

**James Johnson**  
Page, U.S. House of Representatives

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

### **“The Big Draw”**

James Johnson explains why he wanted to attend the Capitol Page School.  
*Interview recorded October 24, 2019*

Well, I became aware of the program when I visited Washington to see my aunt as a nine year old. And as I went through the school system in Chicago—I mean I knew, I decided I wanted to be a doctor when I was six. So, you know, the importance of education was always important, but I was also focused on a specific goal of becoming a doctor. So, I knew I had to go to college. I knew I had to go to a good college in order to get into a good medical school. And again, the, the high schools that I was in and the grade schools—there was a mix. Again, school districts were based on neighborhoods and the education wasn’t—it was less of an afterthought. I mean, as long as the neighborhoods maintained their “neighborhood purity” then everything else was secondary. And the better schools were in the white schools, the white neighborhoods. No if, ands, or buts about that in terms of the academic accomplishment. What the Page appointment offered was the opportunity to go to the Capitol Page School. That was part of the deal. And the Capitol Page School was like going to a prep school. All the teachers were extremely capable—the college professor types. The, the only graduates of the Page School who didn’t go to college would be someone who didn’t want to go to college. But if you wanted to go to college the graduates all got into good schools with good educations. So, that became the big draw as we learned more about it. It wasn’t just becoming a Page. It was becoming a Page in order to be able to go to the Capitol Page School. And again, my family—education is at the top of the list of values.