Black Americans in Congress
1870–2022

Prepared under the Direction of the

Committee on House Administration of the
United States House of Representatives

Zoe Lofgren, Chairperson

Rodney Davis, Ranking Member

By the

Office of the Historian and Office of the Clerk
United States House of Representatives

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On the cover:

Clockwise from upper left: In 1870, Joseph H. Rainey of South Carolina became the first African American elected to the U.S. House of Representatives; John Lewis of Georgia was a civil rights leader and lawmaker known as the "conscience of Congress"; Barbara Jordan of Texas rose to national prominence as part of the House Judiciary Committee's impeachment investigation of President Richard M. Nixon; Ronald V. Dellums of California was a Marine veteran turned community advocate who later served as chair of the House Armed Services Committee.

Joseph Hayne Rainey, Simmie Knox, 2004, Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives
Congressman John Lewis, Michael Shane Neal, 2020, courtesy of the National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution; gift of Jeffery and Cindy Loring in memory of Congressman John Lewis © Michael Shane Neal
Barbara Jordan, Edsel M. Cramer, 1973, courtesy of the Texas State Preservation Board, Capitol Historical Artifact Collection, Austin
Ronald V. Dellums, Andre White, 1997, Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

House Concurrent Resolution No. 82

ONE HUNDRED SEVENTEENTH CONGRESS, SECOND SESSION

SUBMITTED BY THE HONORABLE ZOE LOFGREN

Resolved by the House of Representatives (the Senate concurring),

SECTION 1. PRINTING OF REVISED VERSION OF "BLACK AMERICANS IN CONGRESS, 1870–1989". (a) IN GENERAL.—An updated version of House Document 101–117, entitled "Black Americans in Congress, 1870–1989" (as revised by the Library of Congress), shall be printed as a House document by the Director of the Government Publishing Office, with illustrations and suitable binding, under the direction of the Committee on House Administration of the House of Representatives. (b) NUMBER OF COPIES.—In addition to the usual number, there shall be printed such number of copies of the document referred to in subsection (a) as does not exceed a total production and printing cost of $500,000, of which—(1) 80 percent shall be for the use of the Committee on House Administration of the House of Representatives; and (2) 20 percent shall be for the use of the Committee on Rules and Administration of the Senate.

Agreed to December 21, 2022

Prepared under the Direction of the

Committee on House Administration of the United States House of Representatives

Zoe Lofgren, Chairperson

Rodney Davis, Ranking Member

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Cheryl L. Johnson, Clerk of the United States House of Representatives

Matthew A. Wasniewski, Historian of the United States House of Representatives

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Foreword

I am proud to commemorate this publication of the fourth edition of *Black Americans in Congress*, which revises and expands upon previous editions and covers the years 1870 to 2022. This update provides a comprehensive history of the contributions of the Black Americans who have served in the United States Congress and includes essays that situate these trailblazing Americans within both congressional and American history.

The makeup of the U.S. Congress has, quite sadly, never reflected the full breadth of our nation's diversity. The history of Black Americans in Congress unfortunately bears the marks of this failing. Despite this, the Black Americans that have walked the halls of Congress have left an indelible mark on the institution and the nation as a whole. Take, for instance, California Representative Augustus F. "Gus" Hawkins, the first Black American from west of the Mississippi River elected to the House. He authored provisions of landmark civil rights legislation, including Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and chaired the Education and Labor Committee from 1984 until his retirement in 1991. Or Shirley Chisholm of New York, who was not only the first Black American woman to serve in Congress, but the cofounder of the National Women's Political Caucus and the first Black woman and second woman ever to serve on the House Rules Committee. Or my colleague and friend G.K. Butterfield of North Carolina, who serves with me on the Committee on House Administration and as chairman of the Subcommittee on Elections. He brings a wealth of personal experience and leadership in the field of voting rights to his important work in Congress and is a prominent member of the Congressional Black Caucus, having served as its chair from 2015 to 2017.

The story of Black Americans in Congress is also one of tenacity and fortitude in the face of formidable challenges. A prime example is Hiram R. Revels of Mississippi, who in 1870 became the first Black American to serve in either chamber of Congress. His arrival in Washington, DC, was met with intense opposition and two days of debate over whether a Black American man could satisfy the citizenship prerequisite required to serve in the Senate. Despite Revels eventually being seated as Senator and Blanche K. Bruce of Mississippi being seated five years later, these triumphs were followed by a period of disenfranchisement. During this period, Black Americans, who had been guaranteed the right to vote by the Fifteenth Amendment, were denied this right in practice via deliberate barriers to voting. As a result, no Black American served in Congress from 1901 to 1929. Undeterred by the obstacles placed before them, however, Black American voters and public servants persevered. Congress and our country are better for it, and we all continue to benefit from the courage and resolve of these history makers.

Zoe Lofgren, Chairperson
Committee on House Administration
U.S. House of Representatives
October 18, 2022

Alphabetical List of Black Members of Congress, 1870–2022

Alma S. Adams (2014–Present)
Colin Allred (2019–Present)
Frank W. Ballance Jr. (2003–2004)
Karen Bass (2011–Present)
Joyce Beatty (2013–Present)
Sanford D. Bishop Jr. (1993–Present)
Lucien E. Blackwell (1991–1995)
Lisa Blunt Rochester (2017–Present)
Cory A. Booker (2013–Present)
Jamaal Bowman (2021–Present)
Edward W. Brooke (1967–1979)
Anthony G. Brown (2017–Present)
Corrine Brown (1993–2017)
Shontel M. Brown (2021–Present)
Blanche K. Bruce (1875–1881)
Yvonne Brathwaite Burke (1973–1979)
Roland Burris (2009–2010)
Cori Bush (2021–Present)
G.K. Butterfield (2004–Present)
Richard H. Cain (1873–1875; 1877–1879)
André Carson (2008–Present)
Julia May Carson (1997–2007)
Troy A. Carter (2021–Present)
Henry Plummer Cheatham (1889–1893)
Sheila Cherfilus-McCormick (2022–Present)
Shirley Chisholm (1969–1983)
Donna M. Christensen (1997–2015)
Hansen Clarke (2011–2013)
Yvette D. Clarke (2007–Present)
William Lacy Clay Jr. (2001–2021)
William Lacy "Bill" Clay Sr. (1969–2001)
Eva M. Clayton (1992–2003)
Emanuel Cleaver II (2005–Present)
James E. Clyburn (1993–Present)
Barbara-Rose Collins (1991–1997)
Cardiss Collins (1973–1997)
George W. Collins (1970–1972)
John Conyers Jr. (1965–2017)
William "Mo" Cowan (2013)
George W. Crockett Jr. (1980–1991)
Elijah E. Cummings (1996–2019)
Artur Davis (2003–2011)
Danny K. Davis (1997–Present)
William L. Dawson (1943–1970)
Robert C. De Large (1871–1873)
Oscar De Priest (1929–1935)
Antonio Delgado (2019–2022)
Ronald V. Dellums (1971–1998)
Val Butler Demings (2017–Present)
Charles C. Diggs Jr. (1955–1980)
Julian C. Dixon (1979–2000)
Byron Donalds (2021–Present)
Mervyn M. Dymally (1981–1993)
Donna F. Edwards (2008–2017)
Robert Brown Elliott (1871–1874)
Keith Ellison (2007–2019)
Mike Espy (1987–1993)
Dwight Evans (2016–Present)
Melvin H. Evans (1979–1981)
Chaka Fattah (1995–2016)
Walter E. Fauntroy (1971–1991)
Cleo Fields (1993–1997)

Floyd H. Flake (1987–1997)
Harold E. Ford (1975–1997)
Harold E. Ford Jr. (1997–2007)
Gary A. Franks (1991–1997)
Victor O. Frazer (1995–1997)
Marcia L. Fudge (2008–2021)
William H. Gray III (1979–1991)
Al Green (2005–Present)
Katie Hall (1982–1985)
Kwanza Hall (2020–2021)
Jeremiah Haralson (1875–1877)
Kamala D. Harris (2017–2021)
Alcee L. Hastings (1993–2021)
Augustus F. "Gus" Hawkins (1963–1991)
Charles A. Hayes (1983–1993)
Jahana Hayes (2019–Present)
Earl F. Hilliard (1993–2003)
Steven A. Horsford (2013–2015; 2019–Present)
Will Hurd (2015–2021)
John Adams Hyman (1875–1877)
Jesse L. Jackson Jr. (1995–2012)
Sheila Jackson Lee (1995–Present)
William J. Jefferson (1991–2009)
Hakeem S. Jeffries (2013–Present)
Eddie Bernice Johnson (1993–Present)
Henry C. "Hank" Johnson Jr. (2007–Present)
Brenda Jones (2018–2019)
Mondaire Jones (2021–Present)
Stephanie Tubbs Jones (1999–2008)
Barbara Jordan (1973–1979)
Robin L. Kelly (2013–Present)
Carolyn C. Kilpatrick (1997–2011)
John M. Langston (1890–1891)
Brenda L. Lawrence (2015–Present)
Al Lawson Jr. (2017–Present)
Barbara Lee (1998–Present)
Mickey Leland (1979–1989)
John Lewis (1987–2020)
Jefferson F. Long (1870–1871)
Mia B. Love (2015–2019)
John R. Lynch (1873–1877; 1882–1883)
Denise L. Majette (2003–2005)
Lucy McBath (2019–Present)
A. Donald McEachin (2017–Present)
Cynthia A. McKinney (1993–2003; 2005–2007)
Carrie P. Meek (1993–2003)
Kendrick B. Meek (2003–2011)
Gregory W. Meeks (1998–Present)
Ralph H. Metcalfe (1971–1978)
Kweisi Mfume (1987–1996; 2020–Present)
Juanita Millender-McDonald (1996–2007)
Thomas E. Miller (1890–1891)
Arthur W. Mitchell (1935–1943)
Parren J. Mitchell (1971–1987)
Gwen Moore (2005–Present)
Carol Moseley Braun (1993–1999)
George Washington Murray (1893–1895; 1896–1897)
Charles E. Nash (1875–1877)
Joe Neguse (2019–Present)
Robert N.C. Nix Sr. (1958–1979)
Eleanor Holmes Norton (1991–Present)
Barack Obama (2005–2008)

