Frank Mitchell

Page, U.S. House of Representatives (1965–1966)

Oral History Interview
Final Edited Transcript

August 6, 2008

Office of the Historian
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Abstract

Amid much fanfare, including a formal introduction by then-House Minority Leader and future President Gerald Ford, Frank Mitchell became the first African-American Page to serve in the U.S. House of Representatives in the 20th century. At the time of the interview, Mitchell was widely considered the first African-American Page in the House of Representatives. However, recent scholarship has shown that Alfred Q. Powell of Virginia, appointed as a House Page on April 1, 1871, holds that distinction. Mitchell recalled the warm welcome from House Leaders, Members, and Pages in an era rife with discrimination, and experienced no racial prejudice during his tenure in the House. Mitchell's recollections—many of which focus on his service as a phone Page in the Republican Cloakroom—range from learning relaxation techniques from Congresswoman Frances Bolton of Ohio to attending heated floor debates before the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Like many former Pages, Mitchell believed the opportunity to serve as a Page was a powerful determinant of his success in adulthood.

Biography

Frank Mitchell was born on July 18, 1949, in Detroit, Michigan, to Frank Weldon, a Detroit water department employee, and Norma Bush Mitchell, a hospital aide. He was raised by his aunt and uncle, Doris and Henry Van Buren, in Springfield, Illinois, where he attended Iles Elementary School and George Washington Junior High School before enrolling in Feithans High School. While a sophomore, Mitchell, along with four other students from his high school, was selected as a candidate to become the first African-American Page to serve in the U.S. House of Representatives in the 20th century. With the consent of then-Minority Leader Gerald Ford of Michigan, Congressman Paul Findley of Illinois ultimately chose Mitchell for the historic assignment.

Occurring just weeks after state troopers savagely beat peaceful protestors marching for voting rights, in Selma, Alabama, Mitchell's appointment received national attention and press coverage. Fifteen-year-old Mitchell began his term on April 14, 1965—the centennial of the assassination of President Abraham Lincoln. As a phone Page, Mitchell answered calls in the Republican Cloakroom and took messages for Members, while witnessing many historic moments in the civil rights movement, including the floor debates for the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

After serving as a Page, Mitchell returned to high school in Springfield, Illinois, where he was student council president his senior year. Upon graduation he attended several postsecondary schools, including Western Illinois University, Springfield College (Illinois), and Lincoln Land Community College. From 1970 to 1972, Mitchell worked at the Illinois State Register (Springfield), starting in the newsroom and eventually becoming a reporter. He then took a job at WCCO-TV (Minneapolis, Minnesota), where he worked as a broadcaster and weekend anchor until 1977. Mitchell also worked for BET, INN cable news, and the Omaha Star.

Later employed as a writer and an editor for Northwestern Bell/US West, as deputy director of

communication for the Illinois attorney general's office, and as a media relations manager for Ameritech, Mitchell also started his own public relations firm and served as the executive director for Illinois Fatherhood Initiative, a nonprofit organization.

Editing Practices

In preparing interview transcripts for publication, the editors sought to balance several priorities:

- As a primary rule, the editors aimed for fidelity to the spoken word and the conversational style in accord with generally accepted oral history practices.
- The editors made minor editorial changes to the transcripts in instances where they believed such changes would make interviews more accessible to readers. For instance, excessive false starts and filler words were removed when they did not materially affect the meaning of the ideas expressed by the interviewee.
- In accord with standard oral history practices, interviewees were allowed to review their transcripts, although they were encouraged to avoid making substantial editorial revisions and deletions that would change the conversational style of the transcripts or the ideas expressed therein.
- The editors welcomed additional notes, comments, or written observations that the interviewees wished to insert into the record and noted any substantial changes to the transcript.
- Copy-editing of the transcripts was based on the standards set forth in *The Chicago Manual of Style*.

The first reference to a Member of Congress (House or Senate) is underlined in the oral history transcript. For more information about individuals who served in the House or Senate, please refer to the online *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress* at http://bioguide.conress.gov and the "People Search" section of the History, Art & Archives website, http://history.house.gov.
For more information about the U.S. House of Representatives oral history program contact the Office of House Historian at (202) 226-1300, or via email at history@mail.house.gov.

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Interviewer Biography

Kathleen Johnson is a senior historical editor for the Office of the Historian, U.S. House of Representatives. She earned a B.A. in history from Columbia University and holds two master's degrees from North Carolina State University in education and public history. In 2004, she helped to create House's first oral history program, focusing on collecting the institutional memory of Members and staff. She co-authored two books: *Women in Congress: 1917–2006* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2006) and *Black Americans in Congress: 1870–2007* (GPO, 2008).

— FRANK MITCHELL —

INTERVIEW

JOHNSON: This is Kathleen Johnson from the Office of History and Preservation, interviewing Frank Mitchell, the first African-American Page for the U.S. House of Representatives.[1] The date is August 6, 2008, and the interview is taking place in the Madison Building of the Library of Congress. Today, I was hoping that we could start with some biographical information.

MITCHELL: Okay.

JOHNSON: When and where were you born?

MITCHELL: I was born in Detroit, Michigan; July 18, 1949.

JOHNSON: And what were the names and occupations of your parents?

MITCHELL: My mother's name was Norma Bush Mitchell, and my father's name was Frank Weldon. And Frank worked at the water department in the city of Detroit, and Norma worked as kind of a—I think an aide at nursing homes and hospitals and things like that. I should say, though, they didn't raise me. I was raised by an aunt and uncle—Norma's aunt and uncle—in Springfield, Illinois. So I was shipped off there at an early age—like, before I walked—to Springfield. And along with my sister, who was a year older than me. And we stayed there for a couple of years, I think, and Norma came and got us. And my aunt said, "Wait a minute, I've been raising these kids as if they're my own; I'm going to keep one of them." And she went to Detroit and wouldn't leave until she brought one of us back. And it was me. {laughter}

JOHNSON: What schools did you attend before coming to Washington, D.C.?

MITCHELL: Iles Elementary in Springfield and George Washington Junior High, and I was at Feitshans High School in Springfield when I got the call.

JOHNSON: Did you always have an interest in politics?

MITCHELL: I did. I always had an interest in . . . we called it civics, I think, in the class. That's what the class was called back then. But there was always an interest in historical information. I always knew and learned and was interested in the process of how laws and things were made. And when I became a Page, actually, the people that I worked with and for, were very—at least, they told me they were—very impressed, as to how I knew as much as I did. Like the hopper, and how appropriation bills start in the House, and, you know, different things like that, that they said a lot of Pages weren't aware of. So I guess I can attribute that to the Springfield, Illinois, public school system.

