

James Johnson
Page, U.S. House of Representatives

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

Office Page

James Johnson explains the arrangement created by a group of Members that allowed him to attend the Capitol Page School.

Interview recorded October 24, 2019

In order to go to the school, you had to be a full-time employee of the House, the Senate, or the Supreme Court, and be of high-school age. Well, it turns out that the only full-time employees of the House, the Senate, or the Supreme Court who are of high-school age are Pages. So that was the hook. So eventually what happened was bipartisan effort—strange word in these times. But James Roosevelt, the eldest son of President Franklin Roosevelt, a Democrat from California—Los Angeles, and William H. Ayres, a Republican from Akron, Ohio, got together and came up with this scheme in which I would work one day a week in their office along with three other Members of Congress: Martha Griffiths of Michigan, who eventually became Lieutenant Governor of Michigan, Byron Johnson of Colorado, and Quentin Burdick from North Dakota, who eventually became Senator Burdick. But the five of them each employed me in their office one day a week, which was not a big burden in terms of their individual office budget. But the five days added up to a full FTE in the aggregate. And so, working for five members of Congress as, quote, “an office Page” one day a week was a full-time equivalent, that, that made me eligible to go to the Page School. I never received an appointment as a Floor Page, but I stayed there the rest of my high school days working for various Members.