James E. O'Hara (1883–1887)
Ilhan Omar (2019–Present)
Burgess Owens (2021–Present)
Major R. Owens (1983–2007)
Donald M. Payne (1989–2012)
Donald M. Payne Jr. (2012–Present)
Stacey E. Plaskett (2015–Present)
Adam Clayton Powell Jr. (1945–1967; 1969–1971)
Ayanna Pressley (2019–Present)
Joseph H. Rainey (1870–1879)
Charles B. Rangel (1971–2017)
Alonzo J. Ransier (1873–1875)
James T. Rapier (1873–1875)
Hiram R. Revels (1870–1871)
Mel Reynolds (1993–1995)
Laura Richardson (2007–2013)
Cedric L. Richmond (2011–2021)
Bobby L. Rush (1993–Present)
Gus Savage (1981–1993)
David Scott (2003–Present)
Robert C. "Bobby" Scott (1993–Present)
Tim Scott (2011–Present)
Terri A. Sewell (2011–Present)
Robert Smalls (1875–1879; 1882–1883; 1884–1887)
Bennett M. Stewart (1979–1981)
Louis Stokes (1969–1999)
Marilyn Strickland (2021–Present)
Bennie G. Thompson (1993–Present)
Ritchie Torres (2021–Present)
Edolphus Towns (1983–2013)
Walter R. Tucker III (1993–1995)
Benjamin Sterling Turner (1871–1873)
Lauren Underwood (2019–Present)
Marc A. Veasey (2013–Present)
Alton R. Waldon Jr. (1986–1987)
Josiah T. Walls (1871–1873; 1873–1876)
Raphael Warnock (2021–Present)
Craig A. Washington (1989–1995)
Harold Washington (1981–1983)
Maxine Waters (1991–Present)
Diane E. Watson (2001–2011)
Bonnie Watson Coleman (2015–Present)
Melvin L. Watt (1993–2014)
J.C. Watts Jr. (1995–2003)
Allen West (2011–2013)
Alan Wheat (1983–1995)
George Henry White (1897–1901)
Nikema Williams (2021–Present)
Frederica S. Wilson (2011–Present)
Albert Russell Wynn (1993–2008)
Andrew Young (1973–1977)

The closing date for this volume was June 1, 2022.


Hon. Chas. E. Nash of La.
44th Congress
1875-1877
Hon. Jefferson F. Long of Ga.
41st Congress
1870-1871
Hon. John R. Lynch of Miss.
43rd. 44th. 47th Congress
1873 — 1883
Hon. Robert C. DeLarge of S.Car
42nd Congress
1873
Hon. John A. Hyman of N.Car.
44th Congress
1875-1877
Hon. Jere Haralson of
44th Congress
1875 1877
Senator Blanche K. Bruce of Miss
44th Congress 1875 1881
Senator Hiram R. Revels of Miss
41st Congress 1870-1871
Hon. Jas. T. Rapier of Ala
43rd Congress
1873-1875
Hon. Josiah T. Walls of Florida
42nd 43rd 44th Congress
1871-1876
Hon. Robt. Smalls of S.Car
44th 45th 48th 49th Congress
1875-1887
Hon. Robt. Brown Elliott of S.Car.
42nd 43rd Congress
1871-1874
Hon. John M. Langston of Vir.
51st Congress
1890-1891
Hon. Geo. W. Murray of S.
53rd 54th Congress
1893-1897
George H. White of N.Car.
55th 56th Congress
1897-1901

Black Americans in Congress

INTRODUCTION

On December 12, 1870, Joseph H. Rainey of South Carolina was sworn in as the first Black Member of the U.S. House of Representatives. Newspapers across the nation announced Rainey's historic accomplishment. Born enslaved, Rainey was an advocate for Black civil and political rights, a hard-working legislator, and the longest-serving Black Member of Congress in the nineteenth century. When he became the first African American to preside over the House in 1874, the *Springfield Republican* celebrated his achievement as a marker of national growth, noting that the nation was far removed from "the days when men of Mr. Rainey's race were sold under the hammer within bowshot of the capitol." Before the end of the decade, 14 Black Representatives and two Black Senators had served in Congress—all from southern states and all Republicans.[1]

White southerners responded to Black political progress in the 1870s with a brutal campaign of voter disenfranchisement and violent repression against African Americans. The number of Black Members of Congress declined in the two decades that followed Rainey's departure from the House in 1879. After George Henry White of North Carolina was re-elected to his second and final term in the House in 1898, it would be 30 years—until 1928—before another Black American won a seat in Congress.

The first Black lawmaker elected in the twentieth century was Oscar De Priest of Chicago, Illinois. De Priest's victory in 1928 also made him the first Black Member of Congress elected from a northern state, and his arrival on Capitol Hill was hailed as epoch-defining. The *Chicago Defender* declared that "Illinois and Oscar De Priest have opened up a new chapter in America's history."[2]

This 1938 print revised and reproduced a montage published in 1907 by African-American journalist Edward E. Cooper. It depicts the Black Members who had served in Congress up to that point.

Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

Thirty-eight years later, Edward W. Brooke of Massachusetts was elected to the Senate, becoming the first African American in that chamber since 1881. As with De Priest's election, the Black press described Brooke's win as "historic" and as "the most exciting step forward for the Negro in politics" since emancipation. While no Black Senator would follow Brooke until Carol Moseley Braun of Illinois in 1992, the number of Black Representatives rose exponentially in the ensuing decades. In fact, more than 80 percent of all the Black Members who have ever served in Congress—up to the June 1, 2022, closing date of this volume—were elected after 1966.[3]

In 1972, the election of Barbara Jordan of Texas and Andrew Young of Georgia marked the first time that voters in the South had sent Black Members to Congress since the nineteenth century. Legendary voting rights activist John Lewis noted the significance of this moment in 1973. "More than just a victory for their immediate constituency, their election as representatives in the United States Congress has great meaning for blacks throughout the South," said Lewis, who, in 1987, would begin three decades of service representing Georgia in the House. "These two black leaders are symbols who will challenge blacks in the other southern states."[4]

Time and again, for more than 150 years, Black men and women have won election to Congress despite having to overcome formidable, ever-changing barriers to Black political participation. In the century and a half since Rainey's election in 1870, Black lawmakers have experienced both disappointment and transcendent successes. Rainey's election exemplified what was possible during the brief period of Reconstruction, when the federal government acted to protect Black civil and political rights. De Priest's victory in Chicago illuminated the extent to which the Great Migration of Black Americans from the rural South to the urban North had altered the demographics of American cities and transformed the political geography of a vast nation. And the election of Brooke to the Senate and Jordan and Young to the House provided evidence of new electoral possibilities for Black Americans following the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965.



Senator Edward W. Brooke was the first popularly elected Black Senator and the first Black politician from Massachusetts to serve in Congress.

Image courtesy of the Library of Congress

The story of Black Americans in Congress is not confined to Capitol Hill. It is a national story of electoral triumphs and discouraging setbacks, hard-won victories and long periods of political exclusion in states and towns across the country. From South Carolina, to Illinois, to Massachusetts, to Texas, and Georgia, lawmakers brought these experiences to Washington, DC. *Black Americans in Congress, 1870–2022* weaves together the disparate stories of these Black men and women from across the country, illuminating commonalities and contrasts in this constant struggle for Black representation in Congress. Divided into four sections, this book explores the individuals, coalitions, events, and institutional changes that have shaped the experiences of Black Members. It also demonstrates the essential role African Americans have played in transforming Congress and changing the nature of representation on Capitol Hill. Whether in the 1870s, the 1930s, or the 1970s, Black Members were adamant that they were acting on behalf of millions of African Americans, and they pioneered new forms of political action on Capitol Hill, including the creation of the Congressional Black Caucus, to do so.