JOHNSON: How did you first learn about the Page program?

MITCHELL: Well, I didn't know it until I got there. I heard about Pages in, like, I can't remember if it was a *Weekly Reader* or a *Junior Scholastic* magazine. And I saw a story about some Pages and what they do and that kind of thing. And I always thought at that point that it would be real nice, real interesting to be a Page. But that was the extent of my effort of trying to make anything happen. It just kind of came my way.

JOHNSON: So, can you describe how that happened? How did you become a Page?

MITCHELL: Well, there are conflicting stories, as with a lot of historical events. One version that I'm aware of, that I took part in, was there were five of us from our high school that were invited, along with our parents, to the local Congressman, Paul Findley's, office. It was on a Sunday afternoon. There was the local Republican chairman, [who] kind of headed the committee, and there were—I don't remember who else was on the committee. But he interviewed us and our parents. And then, later that evening—I mean, these were five guys, myself included, that had good grades and decent attitudes and, you know, had indicated they wanted to do something, I guess, with their lives. And for our sakes, it was Tom Carswell, Robert Hearn, Jesse Howard, and Rufus Adams, besides myself.

JOHNSON: Good memory.

MITCHELL: All people that I—except for Tom—all people I've talked to recently. But they called me about, I don't know, seven that evening—it was a Sunday night—and said I need to be leaving for Washington Wednesday morning. And that meant saying goodbyes; that meant getting prepared in terms of dress. You know, I had a suit, I'm sure, but I don't remember it, and I'm sure it wouldn't have withstood wearing it on a daily basis.

So my uncle—not the uncle that raised me, but another uncle—took me to a local clothing store and bought me a couple of suits, and outfitted me, and, you know, got me ready for that. And I went around and said my goodbyes to my buddies and goodbye to my girlfriend Rita. And that Tuesday morning, Jay David Jones, the state representative from Springfield, escorted me to Washington. And we went to meet Mr. Findley, and then we were taken into

Gerald [Rudolph] Ford [Jr.]'s office, who was the House Minority Leader at the time. And so that version tells me that I competed with those other four guys and was selected to be the first black Page in the House of Representatives.

The other version is that a woman from Springfield that worked for Congressman Bob [Robert] McClory, from northern Illinois, had been asked from the Congressman—who obviously knew Mr. Findley—whether she knew anyone in Springfield who could fit the bill for what they were looking for, and she told him about me. She knew my family and everything like that. So another version says that, kind of, she selected me, and they came and got me, found me, and went through a process to make it look good, I guess. Or look competitive. But that the decision may have been made before I even heard about it.

JOHNSON: As far as you know, was this a concerted effort to hire an African-American Page?

MITCHELL: Absolutely.

JOHNSON: So the other four boys that you mentioned were also black?

MITCHELL: Yes. And as I understand it, it was a favor that Mr. Findley—and he and I still communicate—that he asked Mr. Ford whether he would be allowed to do that, and they came to Springfield because it was Lincoln's birthplace—not birthplace, but hometown. And I was appointed on the eve of the 100th anniversary of the assassination of Abraham Lincoln. So, yes.

JOHNSON: So this would have been in 1965.

MITCHELL: Right.

JOHNSON: You were aware that you would be the first African-American Page [for the House].

MITCHELL: Right.

JOHNSON: Were you interested, at that point, in making history, or did you just want to become a Page and serve for the House?

MITCHELL: I guess I wanted to become a Page. The fact that it was history-making didn't really affect me. Because you don't feel or sense history while it's being made. You're just going through the motions of living your life. I mean, and the perspective of what I did and when I did it really is only something I've thought about from a deep historical context in the last few years. I mean, it was five weeks after the Edmund Pettus Bridge incident in Selma, Alabama.[2] That's—I mean, again, why my mother let me go or how my mother let me go is incredible to me. I mean, I had difficulty riding my bike across the busy street without her permission. So it was amazing. I mean, this was—you know, it was just a tremendously historically significant time for civil rights. Vietnam really wasn't in play yet, the women's movement really wasn't in play, but civil rights was going gung-ho. Watts happened while I was there—while I was here in Washington in the House.[3] It was an amazing time, but you don't see it; you know, it's kind of like a headline today. You know, 20 years from now, you'll talk to your children or grandchildren about it, and then you can put it in some context as to what it meant to everything else in the world and what's happened since. But right then, you can't—I don't think you really have the perspective.

JOHNSON: What was the reaction of your family and also your hometown of Springfield?

MITCHELL: Well, it was very positive. All my family, I mean, they get—unlike me, many people don't understand the difference between the House and the Senate and Congress and even the White House. So for many of my family, I was a Page in the White House. They promoted me. {laughter} And a lot of people in Springfield, too. But they had . . . when I came back, like for a break or something like that, they had receptions and things for me. Still today. And it's been a lot of years, and I was gone a lot of the years since I was a Page; I was gone like 35 years from Springfield, crafting my career, I guess. But even now I feel some celebrity. You know, people introduce me that way. You know, "This is Frank Mitchell. He was the first black Page in the . . ." Sometimes they get it right, sometimes they don't. "The House of Representatives." "The Senate." "The Congress." "The White House." "In Washington." {laughter}

JOHNSON: {laughter} Something important.

MITCHELL: Something important, yeah.

JOHNSON: You mentioned a few minutes ago that you met Minority Leader Ford. And I read about the press conference that was held upon your arrival. What are your recollections of that day—your first day and the press conference?[4]

MITCHELL: Well, yeah. I hadn't started working yet when they had the press conference. I just remember that there were more cameras, TV, and still cameras than I'd ever seen before. The lights were flashing. I was kind of—I mean, I guess I was—totally in awe, at 15, just trying to keep up with it all and be ready to sound intelligent when they asked me a question. But, you know, obviously Mr. Ford took the lead, and Mr. Findley had a role. And they asked me—I'm sure, as I

recall, reading some things, too—how I felt, and, you know, what it meant to me. And it was very important. I mean, I was raised in a house, again, with my aunt and uncle and my great-aunt and then her mother—so my great-grandmother. And there were always stories about family members doing things, you know. And it's up to the listener to determine how significant those things are. But they always meant something to the storyteller—to my grandmother or my aunt. So I was raised to think big, to think that I could do whatever I decided to do. And so I guess I wanted to live up to the expectations. I didn't want to stumble.

JOHNSON: Were there any ceremonies or events held in your honor?

MITCHELL: Here?

JOHNSON: Yes.

