

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

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

### **Family Rules**

James Johnson shares the lessons he learned from his parents at an early age.  
*Interview recorded October 24, 2019*

There were three major rules. One, you had to get a college education. Going to college was not optional. Two, you could be whatever you wanted to be in life, but whatever you chose to be you had to strive to be the best at it. You had to work hard. Mediocrity and being lazy is not on your list of things to do. And number three, whatever you chose to do, you had to be honest and have integrity. Being a criminal was not on your list of things to do. So, those were the three rules I remember even before kindergarten. And also, that you were born a negro, not fair, not—but that's just the way it is. I was taught from the earliest age that I was, I would always have to work harder and longer than my white colleagues, that I would have less opportunities, and I had to make the most of whatever opportunity I was given because I wasn't going to be given as many as other people. And that's unfair, unjust, but that's life. As my dad or someone used to say, "If you don't like it, you should have picked better parents, but you didn't. So, that's, you know, that's that."