Although their stories do not often appear in the *Congressional Record*, African Americans profoundly influenced the history of Congress even before the election of the first Black Representatives and Senators. The enslaved laborers who built the U.S. Capitol in the early nineteenth century, for instance, created a physical record of their contributions. The pillars beneath the Capitol Rotunda were chiseled by workers whose names have been lost to history. Brick by brick, they constructed the permanent home of the legislative branch.[5]

For more than 225 years, African Americans have sought ways to rectify the contradictory origins of a representative government that countenanced centuries of slavery, followed by decades of entrenched discrimination and disenfranchisement.

They ran for office, advocated for Black civil and political rights, and appealed for legislative action. Since 1870, Black Americans have made Congress a key battleground in this quest to make real an American democracy.

"THE FIFTEENTH AMENDMENT IN FLESH AND BLOOD," 1870–1901

During the five years following the Civil War, the Republican Party spearheaded congressional efforts to rebuild the South and readmit the former Confederate states during a period known as Reconstruction. Congress passed a series of laws and constitutional amendments to protect individual civil and political rights, guarantee equal protection of the law, and prohibit discrimination in public accommodations.

This was a moment of vast possibility for Black Americans, and they seized the opportunity to serve in local, state, and federal offices. By February 1870, Hiram R. Revels of Mississippi joined the Senate, and Rainey was sworn in to the House that December. Including Revels and Rainey, southern states sent 20 Black Representatives to the House, and southern state legislatures elected two Black Senators over the next three decades. Many Black lawmakers had been enslaved before the Civil War. Yet, as Members of Congress, they were empowered to reshape the very laws that had been previously designed to restrict them.

This section traces the rise and fall of Black representation in Congress in the nineteenth century. Black Members of Congress arrived in Washington from states rife with discord and division. While the Republican Party had established a strong presence across the South, building a base of support from Black voters in the years following the war, the Democratic Party coalesced around White supremacists who were determined to regain control of state and local governments in the region. African Americans often faced violence and intimidation at the polls and appealed to the federal government to intervene and protect Black voting rights.

Against this backdrop, Black Members proposed legislation, engaged in debate, and tried to shape the Republican agenda on Capitol Hill. Black lawmakers in the early 1870s influenced debate on proposed civil rights legislation, called for a national education policy, and urged the federal government to act to protect the rights of individuals in the South. Several, including Rainey and Robert Brown Elliott of South Carolina, offered key arguments during debate in the House on congressional action to undermine the Ku Klux Klan and pass the Civil Rights Act of 1875.



A *Harper's Weekly* illustration from July 1868 depicts a political meeting of African Americans in the South. Black political activism in majority-Black districts throughout the South propelled 22 Black men into Congress between 1870 and 1901.

Image courtesy of the Library of Congress

But as lawmakers and the President increasingly turned away from the goals of Reconstruction, Black Members became more isolated. They continued to advocate for the interests of African Americans and remained committed to building a more egalitarian society. Southern Democrats orchestrated a reign of terror to disenfranchise Black voters, implement discriminatory laws, and roll back the gains of Reconstruction. During the final decade of the nineteenth century, only five Black Members of Congress served in the House. By 1901, the array of legal and extralegal means established across the former Confederacy to preserve Democratic control had thoroughly disenfranchised African Americans.

EXILE, MIGRATION, AND THE STRUGGLE FOR REPRESENTATION, 1901–1965

At the dawn of the twentieth century, Black Americans were cast into political exile. Discriminatory state and local laws in the Jim Crow South led to widespread disenfranchisement, while threats of violence and economic reprisals reinforced the system of segregation. Few pathways existed for Black political participation on Capitol Hill, though advocacy groups such as the NAACP tried to exert influence on legislation in the absence of Black Members of Congress.

This volume's second section follows the massive social, economic, and demographic changes that ultimately led Black lawmakers back to Congress. In 1928, after almost

three decades of no Black representation in Congress, Oscar De Priest won election to the House from a Chicago district. From 1928 to 1965, a total of eight Black Representatives were elected to the House, all from industrial cities in the North and West. Their congressional districts had been transformed by Black migrants, who had left the South in search of safer living conditions and new opportunities.

As more and more Black Americans found employment and new political freedoms outside the South, Republicans and Democrats sought ways to attract their support. De Priest was the lone Black Republican elected during this era. In 1934, Arthur W. Mitchell defeated De Priest's bid for a fourth term in the House, becoming the first Black Democrat elected to Congress. As the nation reeled from the Great Depression, Mitchell and many Black voters embraced the New Deal of President Franklin D. Roosevelt in the 1930s and 1940s, and with it the Democratic Party.

On Capitol Hill, however, southern Democrats actively worked to obstruct civil rights measures and other legislation that might undermine Jim Crow. Though small in number, the Black Representatives serving in the House influenced legislation and pursued institutional advancement in ways unavailable to their predecessors. Black Members chaired committees and subcommittees and regularly played a significant role in committee hearings. Throughout this period, Black Members also consistently demanded civil rights reform; political divisions within both parties and the determined resistance of southern Democrats, however, made passing legislation extremely difficult.

During World War II and the Cold War, global conflict put the spotlight on American society and created new opportunities for Black Americans to challenge discrimination and segregation. They pointed out that the United States waged war for democracy abroad but that the persistence of racism and Jim Crow at home cast doubt on the country's foreign policy rhetoric. At the same time, the grassroots organizing of the postwar civil rights movement created a groundswell of pressure on Congress to act. By the 1960s, Congress passed the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, two landmark pieces of twentieth-century legislation that laid the foundation for the election of more Black Members of Congress in the ensuing decades.



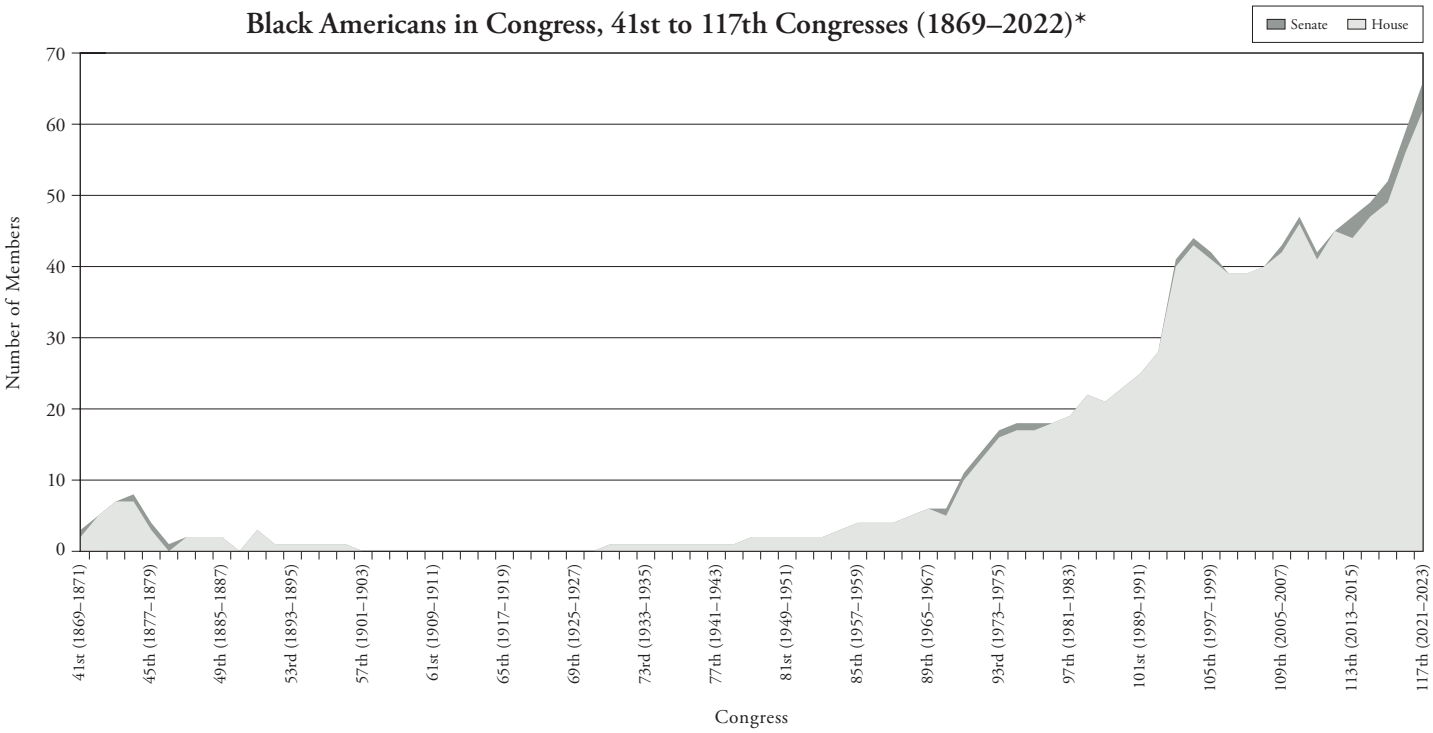
In 1928, Oscar De Priest's successful election campaign to represent a lakeshore district in Chicago, Illinois, demonstrated the electoral possibilities for Black representation in northern cities, particularly as the Great Migration led to growing African-American populations in urban areas.

Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

PERMANENT INTERESTS, 1966–1990

The generation of lawmakers who came to Capitol Hill after the civil rights revolution was at the forefront of a remarkable expansion of Black political representation across the country. The civil rights acts of the 1960s and court-ordered redistricting opened new avenues of political participation for millions of African Americans. Consequently, many more Black politicians were elected to office at the state and federal levels. In 1966, Edward Brooke became the first African American in 85 years to be elected to the U.S. Senate. Two years later, the number of African Americans in Congress increased to nine, at that point the most ever in one Congress. Among those elected in November 1968 was the first Black woman to serve in Congress, Representative Shirley Chisholm of New York. This era also saw the return of the first Black Members from southern states that had not been represented by Black Representatives or Senators in seven decades or more. Representative Andrew Young of Georgia, for example, was elected in 1972 as the first Black Member from Georgia since 1871. Barbara Jordan of Texas and Harold E. Ford Sr. of Tennessee represented southern states that had never sent a Black candidate to Congress. By the 100th Congress (1987–1989) there were 24 Black Members of Congress, elected from districts across the country.

As the number of African Americans serving on Capitol Hill continued to grow, Black lawmakers began to formally



Since 1870, 175 African-American lawmakers have served in Congress as of June 1, 2022. During the 117th Congress (2021–2023), a record 66 Black lawmakers served in Congress.

organize and coordinate their shared legislative efforts. In early 1971, 12 African-American Members of Congress formed the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) to promote what Representative William Lacy "Bill" Clay Sr. of Missouri called the "permanent interests" important to Black Americans, to advance Black Members within the institution, and to push legislation, sometimes with potent results. "Blacks never could rely on somebody in Congress to speak out on racial questions; they can with the caucus," declared CBC cofounder Representative Louis Stokes of Ohio.[6]

Black lawmakers in this era sought to expand and protect the civil rights gains of the mid-1960s, support the liberation of Black people around the globe, and memorialize the achievements and activists of the civil rights movement. The CBC won a number of notable legislative victories, including the passage of Voting Rights Act extensions in 1975 and 1982, the 1983 creation of a federal holiday commemorating the birthday of Martin Luther King Jr., and the 1986 law that imposed the first sanctions against South Africa's all-White government for its practice of apartheid.

The CBC also used its influence within the Democratic Caucus to win better committee assignments and leadership opportunities for Black Members. Typically representing safe electoral districts, many African-American Members enjoyed long careers that allowed them to accrue the seniority necessary to move into positions of power. From 1989 to 1991, for instance, William H. Gray III of Pennsylvania served as Democratic Majority Whip—the third-ranking party leader behind the Speaker and the Democratic Leader.

POWER AND DIVERSITY, 1990–2022

At the start of the 103rd Congress (1993–1995), the number of Black lawmakers in Congress increased from 27 to 40. Altogether, 17 Black lawmakers were elected to Congress in November 1992, including Carol Moseley Braun of Illinois, the first Black woman and the first Black Democrat to hold a seat in the U.S. Senate. The increase in Black representation in Congress in 1993 followed court-mandated redistricting in southern states, a process that drew congressional districts with majority-Black populations to facilitate the election of Black Representatives. Thirteen Black Members were elected from newly created majority-Black districts, eight of whom hailed from southern states that had not elected a Black Representative since the nineteenth century.



Members of the Congressional Black Caucus gather for a group portrait on the House steps of the U.S. Capitol during the 110th Congress (2007–2009).

Image courtesy of the U.S. House of Representatives Photography Office

The large increase in Black representation in Congress afforded Black Members and the Congressional Black Caucus new influence. In this era, 15 Black Members chaired 16 different standing and select committees. Black legislators also continued to rise through party ranks. J.C. Watts Jr. of Oklahoma became the first African-American lawmaker to hold a leadership position in the Republican Party when he was elected conference chair in 1999, and James E. Clyburn of South Carolina served as Democratic Majority Whip, becoming only the second Black Member to hold this position.

By the final decade of the twentieth century, more and more Black women had also begun winning prominent and powerful seats on Capitol Hill. Between 1990 and 2022, 47 Black women were elected to Congress, two in the Senate and 45 in the House, where they became national leaders as chairs of influential committees and subcommittees and the CBC.

This era also saw the growth in number of Black Republican lawmakers serving in Congress. Beginning with the election of Gary A. Franks of Connecticut in 1990, eight Black Republicans have served in the House and the Senate. The return of Black Republicans to Congress has proceeded with the return of their party to power after Republicans won control of the House for the first time in 40 years in 1994.

Moreover, the geographic diversity of their districts meant that Black Members from both parties sought seats on a larger range of committees. From their new positions, Black Members influenced some of the most significant legislation of the period, including criminal justice policy, health care reform, and voting rights.

Nevertheless, African-American Members continued to face new challenges. By the second session of the 117th Congress (2021–2023), the 58 Black Members in the House and three Black Senators represented constituencies whose unique geography and special interests diversified their legislative agendas, occasionally making unity within the CBC difficult. And although leadership positions afforded African Americans a more powerful institutional voice and greater legislative leverage, Black Members had to make difficult choices between party imperatives and the interests of their constituents.

Ultimately, this generation of Black Americans in Congress defined their legislative agenda based on a range of factors, from their congressional districts to broader goals of civil and political rights for African Americans. And they did so on their own terms.

THE ORIGINS OF *BLACK AMERICANS IN CONGRESS*

The present volume originated with the first edition of *Black Americans in Congress*, which was compiled and published shortly after the U.S. bicentennial in 1976. Authorized by the 95th Congress (1977–1979) via House Concurrent Resolution 182, it was printed as a House Document in 1977. Organized by Representative Corinne "Lindy" Boggs of Louisiana and Senator Edward Brooke, the booklet highlighted the careers of the 45 African Americans who had served in Congress up to that point. A résumé-style format included basic biographical information, congressional service dates, party affiliation, committee assignments, and information about Members' other political offices. Entries were arranged chronologically, with one section for Senators and another for Representatives. A thumbnail image accompanied each profile. In a brief introduction, the renowned African-American historian Benjamin Quarles of Morgan State University wrote that Black Members on Capitol Hill were "living proof that Blacks could produce an able leadership of their own. Moreover, their presence in the halls of Congress made their Black constituents feel that they were more than bystanders—they were participants, however vicariously, in the political process."[7]

A second edition, *Black Americans in Congress, 1870–1989,* was authorized by the House and the Senate in the fall of 1989 and was published in 1990. By that point, 66 African Americans had served in Congress. The volume was dedicated to the memory of Representative Mickey Leland of Texas who, as the book went to press, died in a plane crash while delivering food to famine-stricken Ethiopians. Representative Ronald V. Dellums of California, then the chair of the CBC, contributed a brief introduction for the volume: "For Black Americans the promise of republican government and democratic participation was delayed well beyond the founding of the federal government in 1789." Dellums also observed, "In this bicentennial year of Congress and the federal government, it is important to recognize that the Constitution we enjoy today evolved over a number of years and did not protect the civil rights of Black Americans until after a Civil War and passage of significant amendments." Authorized partly to commemorate the bicentennial of Congress in 1989, the volume contained 500- to 1,000-word profiles of Members, with basic biographical information. Suggestions for further reading were provided at the end of each profile. The profiles of former and current Members, arranged alphabetically, were merged into one section and accompanied by larger pictures.[8]

THE 2008 AND 2022 EDITIONS

In the spring of 2001, Congress passed House Concurrent Resolution 43, authorizing the Library of Congress to compile "an updated version" of *Black Americans in Congress, 1870–1989*. In late 2001, the Library of Congress transferred the project to the Office of the Clerk of the U.S. House of Representatives. Subsequently, the Office of History and Preservation (OHP) was created under the Clerk of the House, and OHP staff began work on this publication.[9]

The resulting volume, *Black Americans in Congress, 1870–2007*, published in 2008, reflected the far-reaching changes that occurred after the second edition of the book. When the 1990 edition was published during the 101st Congress (1989–1991), 25 Black Members served in the House. There were no African-American Senators. But over the next two decades, a number of unprecedented developments changed the course of African-American congressional history. From 1991 through the end of 2007, 55 new African Americans were elected to Congress—roughly 45 percent of all the Black Members and Senators who had served in the history of the institution. Moreover, the appreciable gender gap between Black men and women Members of Congress narrowed during this period. Between 1991 and the end of 2007, 20 Black women were elected to Congress—36 percent of all African Americans elected to Congress in that period.