MITCHELL: I don't know. I think it was in my honor, because I kind of seemed like the celebrity. I don't know for sure, but there was something at Johnson Publishing—*Ebony* and *Jet*. And for me and Lawrence Bradford—the guy who was appointed in the Senate the day before I was.[5] And it was at their offices, wherever those are. And I remember there were some girls there around my age, giggling and asking me for my autograph. Bobby Mitchell was there. No relation. But Bobby Mitchell was a great Washington Redskins tailback and one of my heroes. He should have been the center of attention, but he wasn't. {laughter} I was, so—or me and Lawrence. So that was kind of interesting. Out of that, I remember meeting—from that, I remember meeting some people that kind of kept in contact while I was here in Washington—I've lost contact since—but that had invited me to various functions and things. I remember going to the old

Glen Echo Park—if you remember—one of those amusement parks over in Maryland. And I remember going out to somebody's relative's farm on a weekend and just playing volleyball and tossing people up on a blanket and trying to milk cows and stuff. Just, you know, just stuff. {laughter} So it was—there were ceremonies, and then there were just connections that were made.

JOHNSON: So would you describe the response as positive with the other Pages to begin with? What was their reaction?

MITCHELL: It was very positive. I only remember one guy that was kind of . . . that there was any kind of friction with. And I just think he and I had different personalities. Pages, I guess, by the qualifications you have to have to be there, are leaders of some sort. And I just don't think he liked sharing anything in a leadership capacity with anyone else. And so he and I kind of had some words a couple of times. He was also the son of a Congressman, so I kind of brushed that off. But we were fine. I mean . . . and all the other—many of the Pages—we got together, many of the Pages would play basketball. I mean, the Capitol Page School doesn't have any facilities. So I don't remember what the circumstances were, but we went to a school—I don't know if somebody rented it or had a relative or what. But we'd go there and play basketball sometimes on Friday nights, stuff like that.

JOHNSON: Did you have the opportunity to get to know Minority Leader and future President Gerry Ford?

MITCHELL: Well, I knew him, but not—I mean, we never had more of a conversation than him coming into the cloakroom and making small talk. But at the same time, I always thought because I received a warm reception, because there was never any

hint of racism, or I was never made to feel that I'm the only one—I attribute that to Ford. I think he set the ground rules before I ever showed up, before I was ever selected. He said, "If we're going to do this, we're going to do this right," is my guess. And that's the way I always felt, is that he made it comfortable. Because it could have been real uncomfortable.

JOHNSON: Right. What were your impressions of Congressman Findley, who was your sponsor?

MITCHELL: Right. Nice guy. He may have been one of the influences for me to go into journalism, because that's something he did early in his career. He's just—he and his wife are just nice people. I still communicate with them. I visited with them a couple of months ago. He was giving a speech a couple of months ago at Illinois College and invited me to come, and I went, and I went to his house afterwards and spent some time with his wife and his grandson. He's just a nice guy.

JOHNSON: Can you describe, from what you remember, your first day—and if you don't have clear memories of that—your first week as a Page?

MITCHELL: I just remember that it was a lot of information you had to learn. A lot of people. I mean, there were, I don't know, 175 Members that I might have to go and tell them [about a] telephone [call] or take them a message or something like that, so I didn't want to walk up to Al [Albert Harold] Quie when it was Bob [Robert Joseph] Dole, you know, or H. R. [Harold Royce] Gross, or somebody like that. You wanted to know who was who. So you had your little booklet, and you had to kind of memorize what they looked like and stuff, although the pictures were probably outdated to begin with.[6] And then, you know, just knowing your way around, you know. While I was a phone Page, there still were sometimes chores

they had me run, you know, to say "I need something from my office," or something like that. And so you had to go navigate the bowels of the Capitol complex, which I could never do right now. {laughter} So that was a learning experience. And just getting a sense of all the protocol. Because Washington is a town of protocol, you know. You do things the right way. There's a process for everything. And not that I was going to go overboard on something, but just knowing what the proper way to do things is becomes a learning process.

JOHNSON: Did you and the other Pages have any kind of training or orientation as far as what was expected of you and learning about the House procedures?

MITCHELL: Not really. It was all kind of as-you-go. I remember—this might be something from the first day—where my . . . I don't remember his name, but the head phone Page, his name was Bob [Robert Edmund] Bauman. He later became a Congressman. And then later there was a guy named Ron.

JOHNSON: Was that Ron Lasch?[7]

MITCHELL: Yes. Is he still around?

JOHNSON: He retired.

MITCHELL: And they kind of talked you through things until you got comfortable. You know. If somebody says, "Take this to Congressman Clausen"—well, which one? Well, first of all, you had to know there were more than one.

JOHNSON: Right.

MITCHELL: But then they'd say, "The one in the second row, third seat in" or something.

You need to do things this way. So the question might be, if I've got a message or if I need to call somebody on the phone and they're speaking, what do I do? Do I wait? Do I go back and tell them the person who called—they're [the Member is] engaged in a debate now. Little things like that. That a kid, regardless of whether they're 15 or 18, wouldn't know. {laughter}What the proper thing to do is. So there was kind of that on-the-job training as you went along that you would learn about. But no . . . some kind of orientation would probably be a good idea. I don't know if they do it now. Do they?

JOHNSON: They do.

MITCHELL: Yeah. That's probably good. {laughter}

JOHNSON: You mentioned in the beginning of the interview—you didn't mention her by name—but I think that was Mrs. Corbin? Was that her name?

MITCHELL: Yes.

JOHNSON: The executive secretary for Congressman McClory.

MITCHELL: Yes.

JOHNSON: She was mentioned in a newspaper article saying that she served as a mentor to you.

MITCHELL: Yes.

JOHNSON: Was that the case while you were on the job as well?

MITCHELL: Yeah, although we didn't have a chance to talk about the job. I mean, she had her duties in the Congressman's office, and I was on the floor. But she was very helpful in a number of things. I remember there was a letter I wrote to my local newspaper, a letter to the editor. I can't remember the subject; I had it for years. I don't even know where it's at now, or even if I still have it. But she encouraged me to write it. And she encouraged me, I remember, to pursue—she said, "If you like to write, you need to do it." You know, rather than talk about it, "you need to do it." So—I mean, I lived with her for awhile, too. When I came to Washington, first she found kind of a distant cousin—his name was Don Jackson. He and his wife, Maggie, let me stay with them. Don was probably—he was 26. And they had a newborn—he was just walking. Barry. And Don tells me now, he says, "All I needed to do was get a record player and some records, and you and Barry were satisfied." {laughter} And I'd stay in the room playing records and stuff. And I remember one time Barry got it—I liked model cars and model airplanes. And he got into some model car paint, and it was all over. And it just doesn't wipe off—it just doesn't come off with soap and water. And Maggie had been scrubbing and scrubbing until he was about raw. And for some reason—I mean, I wasn't a chemistry guy or anything—but for some reason I took some Listerine and a cotton ball, and it came right off.

