

James Johnson
Page, U.S. House of Representatives

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

DC Public School

James Johnson recalls the public school he attended while the House sorted his employment.
Interview recorded October 24, 2019

Although, it was kind of funny when I first got there. Back in Chicago, they had an honors curriculum, which the brainiacs were in that. It was sort of a small group of kids who took what would now be called college preparatory classes. So, when I came here and went to Western, I enrolled in—Washington at the time had a track system. There was the honors level, college prep, I forgot what this—it was a vocational was a lowest one and then there was basic or something. But if you weren't in the first two then you weren't in anything that was going to lead to college. And most of the negro kids were not in the first two tracks. And so, when I came here, I was put in I think track three or whatever. And the first day I was there, there was a test, a math test of some sort. And, you know, I scored a 100 because it was easy. I mean, it was stuff that I'd learned, you know, maybe a year or two earlier. And, and, you know, the teacher was like, "Okay, what's, where did you learn this?" I said, "I learned it in the school I came from in Chicago." It's like—so there was kind of a hubbub and they gave me some other tests and I kept scoring 100s because it was stuff I had already learned like a year or 18 months earlier. So, they put me in the, they put me in the college prep track. But yeah, the assumption was I wasn't smart enough because I was a negro to be in that class—in those classes.