The structure, scope, and content of the 2008 edition of *Black Americans in Congress* reflected the dramatic growth, changing characteristics, and increasing influence of Black Members. Like the first edition, the 2008 volume was organized chronologically, to more accurately convey how the experiences of Black Members changed over time. In contrast to both of the previous editions of *Black Americans in Congress*, however, the Member profiles in the 2008 edition placed more emphasis on elections and congressional service and featured a much broader scope. Additionally, contextual essays offered analysis of the political, social, and institutional developments affecting African Americans' participation in Congress over the years.

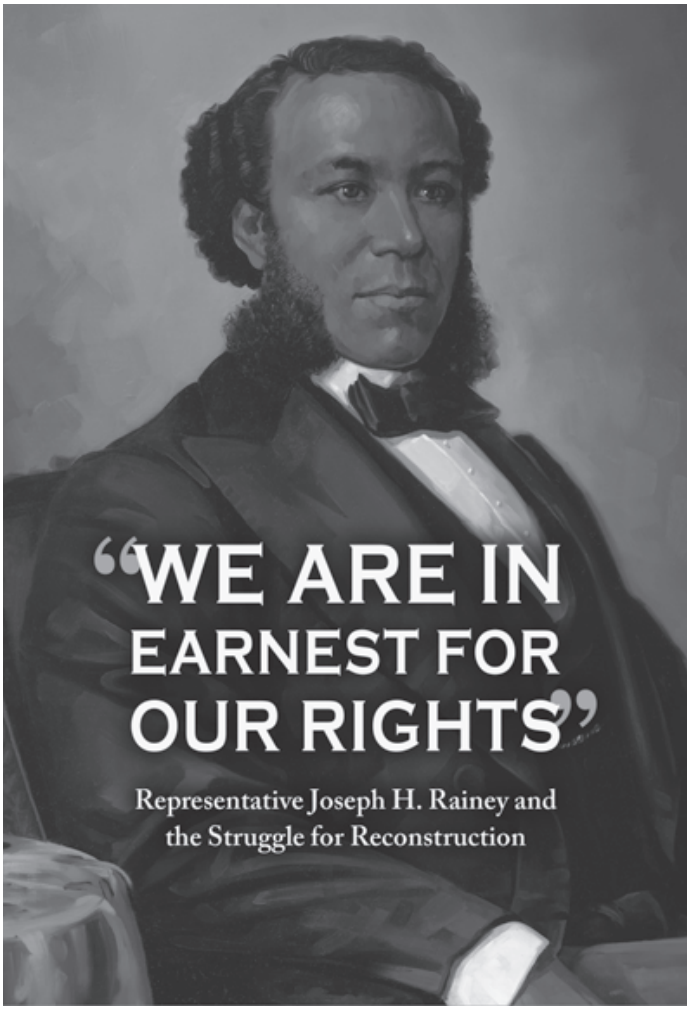
In the summer of 2022, Congress passed House Concurrent Resolution 82 to publish a revised edition of *Black Americans in Congress*, whose title was specified in the print resolution and follows the first three editions of this book. The new edition of *Black Americans in Congress*,



Mickey Leland of Texas poured his energy into raising awareness of hunger and poverty in the United States and around the world. In 1984, Leland successfully persuaded the House to create the Select Committee on Hunger, which he chaired.

Image courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration

however, includes fully reconceptualized and reorganized contextual essays and profiles. Its four sections cover revised time periods to accentuate key turning points in the history of African Americans in Congress and to take into account the growth in the number of Black Americans in Congress since 2008. It also features updated appendices, including Black Members by Congress and by state or territory; Black Members who were chairs of committees and subcommittees; chairs of the CBC; Black Members in party leadership positions; and constitutional amendments and major legislation related to the civil and voting rights of African Americans.[10]



Joseph H. Rainey of South Carolina, who in December 1870 became the first African-American Representative, navigated a unique path from slave to citizen to Representative. Rainey's pioneering career and legacy as a defender of Black civil and political rights are explored in *"We Are in Earnest for Our Rights": Representative Joseph H. Rainey and the Struggle for Reconstruction*, published to celebrate the 150th anniversary of his election to the House.

Office of the Historian, U.S. House of Representatives

Each Member profile describes the individual's precongressional career and, when possible, contains a detailed analysis of the lawmaker's first campaign for congressional office as well as information about re-election efforts, committee assignments, leadership positions, major legislative initiatives, and a brief summary of the Member's post-congressional career. Following the Government Publishing Office (GPO) *Style Manual*, the editors have capitalized the initial letters of both "Black" and "White."

We hope this resource will serve as a starting point for students and researchers who want to know more about the experiences of Black Americans in Congress. Accordingly, bibliographic information, including information about manuscript collections, is provided at the end of each former Member profile, when applicable. This information was drawn from the House and Senate records that were used to compile the *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress.*

The Office of the House Historian maintains a website exhibition, "Black Americans in Congress," https://history.house.gov/Exhibitions-and-Publications/BAIC/Black-Americans-in-Congress/, based on the book's latest print edition. Readers can access the online profiles of every Member from Hiram Revels and Joseph Rainey onward as well as up-to-date data and statistics on various aspects of the history of African Americans in Congress.

RESEARCHING THE TOPIC OF AFRICAN AMERICANS IN CONGRESS

The literature on African-American history, which has grown into one of the most dynamic fields in the profession, has been created largely since the 1960s. John Hope Franklin, the post–World War II dean of Black history, wrote the textbook *From Slavery to Freedom* (first published in 1947; later editions were written with Alfred A. Moss Jr.); with eight editions in half a century, this textbook remains an excellent starting point for those who wish to appreciate the breadth of the African-American historical experience. Professor Moss read a draft of the 2008 edition of this book.

The ample literature on African-American history is wide-ranging. As often as possible we have pointed readers, in the endnotes of the essays and profiles of this volume, toward standard works on various aspects of African-American history and congressional history. As the field has grown, a number of political biographies have been published on nineteenth-century Black Members of Congress, including Robert Brown Elliott, George

Washington Murray, Robert Smalls, George Henry White, and Blanche K. Bruce. In 2020, the Office of the House Historian published *"We Are in Earnest for Our Rights": Representative Joseph H. Rainey and the Struggle for Reconstruction*, a 35-page booklet on the congressional career of the first Black Member of the U.S. House of Representatives. The lives of major twentieth-century Black Members of Congress, including William L. Dawson, Arthur Mitchell, Adam Clayton Powell Jr., Charles C. Diggs Jr., Andrew Young, and Mickey Leland, have also been chronicled in recent biographies.[11]

Several sources were indispensable starting points in the compilation of this book. Inquiries into Members' congressional careers should begin with the *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress*. Maintained by the Office of the House Historian and the Senate Historical Office, this publication contains basic biographical information about Members, pertinent bibliographic references, and information about manuscript collections. It is available at https://bioguide.congress.gov/search. For Members who served exclusively in the House, or House Members who also served in the Senate, the People Search function on the House Historian's website, available at https://history.house.gov/People/Search/, is also vital. It is easily searchable and updated regularly.

Much of this book is based on primary source material, particularly published official congressional records and scholarly compilations of congressional statistics. The Office of the House Historian consulted a wide range of sources for information related to congressional elections, committee assignments, legislation, votes, floor debates, news accounts, and images.

Congressional election results for the biennial elections from 1920 forward are compiled by the Office of the Clerk, published by GPO, and available online at https://history.house.gov/Institution/Election-Statistics/. Michael J. Dubin's *United States Congressional Elections, 1788–1997*, contains results for both general and special elections. For information on district boundaries and reapportionment, the editors relied on Kenneth C. Martis's *The Historical Atlas of Political Parties in the United States Congress, 1789–1989*.[12]

Committee assignments and information about jurisdiction may be found in three indispensable scholarly compilations: David T. Canon, Garrison Nelson, and Charles Stewart III, *Committees in the U.S. Congress, 1789–1946*, 4 vols.; Garrison Nelson, *Committees in the U.S. Congress, 1947–1992*, 2 vols.; and Garrison Nelson and



As the first African American elected to the House from west of the Mississippi River, Augustus F. "Gus" Hawkins of California earned the nickname "Silent Warrior" for his persistent, behind-the-scenes work on behalf of minorities and the urban poor.