But I stayed with Don and Maggie, and then Maggie was pregnant. And so when I came back for the next session, where I was going to stay was a question. And Mrs. Corbin said, "Well, you'll stay with me, then." And so I stayed with her the last couple months I was a Page.

But I remember when I first came—I mean, it was well into the evening. It was after the news conference, and we had kind of moved to Congressman McClory's

office. And I still didn't know where I was staying. And Mrs. Corbin finally said, "Well, you've got somebody coming to pick you up." So they didn't have a plan. {laughter} Back that Sunday when they called, they didn't have a plan on where I was going to stay on Wednesday when I got there. So that adds to my amazement of my mother allowing me to go, not knowing where I was going to stay, so.

JOHNSON: Was this the case for most of the Pages, though? Maybe not that much of a short notice, but there wasn't anyone who helped them find housing—that was their own responsibility?

MITCHELL: Right. Right. As far as I knew. However, most of the Pages then were from Virginia or Maryland. There were very few that I knew of . . . The one guy that I mentioned that—he and I—I say that, but there were four phone Pages. I was one of four. And the four of us were scattered all over—from Wisconsin . . . I think two from California. But the others, the Pages that did errands, for the most part, most of them were from Virginia or Maryland. And most of them had, like, apartments that they stayed in Monday through Friday, and then they'd go home for the weekend. At 16 years old, that's pretty tough. {laughter}

JOHNSON: You talked about, a little bit, some of the assignments that you had. But if you had to describe a typical day as a Page for you in 1965 and 1966, how would you do that?

MITCHELL: Well, on the job, it was—the phone rings, and, I mean, we sit—you come in the cloakroom; there were five or six seats to the right, and there's a row of phone booths that wrapped around to the left and then all along the facing wall. And if one rang down here, the guy on that end kind of got it; if one rang down there,

that end guy got it. When it was in the middle, one of the middle guys kind of got it. And you—there would be one of two requests. They would say, "I'd like to speak to Congressman Ford." And so you'd say, "Hold on, please, I'll have to get him from the floor." And so you'd go to the floor, and you'd find out who they were and everything. And I remember taking calls from Ronald Reagan, Nelson [Aldrich] Rockefeller . . . I want to say Jerry Brown, even. {laughter} But I'm not sure why he'd have been calling, anyway. But you'd go out and you'd tell them, and they'd say "I'll take it" or "I'll call them back; have them hold on for a few minutes" or "I'll call them back" or whatever. And then you'd go back in and wait for it to happen again. There weren't a whole lot of—there wasn't a whole lot of other work that was done, that I did, that I remember. It was mostly just phone stuff.

JOHNSON: That was your primary responsibility.

MITCHELL: Yes.

JOHNSON: So you didn't run errands like the majority of the Pages.

MITCHELL: Right. Right. Now, do they do it differently now? Are there—because most of them, like I said, there were four of us that were phones, and then there were maybe 40 or more that were runners, if you will. And they might, for something as simple as, you know, "Get me a pack of cigarettes" back then, or "some potato chips" or "a candy bar," or "Go to my office and tell my secretary to give you this file." That kind of thing. But for the phone guys, it was just—and sometimes the phones were ringing off the hook. Because if there was some legislation that was hot or some issue that was going on, it was ringing off the hook. I mean, the four of us had maybe, you know, all 10 of them or all 13 of them, however many

phones there were ringing. And Ron [Lasch] and Bob [Bauman] had to get involved, too.

JOHNSON: Okay. As a phone Page, you must have spent an extensive period of time in the cloakroom—the Republican Cloakroom.

MITCHELL: Right.

JOHNSON: What do you remember about Helen Sewell, the manager of the snack bar? Do you remember her?

MITCHELL: I had been trying to remember her name. Thank you. {laughter} I remember she kind of took a motherly approach to me. And I remember she fattened me up, too. I used to eat her roast beef sandwiches like they were going out of style. And a couple of glazed doughnuts. Because, you know, you get up at 5:00 in the morning to go to Page school. You know, you might get a bowl of cereal—not much, not every day. And so you're going to school, so by the time you get out of school at whatever it is, 9:00 or 9:30, you're starving. So you'd walk in the cloakroom and [say], "Helen, I need two roast beef"—that was breakfast—"Two roast beef sandwiches." {laughter} But she was just a nice lady. Yeah. She was very protective, you know. And I remember her pulling me to the side and saying, you know, "This Congressman is, you know, this way, or this Congressman is that way." You know, nothing derogatory, but things she felt would serve me in going forward, you know, and in dealing with those Congressmen.

JOHNSON: Was that something she specifically advised you on, or did she do that with the other Pages as well?

MITCHELL: I don't know. I don't know. I felt it was something she went—I actually felt it was something she went out of her way to do for me, since I was the first black.

JOHNSON: What else do you recall about the cloakroom? The physical structure and then also the atmosphere of the cloakroom?

MITCHELL: Well, I remember it was L-shaped, and in the back half of the 'L' it was a lot of big, comfortable chairs and couches. And the Congressmen would come back and take advantage of that, particularly on a long day, a long session. And we would have something . . . we had some overnighters during some of the—I was there during the civil rights—Voting Rights Act debate. There were some housing debates, I remember. And you could always tell when you got the calendar of the agenda for the coming week and what was coming up, and you'd see the number of hours set for debate. And you'd say, "Oh, this is going to be a long one." {laughter} And so by midnight, two or three in the morning, and they're still going, and we're like this, you know, just hanging our heads. And that's when Ms. [Frances Payne] Bolton would come in. "Hello boys! How you guys doing? Oh, you're looking so—like you're pooped out. You need to get some energy." And she'd tell us to breathe deeply and close our eyes, think about relaxing from head to toe, just a little bit at a time, and then reverse the process, and then you'll feel better. And she was right. But it would only last a half an hour, and then you'd feel tired again. {laughter}

JOHNSON: Do you remember any other Members of Congress in particular that spent a lot of time in the cloakroom or that you had a chance to see a different side of?

MITCHELL: Well, I remember Al Quie, probably just because he was so tall. But [also] because I later lived in Minnesota and got a chance to meet him then, you know,

as an adult. His demeanor and disposition never changed. Unlike Don [Donald Henry] Rumsfeld, who was a Congressman then. And he was a lot different later as Secretary of Defense, to me. But he had to be, obviously. Again, everybody I met and everybody I saw, and the way I saw them, was pretty positive. I didn't see, you know, any ranklings between Members. And certainly not anything aimed at me. Just people had their idiosyncrasies, things they were known for, like H. R. Gross was kind of the guy that made sure the Members had their I's dotted and their T's crossed. And he would challenge them, you know, kind of from a grammatical standpoint. You know, in their bills, in the structure of how they were written and stuff like that.

