

Civil Rights

Selecting an African-American Page from the Land of Lincoln The Honorable Paul Findley U.S. Representative of Illinois

Representative Paul Findley of Illinois describes how Frank Mitchell became a House Page.
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Gerald Ford, as Republican Leader, had control of the appointment of several Pages; I think probably seven or eight all together. That's for the entire, entirety of the—the Republican Membership in the House at that time was a very distinct minority, and the, the, the majority had dozens of such positions to fill.

So, I, I came to, to Jerry Ford and told him that to my knowledge, no African American had ever served as a Page in the history of the House and I said, "This would be a, a good time to break that tradition and name one, and if you agree, I'll be, certainly be happy to find someone in Abraham Lincoln's old hometown to fill that job. And he readily agreed. This was shortly after my, my showdown over the, the initial civil rights bill. But he agreed to it and he said, "You pick out somebody in Springfield that you think will fit the bill and bring me the information," which I did.

Frank Mitchell was not a civil rights campaigner, and I, I, on reflection, I'm very glad that the black community in Springfield did not seek out one of the campaigners for civil rights, because he was breaking ground. He was an historic figure really, and his behavior would set the tone for the following years, when other blacks would be similarly honored.