Image courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration

Charles Stewart III, *Committees in the U.S. Congress: 1993–2010*. In addition, the editors of this volume consulted several primary sources to identify Members who chaired committees and subcommittees. The *Congressional Directory*, a GPO publication, dates to the nineteenth century and is available online from the 105th Congress (1997–1999) forward at https://www.govinfo.gov/app/collection/CDIR/. Committee and subcommittee rosters are also available in the independently published *United States Code: Congressional Service* and *United States Code: Congressional and Administrative News*. Another valuable source was the *Congressional Staff Directory*, which was published by Charles Bruce Brownson and Anna L. Brownson for more than 35 years starting in 1959. Additional editions were published by Congressional Quarterly from 1996 to 2012. The official lists of committee and subcommittee assignments compiled by the Clerk of the U.S. House of Representatives and the Secretary of the U.S. Senate were also consulted. The House Clerk's committee rosters are available from the 101st Congress forward at https://history.house.gov/Congressional-Overview/Profiles/101st/, and the Senate Secretary's committee rosters are available from the 109th Congress (2005–2007) forward at https://www.senate.gov/committees/committee_assignments.htm. The availability of compiled subcommittee rosters before 1959 is incomplete. For this period, the editors also consulted



Ralph H. Metcalfe of Illinois (seated) broke down barriers as an athlete, winning a gold medal in the 1936 Olympics in Nazi Germany. As a Member of Congress, he advocated for disadvantaged people in his district.

Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

committee reports and hearing transcripts for subcommittee membership information.[13]

Legislation, floor debates, roll call votes, bills, resolutions, and public laws back to the 1970s may be searched at https://congress.gov. A useful print resource that discusses major acts of Congress is Stephen W. Stathis's *Landmark Legislation, 1774–2012: Major U.S. Acts and Treaties*, 2nd ed. Floor debates about legislation can be found in the *Congressional Globe* (1833–1873), available in the Library of Congress's online digital collection *Century of Lawmaking*, at https://memory.loc.gov/ammem/amlaw/, and the *Congressional Record* (1873–present), which is available at congress.gov from 1899 to the present. An index of the *Congressional Record* from 1983 to the present is available at https://www.govinfo.gov/app/collection/CRI/. The editors also consulted the official proceedings in the *House Journal* and the *Senate Journal*. For House roll call votes back to the second session of the 101st Congress, visit the House Clerk's website at https://clerk.house.gov/Votes. For print copies of the *Congressional Directory*, the *Congressional Globe*, the *Congressional Record*, the *House Journal*, the *Senate Journal*, and committee publications, consult a federal depository library. A GPO locator for federal depository libraries is available at https://ask.gpo.gov/s/FDLD.[14]

We used online databases to review key newspapers from the major historical eras covered in this book, including the *New York Times,* the *Washington Post,* the *Los Angeles Times,* the *Christian Science Monitor,* the *Wall Street Journal,* the *Chicago Tribune,* the *Boston Globe*, and the *Atlanta Constitution.* We also consulted African-American newspapers, including the *Chicago Defender,* the *Atlanta Daily World,* the *Pittsburgh Courier*, the *Afro-American* (Baltimore, Maryland), and the *New York Amsterdam News*. News accounts and feature stories often helped fill in gaps in the historical record with stunning detail. These newspaper citations appear in the notes.

Additionally, the Office of the House Historian has interviewed several Black Members of Congress and Black congressional staff as part of its oral history program. Oral history videos and transcripts of interviews have been compiled online as part of a project to commemorate the 150th anniversary of Joseph H. Rainey's election to the House and are available at https://history.house.gov/Oral-History/Rainey/.

Significant photo research was carried out for the 2008 edition of *Black Americans in Congress*, and many of the images in that print publication are replicated here. Each image is accompanied by information on the repository from which it was sourced, including, but not limited to, the Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives, the Prints & Photographs Division of the Library of Congress (Washington, DC), the Still Pictures Branch of the National Archives and Records Administration (College Park, Maryland), and the Moorland-Spingarn Research Center at Howard University (Washington, DC). Images from more than a half-dozen Members' manuscript collections, state legislatures, libraries, and archives are also included in the publication.

Most of the profile images were provided by the House Clerk's Office of Art and Archives and are part of the Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives. The Senate Historical Office provided photographs of Senators. Images of current Members were provided by their offices. Current Member offices should serve as the point of contact for persons seeking an official image.

The editors thank the Office of the Clerk for its support and assistance in producing this edition of *Black Americans in Congress*. In particular, the Office of Art and Archives

provided assistance with image credits and captions, and the Office of Communications copyedited and designed the final publication.

Notes

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2 "After 28 Years," 20 April 1929, *Chicago Defender*: 14.

3 "Brooke Win Softens Gov. Brown's Defeat," 10 November 1966, *Los Angeles Sentinel*: A1; Simeon Booker, " 'I'm a Soul Brother—': Senator Edward Brooke," April 1967, *Ebony*: 154.

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12 Michael J. Dubin, *United States Congressional Elections, 1788–1997* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company Publishing, Inc., 1998); Kenneth C. Martis, *The Historical Atlas of Political Parties in the United States Congress, 1789–1989* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1989).

13 David T. Canon, Garrison Nelson, and Charles Stewart III, *Committees in the U.S. Congress, 1789–1946*, 4 vols. (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Press, 2002); Garrison Nelson, *Committees in the U.S. Congress, 1947–1992*, 2 vols. (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Press, 1994); Garrison Nelson and Charles Stewart III, *Committees in the U.S. Congress: 1993–2010* (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 2011); *United States Code: Congressional Service* (St. Paul, MN: West Publishing Co., 1942–1951); *United States Code: Congressional and Administrative News* (Eagan, MN: Thomson West, 1996–present); Charles B. Brownson, ed., *Congressional Staff Directory* (Indianapolis: Bobbs–Merrill Co., 1959–1960); Charles B. Brownson, ed., *Congressional Staff Directory* (Washington, DC: Congressional Staff Directory, 1961–1972); Charles B. Brownson, ed., *Congressional Staff Directory* (Alexandria, VA: Congressional Staff Directory, 1973–1975); Charles B. Brownson, ed. *Congressional Staff Directory* (Mount Vernon, VA: Congressional Staff Directory, 1976–1979); Charles B. Brownson, ed., *Congressional Staff Directory* (Mount Vernon, VA: Congressional Staff Directory, Ltd., 1980–1988); Ann L. Brownson, ed., *Congressional Staff Directory* (Mount Vernon, VA: Staff Directories, Ltd., 1989–1996); *Congressional Staff Directory* (Alexandria, VA: CQ Staff Directories, Inc., 1996–1998); *Congressional Staff Directory* (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 1999–2012).

14 Stephen W. Stathis, *Landmark Legislation, 1774–2012: Major U.S. Acts and Treaties*, 2nd ed. (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Press, 2014).

PART ONE

Former Members

S.R.8.

Pub. Res. 10.

Fortieth Congress of the United States of America;

At the Third Session,

Begun and held at the city of Washington, on Monday, the Seventh day of December, one thousand eight hundred and Sixty-eight.

A RESOLUTION

Proposing an amendment to the Constitution of the United States.

Resolved *by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,* (two-thirds of both Houses concurring) That the following article be proposed to the legislatures of the several States as an amendment to the Constitution of the United States, which, when ratified by three-fourths of said legislatures shall be valid as part of the Constitution, namely:

Article XV.

Section 1. The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude —

Section 2. The Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation —

Schuyler Colfax

Speaker of the House of Representatives.

H. V. Foster

President of the Senate pro tempore.

Attest:

J. W. Forney

Clerk of House of Representatives.

Geo. C. Gorham

Secy of Senate U.S.

"The Fifteenth Amendment in Flesh and Blood"

1870–1901

On January 20, 1870, the Mississippi state legislature elected Hiram R. Revels to the U.S. Senate. A North Carolina-born preacher who was elected as a Republican to the Mississippi state senate in 1869, Revels was poised to become the first African-American Member of Congress. Mississippi had been without representation in Congress since seceding to join the Confederacy in 1861, and Revels was chosen to finish the remainder of a term ending at the close of the 41st Congress (1869–1871). He arrived in Washington 10 days later, just before the start of a remarkable month on Capitol Hill during which the ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment guaranteed Black voting rights in the Constitution. Nearly five years after the end of the Civil War, the Republican-led effort known as Reconstruction had done much to reshape the South and protect the civil and political rights of newly emancipated African Americans. Now Congress was prepared to consider a bill to formally readmit Mississippi to the Union, and Revels was confident he would be seated quickly.[1]

Ratified on February 3, 1870, the Fifteenth Amendment prohibited any state from depriving citizens of the right to vote because of "race, color, or previous condition of servitude."

Image courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration

Over the next four weeks, however, the Senator-elect was reduced to being a spectator as Congress delayed seating him. An extended debate on Mississippi's status held up the bill to reinstate the formerly rebellious state. But on February 23, Mississippi finally rejoined the Union. That afternoon, from a seat in the Senate gallery, Revels watched as his would-be colleagues engaged in intense deliberations concerning his qualifications for the office. Central to this contentious debate was the question of citizenship. Congress had explicitly clarified the status of African Americans by law in 1866 and in the Fourteenth Amendment, which, when ratified in 1868, established citizenship for anyone born in the United States. Had Revels been a citizen long enough to meet the nine-year requirement set by the U.S. Constitution for membership in the Senate? Senators largely divided along partisan lines, with Democrats arguing that Revels was ineligible and Republicans defending his credentials. After two days, the Republican majority in the Senate finally voted to seat Revels on February 25. He was sworn in at 4:40 p.m. as the first Black Member of Congress.[2]



In this 1870 *Harper's Weekly* print by Thomas Nast, former Confederate president Jefferson Davis lurks in the Senate Chamber, observing the swearing-in of the first Black Senator, Hiram R. Revels. Davis represented Mississippi in the Senate a decade earlier, and Revels's significance in the chamber was given Shakespearean proportions by placing the words of *Othello's* villainous Iago in Davis's mouth.