I remember Bob [Robert Henry] Michel, who was from Peoria [Illinois]. Later I played basketball against his son, Scott. I remember a lot of them, but I didn't—in terms of having a relationship with them or anything like that, I really didn't, besides Mr. Findley.

JOHNSON: What about Les [Leslie Cornelius] Arends? Did you have an impression of him? Did you get to see him interact in the cloakroom?

MITCHELL: Oh, yeah. He would whip them up—to use the terminology of what he did. He might come in and have a list of people he needed to contact, and he would hand somebody, you know. "I need to talk to these people. After you get one, get the other. Got them all on the phone? Call this one." You know. So he was—we know what he's doing, but you know, in terms of what he's trying to do and make the process work, and to really make the job of Republican Whip, in that case, come to life. Again, I'm not sure we understood it. We knew what our role was: We needed to make these phone calls. You know, now, looking back, he was really making things happen for his side of the aisle. You know, get the people in

there. I would guess that some of what was going on, some of what we were calling for him, were probably lobbyists that needed to maybe do some more arm-twisting. Things like that. But again, we weren't taking time to think about it.

JOHNSON: You were a Republican Page. Did you have the chance to interact with the Democratic Pages?

MITCHELL: Not really. Not really. It just didn't happen. I'm not sure why. I mean, other than in school, and you really didn't get to know people at school that well. Again, because classes were short, school was fairly compacted. So you just interacted—you got to know the guys in the cloakroom very well. You got to know some of the other Pages on that side of the aisle because when things were slow, you know, you'd sit in the cloakroom for awhile, and then you'd go outside, you know, just step out, and the others would be standing around. A couple of the guys—I remember Carey Flynn was one guy and Barry Mersky, I think his last name is. Barry's up in New York, and Carey's somewhere around the Virginia/Maryland areas in dentistry. Those are the only two guys I really remember.

But, you know, it's the same with Congressmen. Didn't really meet any of the—the only one [Speaker of the House] I met was John [William] McCormack, really. He called me up to the Speaker's podium one day. Scared the bejeepers out of me. {laughter} I mean, "Who, me? He wants me where?" {laughter} And he just shook my hand and asked me how I was enjoying it. Welcomed me to Washington. And it was great. That was an honor. That was an extreme honor.

JOHNSON: I can see where it would make you nervous when the Speaker of the House is

calling upon you personally. {laughter}

MITCHELL: Yeah—"What'd I do? What'd I do?" {laughter}

JOHNSON: You've alluded to the school—the Capitol Page School a few times. Can you describe it in a little more detail? Where the classes were held and what the curriculum was like?

MITCHELL: Well, I remember it was on the top floor, and it was kind of a rectangle shape. You'd just walk around the top floor and keep taking lefts. I remember there wasn't any chemistry. The sciences were not represented well. The teachers were different than the teachers I had been used to in Springfield, in that they were more engaging with the students. Obviously, the classrooms were small, but I remember there just would be—it wouldn't just be book learning, if you will. It would be kind of your perspective on what's in the book. Trying to make it come to life, make it personal for the student. Which I thought was a good way, but again, I was disappointed because I hadn't taken chemistry as a sophomore in Springfield, and then since I was here at the start of my junior year and they didn't have it, that meant I was going to have to take it my senior year, and I didn't want to do that. Because I had enough credits, you know, to graduate, except for the requirements of having four years of English or something like that. So I wanted to take the senior year—take it easy. So I didn't want no chemistry in my senior year, so I didn't take chemistry. {laughter}

JOHNSON: What classes did you take, then? If you didn't have chemistry? You had English, math—

MITCHELL: English, some history, math—algebra, probably, back then . . .

JOHNSON: Did you have any kind of civics that would connect with what you were doing as a Page?

MITCHELL: No, not that I remember. I think it was just good old American history.

JOHNSON: You said you were 15 when you were a Page. What were the typical ages of the other Pages at the time?

MITCHELL: Most of them that I remember were 16 or 17. And going back to the Page school, I came in April, and so there was only like a month and a half left of school. So I attended classes, but they didn't feel it would be fair to me to make me make up the whole semester worth of work. They didn't know what to apply from my old school and stuff like that. So somebody worked it out where I went back to Springfield at the end of the sophomore year—at the end of May, I think, or first week in June, or something—and took some exams—based on what I'd learned in Springfield, even though I was a month and a half short. And that's how I became a junior.

JOHNSON: Did you go back home that summer, or did you stay in Washington, D.C.?

MITCHELL: No, I just went back for that few days, and then I went back [to Washington], and I was there until November, I guess. Until the session ended. And then I came back in January.

JOHNSON: Did you have access to all areas of the Capitol as a Page? Were you able to roam free, basically?

MITCHELL: As far as I knew. I mean, I wasn't that much of an explorer. I didn't want to get in trouble for being somewhere I wasn't supposed to be. {laughter} But yeah. I could go, you know, into any office I wanted to, if I wanted to. But usually I'd have to have a reason. You know, if somebody asked me to do something.

JOHNSON: Did you have a favorite area of the Capitol?

MITCHELL: Well, actually, although I never did feel comfortable learning the nooks and crannies of the tunnel, the tunnel was cool. You know, just walking from the Capitol to one of the office buildings. That was cool. And it was cool walking through the Rotunda to the Senate side. But there were . . . I'm trying to remember if there was anywhere I went and hid. {laughter} There was probably somewhere that everybody has, you know, to go in when they need that 10-minute nap. I'm sure I had one, but I can't remember where it was. {laughter}

JOHNSON: Or if you just want to be by yourself.

MITCHELL: Just want to be by yourself, right. Right.

JOHNSON: Just for a few minutes.

MITCHELL: Yeah.

JOHNSON: Well, before I get to that point, I wanted to ask you: Did you get to know any of the neighborhood children? Some of our previous interviewees that lived in the city—that eventually worked at the Capitol—said that the Capitol was almost a playground for them. That they would come into the Capitol and that they were able to access rooms and get to know some of the Pages. Did you have an

opportunity to meet anyone from D.C.?

MITCHELL: I did, but not necessarily in the neighborhood. Don, the guy I stayed with, he knew some people that had—actually, I think they were girls my age that I met. I think they were trying to hook us up. {laughter} But I never met—I mean, I remember going—I lived on Minnesota Avenue, Southeast. I remember that. 3510. Why I remember that, I have no idea. And I remember going to some school in the neighborhood and playing basketball. But I never really connected with any of the guys playing basketball.

