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

### **“Within a Few Microns of Skin”**

James Johnson details finding common ground with his fellow students.  
*Interview recorded October 24, 2019*

Once all the hoopla went down, and I got to the school of course, you know, people read the papers. You know, *The Today Show* is *The Today Show*. I think when I got there it was a kind of, you know, “Who is this guy?” And, you know, I conducted myself the way any student would and rather quickly I was accepted. There were some students who were less accepting than others. Remember, this, this is a bunch of teenagers from all over the country. And you know, you’ve got teenagers from the South whose exposure to someone like me is very different and who’ve been taught that someone like me isn’t somebody that you interact with other than as, other than that person being subservient to you. You don’t ever interact with someone like that on an equal basis. So, there was a lot of adjustments that people had to make, but they made adjustments. And I’ve always been taught—I mean, everyone’s different. But I, from an early age, I always looked at what was the same about somebody. And as I went into medicine, you know, everybody I ever operated on—no matter what their skin color, gender, education, where they came from—once I put the scalpel on them, they all looked the same within a few microns of skin. Blood was always red and if it wasn’t they were in trouble. If they didn’t get oxygen within a couple of minutes bad things happen. So I, I’ve always looked—it was my starting point is what do we have in common rather than what, what’s different about us. Sports like basketball—yeah, I like basketball, you know. So it didn’t matter if you were from Mississippi. You were from where you were from and you would look for some common ground. And I was able to find that common ground with just about everybody. My yearbook pictures have people signing things from all over.