Image courtesy of the Library of Congress

"There was not an inch of standing or sitting room in the galleries, so densely were they packed," noted the *New York Times*, "and to say that the interest was intense gives but a faint idea of the feeling which prevailed throughout the entire proceedings." Newspapers across the nation covered this historic moment in the Senate chamber—and many explicitly noted that Revels represented Mississippi, the home of former U.S. Representative and Senator and Confederate president Jefferson Davis.[3]

For former abolitionists and Radical Republicans in Congress, Reconstruction was a way to remake the country, and Revels was celebrated as a living reminder of the new democratic order taking hold in the South in the years following the Civil War. In a speech in Boston in May 1870, the Massachusetts abolitionist Wendell Phillips hailed Revels as "a true embodiment of southern reconstruction … the fifteenth amendment in flesh and blood, the incarnation of this last proud step in our nation's progress." For Phillips, a Black Senator validated the long struggle to destroy the institution of slavery as well as the transformative measures implemented during Reconstruction. In the five years following the war, Congress had amended the Constitution and passed legislation to abolish slavery and protect the civil and political rights of freed people. Black elected officials were crucial to new state and local governments forged in the once rebellious southern states. Phillips predicted that Revels was "the first drop in the coming shower" and that many more Black Members would soon be elected to Congress.[4]

Nearly 10 months after Revels took his seat in the Senate, Republican Joseph H. Rainey of South Carolina was sworn in as the first Black Member of the U.S. House of Representatives on December 12, 1870. In November, Rainey had won a special election to fill a vacancy in the 41st Congress, making him the first popularly elected Black Member of Congress. Unlike the Senate, where Members were chosen by state legislatures until 1913, House Members have always been directly elected by the people.

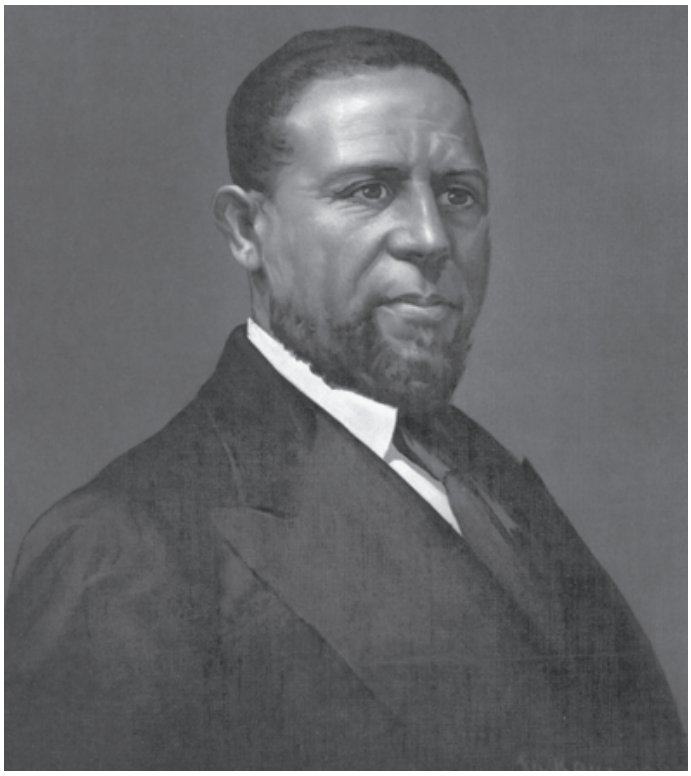
Revels and Rainey were the vanguard of a much larger movement that would fundamentally change the course of American history. In the years after the war, emancipation and Reconstruction dramatically altered southern congressional

districts. Federal law required states to fully count freed people in the apportionment process, and Black Americans won the power to vote and serve in Congress. Within five years, 14 more Black Members followed Revels and Rainey to Capitol Hill. This profound increase coincided with significant legislative achievements securing civil and political rights for African Americans across the nation.

The 44th Congress (1875–1877), however, proved to be the high-water mark for Black representation, with seven African Americans serving in the House and one in the Senate. By 1877, the Democratic Party, led by many of the same officials who had sparked the secession movement and fought for the Confederacy, had regained control of southern state governments. Democrats proceeded to implement a coordinated policy of discrimination, intimidation, and violence to block Black political participation and undermine the Republican Party in the South—effectively ending the federal project of Reconstruction. State legislatures no longer chose Black Senators. Gerrymandered congressional districts reduced opportunities for Black House candidates. During the next two decades, the number of African Americans in each Congress precipitously declined: only six new Black Members were elected after 1874, and for most Congresses, only one or two Black Members served on Capitol Hill. Nevertheless, these lawmakers soldiered on, searching for new ways to use the powers of the federal government to resuscitate Black freedom as the crushing weight of Jim Crow discrimination settled over the South.

Ultimately, 20 Black Representatives and two Black Senators served in Congress between 1870 and 1901. Each displayed a formidable array of skills as a lawmaker, orator, and activist. Although most were isolated in Congress and served only one or two terms, they pursued ambitious reforms while diligently working to protect the interests of their constituents. They were all Republicans from the South who called for the federal government to act decisively to pass legislation to guarantee the civil and political rights of freed people.

Black lawmakers recognized that they brought a distinct perspective to Congress, which informed their legislative agenda and gave them insight into the ambitions of nearly five million African Americans living in the United States. Less than a month into his tenure in the Senate, Hiram Revels prefaced his first remarks on the floor by noting that he was uniquely positioned to express "feelings which perhaps never before entered into the experience of any member of this body." Black Members had seen repression and exclusion. Many had been enslaved before the war. But they were also part of the grand democratic experiment of Reconstruction in the South. During their service in Congress, nearly all of them described racial discrimination and segregation taking hold in the South in new ways, even as Congress attempted to end such practices during the late 1860s and into the 1870s.[5]



Senator Hiram Revels of Mississippi was the first African American to serve in Congress.

Image courtesy of the Library of Congress

Starting with Revels and Rainey, African-American legislators brought this lived experience into the halls of Congress until the final Black Member elected in the nineteenth century, George Henry White of North Carolina, left office in 1901. No African-American lawmaker would be elected to Congress until 1928.

This section explores the inspiring, harrowing, and tumultuous 30-year journey of Black lawmakers in the period after the Civil War. From the revolutionary moment of Reconstruction to the onset of a system of racial exclusion in the South that undid decades of progress, Black Members of Congress remained resolute in their bold efforts to democratize American politics and society while maintaining their tenuous foothold in the national legislature.



This *Ballou's Pictorial Drawing-Room Companion* print depicts Thomas U. Walter's plan for the extended Capitol building and dome, which was approved in 1854. The new north and south wings of the building pictured here opened in the following few years, though the dome remained under construction during the Civil War. When the first Black Members of Congress arrived in Washington, DC, they found a majestic, marble Capitol completed with a massive dome.

Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

RECONSTRUCTION AND BLACK POLITICAL ACTIVISM

As the 39th Congress (1865–1867) convened on December 4, 1865, Radical Republicans confronted a crisis in the South. Since the conclusion of the Civil War in April, most of the former Confederate states had taken dramatic steps to reconstitute their governments under the leaders of the rebellion. President Andrew Johnson, a slaveholder and former Tennessee Senator who stayed loyal to the United States during the war, had granted blanket pardons to many Confederate soldiers and officials, restoring their right to hold public office. Throughout the South, voters elected former Confederates to state legislatures and to Congress. At the state level, southern legislatures populated with former Confederates passed unjust laws known as Black Codes to restrict the rights of freed people.[6]

Outraged by these developments, Radicals were determined to steer the nation in a different direction. Led by Charles Sumner of Massachusetts in the Senate and Representative Thaddeus Stevens of Pennsylvania in the House, this faction within the Republican Party had roots in the antebellum abolitionist movement and had long sought to destroy the institution of slavery and protect the rights of African Americans. The Radicals believed that the federal government could guarantee equal rights for all through legislation, constitutional amendments, and the enforcement powers of the executive branch. Although they were a vocal minority within the Republican Party, they were well-positioned to drive the congressional Reconstruction agenda in the years following the war. They wanted to perfect the Republic, not return to antebellum norms, and many served as activist allies to Black Members of Congress elected during this period.[7]