[A 1-minute, 39-second segment of this interview has been redacted.]

BRIEF INTERRUPTION

JOHNSON: Okay, we had a minor interruption, but we're back on tape again.

MITCHELL: Okay.

JOHNSON: As far as you know, was there any area in the Capitol, during this period when you were Page, that was still segregated?

MITCHELL: Not that I know of. No one ever told me I couldn't go anywhere. And in fact, I guess, to tell you the truth, I never thought about it. It never came up. [Bob] Bauman, Ron [Lasch], [Gerry] Ford, [Paul] Findley—nobody ever said, "You can't go here or there." Nobody ever said that. And I went pretty much everywhere. I mean, I would get—like, I got a letter—thank-you letters from Everett [McKinely] Dirksen, the Illinois Senator. And I got a thank-you letter from Hubert [Horatio] Humphrey [Jr.]. So somebody said, "Well, you should

call their office and ask to meet them." So I did. And I went over and got pictures with Senator Dirksen. You know, "Hello, Mr. Mitchell." {laughter} And Hubert Humphrey. You know, I still have those pictures today. You know, and that was a big deal for me. In terms of segregation, the only thing that ever happened—that ever, ever, ever happened racially was . . . what's the name of it? The American Nazi Party. Some guy handcuffed himself to the gallery railing, and threw out this racist literature on the House Floor. And during that time, you know, it was pretty bad stuff. It was, like, tickets back to Africa for black people. And caricatures and stuff. And folks were looking at me to see how I was going to react, you know. But that was the only time where I remember anything like that. And it really didn't affect me. You know, the guy was handcuffed, and they had to come and wire-cut him off and take him to jail. That gave me an idea of how much people hate people for no good reason. But [I was] never told not to go anywhere.

JOHNSON: Did you ever feel that you were treated differently because of your race by Pages or Members, staff, anyone at all while you were at the Capitol?

MITCHELL: Well, yes, but in a good way. I think some people went out of their way to be nice to me. But never in a bad way. No one ever treated me poorly because I was black. Not that I ever sensed. They may have said things behind my back, but that didn't hurt me. So they didn't make—that wouldn't have made any difference, so. I received great treatment from everybody I came in contact with, from staff to Members of Congress. Just all across the board. It was great. Which is particularly surprising, to be in 1965, when there were still so many areas of the culture that were segregated, that were hateful. It really is amazing.

JOHNSON: Washington, D.C., was desegregated during this period. But did you ever have a

time when, outside of the Capitol, in the city, that you were excluded from any sort of area, public or private?

MITCHELL: I remember—I think when I went back to Springfield to take my final exams for my sophomore year—I think I took the bus. I know I took the bus one time; I think it was for that particular occasion. And we stopped somewhere in West Virginia. And we were told the Negroes were to go around back to get—to use facilities, to get something to eat, whatever. And when I heard that, I just got back on the bus and didn't deal with it. I didn't want to—didn't want to deal with it. So, that was the only thing, and that wasn't, obviously, in Washington, but it was as a result of being in Washington.

JOHNSON: What are your memories of Washington, D.C., in 1965 and in 1966?

MITCHELL: I learned how to drive in D.C. So I guess my memories are fond. {laughter} I liked it. I liked D.C. It seemed to me to be a nice place to live. There were some cultural things; the history is just amazing here, and again, I was kind of into that. So I enjoyed being here, and I really thought one day I'd come back and live here. I haven't made it yet. {laughter}

JOHNSON: Were you active in the civil rights movement as a teenager?

MITCHELL: Later I was. I was the head of the—president of the youth—NAACP Youth Council in Springfield. I remember when Reverend [Jesse] Jackson was bringing busloads of people down to Springfield to march on the capitol about various entitlements issues. I remember picking people up that were staying in different people's houses, to give them a ride to the meeting place before the march. So I guess I would say I was supporting.

When I became a reporter, in newspaper first, I guess I felt some obligation to make sure news about black people was covered that hadn't previously been covered and wouldn't be covered if I didn't cover it. For instance, I did a piece on—a series—on Black History Week in 1972. It was only a week then. And I can say that they're still using some of the pieces for historical purposes in Springfield. When I left the newspaper, I urged them to replace me with a black person. I don't know if they did or not, but over the years there have been others.

When I went into television, I kind of tweaked my position, because one of the things it seemed to me was that they wanted me to be the black reporter to cover black news. And I didn't think that was the same. I thought, if there's news that won't get covered unless I cover it, I'll cover it. But because something happens with or about black people doesn't make me the reporter that needs to cover it. Everyone should be able to cover it. Any reporter should be able to cover it. So consequently, one—I think it was a Sunday—I got a call from a guy wanting me to come in to work that day, on my day off, but he wanted me to come because there had been a double murder in the black community, and they thought I could maybe open some doors to get some interviews that other reporters couldn't. I wasn't sure I was going to buy that argument, but I went along with it. Well, I didn't get too much further than anybody else would have, but I did the story, anyway.

And again, when I left, ironically, I left that station and left television news because of a disagreement over a Washington story. It was when Hubert Humphrey had been diagnosed with inoperable cancer. I broke that story in Minneapolis at the TV station. I was the first reporter to cover it. And when he got well enough to come back to Washington, my news director assigned me to

come back and cover his first few days back in the Senate. So I started calling some people out here and saying, "I'm going to be in town, I'm going to be in town." And then the next day, the general manager decided he wanted this other guy to go. And I'm like, "Wait a minute, this is my story. What do you mean, you want Al to go?" And he said, "Well, he's got more seniority than you do." So I said, "But wait a minute, this is my story." And he wouldn't back off, and the news director was out of town that day, so, to make a long story short, I quit. Not on the spot, but I quit after I found another job. And basically, I haven't looked back to TV since.

So that's kind of my . . . But over the years I've been active in a number of . . . they wouldn't be called civil rights efforts anymore, but things that are positive for the black community. I was president of the Nebraska Black Managers' Association, which gave out scholarships to kids going to college. I've been on sickle-cell boards to raise money for sickle-cell anemia. What being a Page did, one of the things it did for me was make me want to contribute in the community. That's just automatic. That's one thing it did for me. The other thing it did for me was to believe that anything I wanted to do, I could do.

JOHNSON: Did you ever have any aspirations, based on your time as a Page, to follow a political career for yourself?

MITCHELL: I did, but I didn't. {laughter} I wanted to a couple of times. I mean, growing up, I don't know, it was probably even before I became a Page, but certainly afterwards I wanted to be the mayor of Springfield. But then after you get into it, after—especially from a reporter's perspective, when you cover it, and you see the poor treatment that politicians receive—some maybe deserve it, but just everything is public. And I guess I was a little too private for that. So probably

the closest thing I came to running for office was city council in Minneapolis. And I didn't do that, probably because I couldn't afford to quit my political job, or my reporting job, to run for office that I may not get, and then I'd be out of a job and broke, too. {laughter} So I didn't do that.

