral Histories of African Americans in Congress

Neighborhoods of Chicago

James Johnson describes the race and class divisions that transformed Chicago neighborhoods and school boundaries in the 1950s.

Interview recorded October 24, 2019

Then, we moved to Park Manor, which was a neighborhood that is further south. But it was a neighborhood of single-family bungalows. And when we moved in, it was all-white—mostly white. Within two years, it had changed to being all-Black, which is what happened in Chicago at the time. Neighborhoods changed overnight. So, Black families who were more educated and more middle-class would move into a working-class white neighborhood, they would all move out or they would get good money for their homes and they'd move someplace else. And then, middle-class Black families could move into homes that, you know, were better homes. So it was sort of a win-win, but it was interesting how they did it because the school boundaries would be adjusted because, as I said, there was very little transition zone. So when we moved to Park Manor, the school that was closest to me was two blocks away on 76th Street. We lived on 7339 Indiana, so near 74th. 75th was the divide. So I didn't go to the school that was a few blocks away. I went to the school that was actually a mile away because it was still in the Black neighborhood. And in fact, they built a new school three blocks from me before they would allow us to go to the other school. That's just the way things were.