JOHNSON: Going back to the civil rights questions that we started—were you ever recruited by any civil rights leaders while you were in D.C. because of your stature as the first black Page for the House?

MITCHELL: No. I think I was kind of . . . just a little pebble in the scheme of things. I mean, it happened—yeah, maybe it's significant. I mean, it still bewilders me why it took 150 years. You know, or whatever it was, to make it happen. And then even longer for girl Pages—for female Pages.[8] That baffles me, too. But no one ever really recruited me. I mean, I didn't meet anybody because of it. You know, Dr. King, or Reverend Abernathy, or Jackson or anybody like that. Nope.

JOHNSON: Earlier you mentioned Lawrence Bradford, who one day before you became the first black Page for Congress. Did you get to know him well?

MITCHELL: Pretty good, yeah. We hung out. I mean, we were kind of linked. We played basketball together, we went out sometimes together and went to parties—threw parties together. But we never kept in contact. There was another guy, Ernie Wilson, that was a Page for the Supreme Court. Now, Ernie—excuse me—Ernest Wilson III is now chancellor or the dean of the School of Communications at USC, I believe. And a curriculum vitae this long [spread arms wide]. {laughter} But, yeah. Ernie and Lawrence and I would kind of, you know, co-mingle.

JOHNSON: I was going through the Page yearbooks for the period, and I also came across Fraser Walton, a Supreme Court Page. Did you get to know him?

MITCHELL: Didn't know him.

JOHNSON: Okay. What about the African-American Members at the time? There were only six; they were all Democrats, and you were a Republican Page. But did you get to know any of them? Did any of them seek you out and offer any advice?

MITCHELL: Not at all. Not at all. And the only one really I remember anything about is Adam Clayton Powell [Jr.]. I don't know if it's protocol or what. It would seem to me that that would have been something—the right thing to do. To, you know, let a young kid know that he's welcome and if he needs somebody here, here I am. But no one ever did. Nope.

JOHNSON: Did you get to witness—you mentioned Adam Clayton Powell—any speeches that he might have made on the floor, or any of the other black Members of the time?

MITCHELL: Oh, yeah. Definitely I remember him. He was quite eloquent, quite gregarious. And really, when he got up to speak, you know, you kind of expected—everybody kind of stopped and said, "Okay, what's he going to do now?" And he was just an interesting character. But I don't know whether there would have been anything I could have done to have gotten to know him that would have been appropriate, given the different parties and different ages and things like that. But it was interesting being here while he was a Member and to see him in action.

JOHNSON: And Congressman [William Levi] Dawson, from Illinois—you didn't get to know him at all either?

MITCHELL: No. No.

JOHNSON: You did mention that it was a long night when the Voting Rights Act was passed. What do you remember about that day and that night? Or were you too busy working to really have an idea of what was going on on the floor?

MITCHELL: Yeah. You really . . . Again, being a part of history, you don't really know what it means. And you have to put that kind of in the chain of events of what needs to happen. You know, with the troops going to enforce letting people register to vote, or letting people vote. Things like that. And that this piece of legislation is going to help ease some of the confusion over that and help make it happen so that people can exercise their right. You don't think of that as a Page, necessarily. Maybe as a legislative assistant or aide or something like that, but not as a Page, I don't think. Not as a 15- or 16-year-old Page. It's some years later that you see where it fits into the scheme of things.

JOHNSON: You mentioned that there were some leisure activities that you took part in—basketball, for instance. Were these organized activities for Pages, or was this something that you did on your own time?

MITCHELL: Yeah, it was kind of something that you did on your own time. It was kind of by invite. No one who was going to organize it, who was going to put it together—again, I think someone had some connection at these schools that we would go to, so that we could get in and play some ball. So it wasn't like all, you know, 100 Pages on both sides of the aisle. It was like, maybe 15, 20 guys. If even that.

It might have been 12 or 14.

JOHNSON: Were there any organized activities that were held for the Pages?

MITCHELL: Not that I remember. I remember participating in, I think, two softball games. You know, where the Republicans play the Democrats.

JOHNSON: Right.

MITCHELL: Yeah. I remember being involved in a couple of those, like as a bat boy or something like that.

JOHNSON: And that's an annual event that they still have.

MITCHELL: I read that, yeah.

JOHNSON: Well, that must have been fun.

MITCHELL: That was. That was. And don't they do it at . . .

JOHNSON: This year it was at the [Washington] Nationals Stadium.

MITCHELL: Yeah. I was going to say, what's the name of the team? Senators—it was the Senators, wasn't it?

JOHNSON: Right. The Rayburn House Office Building opened shortly before you became a Page, and you weren't a runner or a messenger, so I don't know if you had much of a chance to go to that new building, or if you heard anyone talking about what

they thought of it at the time.

MITCHELL: I remember the Cannon and Longworth. Rayburn was a little bit different. I don't ever remember specifically going there. And usually when I would go, I'm thinking it would be to, like, meet with Mr. Findley, wherever his office was—I have no idea. Or I think I'd met Mrs. Corbin. And Mrs. Corbin and Congressman McClory had an assistant named Juanita Young. And Juanita was about 19 and pretty. {laughter} And Juanita kind of took me under her wing, too. Ironically, Juanita's daughter and my oldest son went to Hampton together. And I told my son to try to contact Kenyetta—I think her name is—so I could get a hold of Juanita and let her know I was coming out here and see if she remembered anything about my appointment, about the whole Mrs. Corbin thing. Because I figured out just recently—there was a family reunion 4th of July weekend, that Don Jackson and his wife came to—and I had this picture. It was taken about a block away from where I grew up at. It would have been my great-great-grandmother's house. And Mrs. Corbin was in the picture. So I took it, and we tried to identify everybody, and then I tried to figure out, "Okay, how are they related to me?" Well, Mrs. Corbin's maiden name was Oldsby. And her sister and her brother married two Smiths, sister and brother. The Smiths were my great-grand—they were brother and sister to my great-grandmother. So Ms. Oldsby and I—Eulalia—Mrs. Corbin and I are not related per se, but we're kind of in the same family. There was no blood.

JOHNSON: But there was a connection.

MITCHELL: But there was a connection there. So.

JOHNSON: Did you view yourself at the time as a pioneer or a pathbreaker, or was it as you

said a little bit earlier—that you were caught up in the moment, so you didn't really have time to think about yourself as making history?

MITCHELL: Yeah, I definitely didn't think of myself as a pioneer. Maybe I realized I was making history. But looking back at it, it was such an aligning of the planets to make this happen. Again, I was born in Detroit, got to Springfield because my aunt insisted that she'd bring me back. For them to come to Springfield and to decide when they decided, after all these years of not having, you know, any black person as a Page, then to come to my high school, and to find me? I think that was just an incredible . . . It was more than a stroke of luck; it was some kind of destiny, that I was supposed to—that it was written before I even came about. You know, as weird as that may sound. But too many things had to fall into place for me to get here.

But I didn't break—I don't think I broke any barriers for anybody. You know, I wasn't like one of the Little Rock six or nine or however many there were. You know, Medgar Evers at the University of Mississippi or anything like that. I didn't do anything like that.

But what I did do was carry myself with dignity and respect, and I hope I made it easier for the next guy or woman coming along, so that there wouldn't be any hesitation. Because I have to think that, with the way folks thought back then, was that the reason no one had been appointed was because with whatever stereotypes they had of black people, they said, "Well, maybe a black person can't handle it, or whatever." Well, I hope I helped knock down some of those myths. So in that way, you know, I did my part.

JOHNSON: Did you have any role models while you were a Page here in 1965 or 1966?

Either on the Hill, or somewhere else?

MITCHELL: Well, on the Hill, not really. The biggest role model in my life probably was my Uncle Perry. The one who took me to get the clothes when I found out I was going to be leaving . . . He just died last year. I came back to Springfield because he was sick and I knew my cousin needed some help, and so I came back, because he took care of my folks when they were sick, and it was just my turn. He just carried himself in a way that, you know, you wanted to emulate. It was more than being a "yes, sir," and a "no, ma'am," and opening doors and stuff like that. He just had a demeanor about him that commanded respect but gave respect. Him, and then Mr. Carey. Mr. Carey was the guy who taught me to jump on a trampoline, and play ping-pong and pool. We grew up, like, three doors from him. And he was just always somebody who did the right thing. Bottom line.

JOHNSON: Do you consider yourself a role model, based on . . .

MITCHELL: Well, more than Charles Barkley. {laughter}

JOHNSON: But based on your time as a Page, and then with what you've done in your life since that period?

MITCHELL: Well, yeah. And I think I've tried to suggest to some folks in Springfield that there are kids of any race that probably could benefit from hearing my story, and what happened, and how I got there, and what I did or didn't do with it, depending on who wants to interpret it. So, yeah, I guess I do feel that way—that I have a story to tell. And that story could benefit other people. Hopefully the people it benefits most are my three sons and my six grandchildren. There are

others, though.

JOHNSON: How do you think your time as a Page influenced your life?

MITCHELL: Again, it allowed me to think big, think globally—think beyond Springfield. Like I said, I'd been gone: I left Springfield in 1972. Now, on the one hand I look at people who've been there all that time, and I came back last year, in '07. I've been gone all this time, but those people who stayed, are they better off by staying? Well, you know, they worked the same job for 30-some years, and they've got a pension now. Mine might not be as solid as theirs, but they haven't been through a Minnesota blizzard. Or they haven't, you know, been to a [Chicago Cubs] baseball game at Wrigley Field. Or whatever. I've just been exposed to more. And I think that exposure is a lot more important. And I don't think I would have gotten it had I not ever come to Washington. That let me just expand my horizons and seek to expand my horizons, just to believe that I could. I mean, I've had my own business, I've been a television reporter on Walter Cronkite, I've met a guy who became President, met people who were Vice President. It's just been an amazing life for me.

And I don't know that I got any job beyond the first journalism job—at the *Illinois State Journal-Register*—it was important to them, I think, because of my affiliation with Mr. Findley and with David Jones, to engage me in working for them. When I first got back, they offered me a job to cover my high school sports. That was when, I would say, I was at the end of my junior year. I wanted to play, so I told them, "Thanks, but no thanks." But then later I came back to them, took a job as a stock clerk, and told the guy who hired me—I said, "I can write. I'd like to maybe do some writing for you." So they started letting me write headlines and wire copy. That was only because the editor had offered me

the job a few years before, and so they knew that I had some interest in that, and maybe some talent, and they taught me everything I needed to know. That was the connection between being a Page and getting a job. After that, I don't think any other job I've had was a result of my being a Page. But my believing I could do any other job I had was because I had been a Page and had been so successful. There's some interconnection there.

JOHNSON: If you were asked to give advice at this point to someone who wanted to be a Page—a young man or a young woman—what would it be?

MITCHELL: Well, if they wanted to be, I'd just say, you know, keep writing letters to your Congressman to try to get their attention. Keep doing the right thing and being positive in what you do, and you'll get the attention of who you need to get the attention of. But if you've gotten the appointment, take advantage of the moment. Keep a log. Keep information straight, because you can't keep it in your head. {laughter} So that later on . . . you don't know the connections you make. You don't know how they could benefit you in the future. So the people you meet along the way, make sure you really meet them. Make sure you stay connected with them. Don't just look at them as somebody for the moment and keep on going. Keep those connections, and those can build huge bridges later on. So that would be the most advice I think I could give.

JOHNSON: Would your advice differ for a white Page versus a black Page?

MITCHELL: I don't think so. No. Because in both cases, you need other people. No one gets here by themselves. Wherever you're at, you got here with the help of somebody else. Color doesn't enter into it.

JOHNSON: Is there anything else you wanted to add today—a topic we didn't cover, or something that you think it would be important to talk about?

MITCHELL: No. Nothing that I can think of.

JOHNSON: Alright. Thank you. Thank you very much.

NOTES

[1] At the time of the interview, Frank Mitchell was widely considered the first African-American Page in the U.S. House of Representatives. However, recent scholarship has shown that Alfred Q. Powell of Virginia, appointed as a House Page on April 1, 1871, holds that distinction.
[2] Reference to the March 7, 1965, voting rights march in which state troopers brutally beat peaceful civil rights protestors, led by future Congressman John R. Lewis of Georgia, at the foot of the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama.
[3] Reference to the 1965 race riots which took place in the Watts neighborhood of Los Angeles, California.
[4] Frank Mitchell's arrival at the Capitol as the first African-American House Page was widely covered by the press.
[5] Lawrence Bradford earned the distinction of becoming first African-American congressional Page.
[6] Reference to the *Congressional Pictorial Directory*, which includes photographs of sitting Members for each Congress.
[7] Ron Lasch was a House employee for more than 40 years.
[8] On May 21, 1973, Felda Looper became the first female to serve as a Page in the House of Representatives. The Office of the House Historian conducted an oral history interview with Felda Looper on May 21, 2007.

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