The opening of the new session of Congress set the stage for the Radicals to initiate a coordinated response. Representative Stevens introduced a resolution to prevent the seating of any Members-elect from the former Confederate states and establish a bicameral committee to investigate conditions in the South. The panel, known as the Joint Committee on Reconstruction, was made up of nine Representatives and six Senators. It conducted hearings and grappled with the constitutional questions that followed emancipation, such as defining citizenship and preventing southern governments from excluding potential Black voters while benefiting from their inclusion in population totals used to formulate congressional apportionment.[8]

Radicals began to set the nation on a new course for Reconstruction—one that was charted by Congress and designed to fundamentally change the South. When Georgia ratified the Thirteenth Amendment on December 6, three-quarters of the states had voted to amend the Constitution to abolish slavery. Congress had already created the Freedmen's Bureau to provide freed people with schools and assistance with economic and legal affairs. As lawmakers called for additional legislation and constitutional amendments to assist freed people, several newspapers reported the imminent organization of "an outside Congress"—a term used to describe the lobbyists of the day—to represent African Americans in Washington. Black activists were prepared, as they had been advocating for the civil and political rights of free people of color as well as the abolition of slavery since long before shots were fired at Fort Sumter. Black communities in 17 states and the District of Columbia chose the members of the delegation, and the *Boston Investigator* noted that the group was "especially charged with directly attending to their interests before Congress."[9]

Two months later, on February 7, 1866, President Johnson received a delegation in the White House led by Frederick Douglass and Black activist and restaurateur George T. Downing. The members of the delegation hailed from both sides of the sectional divide. For example, the Manhattan-born Downing operated a successful restaurant in Newport,

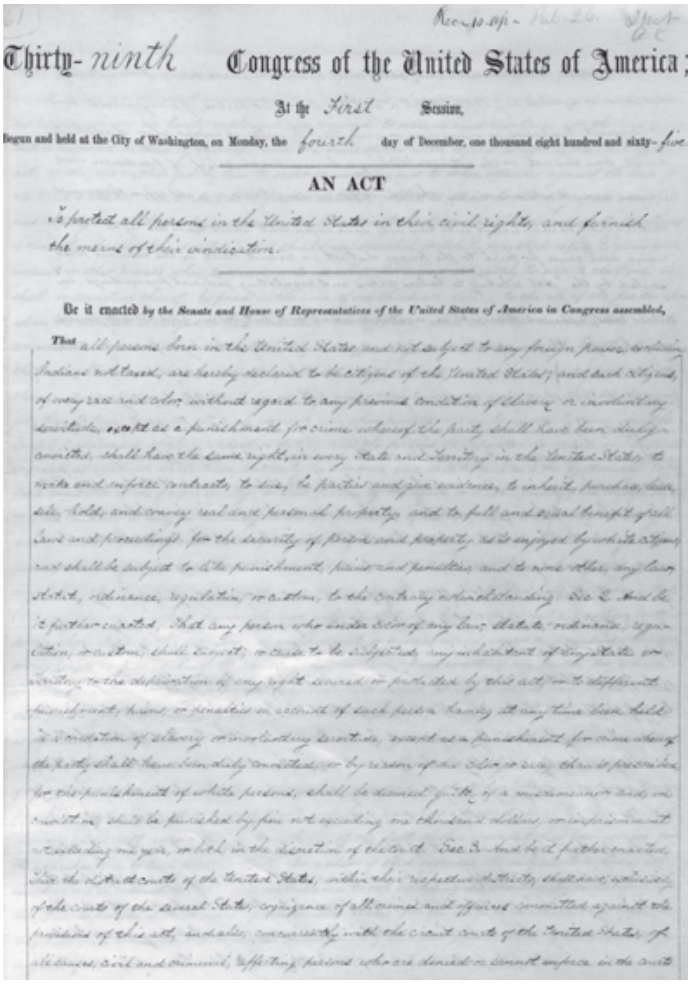
Rhode Island. He would later run the Members' Dining Room in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1868 to 1876. South Carolina had sent Alonzo J. Ransier, who was elected to the state house of representatives in 1868 before becoming the first Black lieutenant governor of the state in 1870. In 1873, he would return to Washington as the Representative from South Carolina's Second District.[10]

The delegation stressed the precarious position of African Americans at the beginning of 1866. The Thirteenth Amendment was not enough, Downing told the President, and "we wish it enforced with appropriate legislation." The Constitution, he added, "knows no privileged class," and Black Americans "should be protected in their rights as citizens and equal before the law." They insisted on being "fully enfranchised" throughout the nation, and "anything less than this will be rendering to us less than our just due." Douglass also directly addressed Johnson, asking him to guarantee Black voting rights. The President, Douglass stressed, had "the power to save or destroy us; to bless or blast us. I mean our whole race." The contentious meeting concluded with Johnson lecturing the Black delegation on the problems that he thought might follow Black suffrage.[11]

Turning to Capitol Hill, the delegation appealed to Congress and outlined a vision of Black citizenship rooted in the Constitution. On February 15, Senator Sumner introduced the delegation's "memorial and protest" objecting to House Joint Resolution 51, a proposed constitutional amendment. Passed by the House on January 31, the joint resolution defined the punishment for those states that excluded voters on the basis of "race or color," mandating a reduction in House seats apportioned to any state guilty of such an offense.[12]

The delegates objected to inserting this explicit reference to "race or color" into the Constitution. If enacted, the proposed amendment, although designed to deter such action, would codify the very possibility of excluding voters on these terms. The delegation warned that this troubling precedent had the potential for abuse. Sanctioning the exclusion of any citizen went against the "fathers of the republic," who "framed and adopted" the Constitution for "the whole people—colored men being at the time legal voters in most of the States." The delegates urged the Senate to reject the resolution. The Senate followed their recommendation and never approved the amendment.[13]

During the next five years, Republican lawmakers worked to guarantee the civil and political rights of African Americans and establish a process for readmitting former Confederate states. Congress passed the Civil Rights Act of 1866 to establish the rights of citizenship, institute equal protection under the law, and outlaw discrimination in employment, housing, and accommodations. After overriding a veto from President Johnson, Republicans began drafting a new constitutional amendment to redefine citizenship in the United States. When Congress approved the Fourteenth Amendment in June 1866, it explicitly granted citizenship to those born on American soil and guaranteed equal protection of the law for all. The amendment also threatened those states that attempted to discriminate at the polls with a reduction in seats apportioned in the House and barred former rebels from holding office. Despite Johnson's opposition to the amendment, the states ratified it in 1868, extending



Thirty-ninth Congress of the United States of America;

At the First Session,

Begun and held at the City of Washington, on Monday, the fourth day of December, one thousand eight hundred and sixty-five.

AN ACT

To protect all persons in the United States in their civil rights, and furnish the means of their vindication.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

That all persons born in the United States and not subject to any foreign power, excluding Indians not taxed, are hereby declared to be citizens of the United States; and such citizens, of every race and color, without regard to any previous condition of slavery or involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall have the same right, in every State and Territory in the United States, to make and enforce contracts, to sue, be parties, and give evidence, to inherit, purchase, lease, sell, hold, and convey real and personal property, and to full and equal benefit of all laws and proceedings for the security of person and property, as is enjoyed by white citizens, and shall be subject to like punishment, pains and penalties, and to none other, any law, statute, ordinance, regulation, or custom, to the contrary notwithstanding. Sec. 2. And be it further enacted, That any person who, under color of any law, statute, ordinance, regulation, or custom, shall subject, or cause to be subjected, any inhabitant of any State or Territory to the deprivation of any right secured or protected by this act, or to different punishment, pains, or penalties on account of such person having at any time been held in a condition of slavery or involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, or by reason of his color or race, than is prescribed for the punishment of white persons, shall be deemed guilty of a misdemeanor, and on conviction, shall be punished by fine not exceeding one thousand dollars, or imprisonment not exceeding one year, or both, in the discretion of the court. Sec. 3. And be it further enacted, That the district courts of the United States, within their respective districts, shall have, exclusively of the courts of the several States, cognizance of all crimes and offenses committed against the provisions of this act, and also, concurrently with the circuit courts of the United States, of all causes, civil and criminal, affecting persons who are denied or cannot enforce in the courts

The Civil Rights Act of 1866 defined the rights of citizens and created a new role for the federal government protecting individuals against discrimination. The law guaranteed all citizens the "full and equal benefit of all laws and proceedings for the security of person and property."

Image courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration

American citizenship to the four million African-American men, women, and children who had once been enslaved.[14]

The President's hostility to these measures was part of a years-long struggle with Radical Republicans in Congress. On Capitol Hill, Republicans used the powers of the House and Senate to wrest the national program for Reconstruction away from Johnson—a process that culminated with Johnson's impeachment in 1868.

Meanwhile, conditions across the South continued to deteriorate as White terror organizations threatened, tormented, and killed freed people and their Republican allies. Congressional investigations compiled mountains of testimony cataloging these daily incidents of violence and intimidation. Many Republicans pushed the federal government to do more to assist the postwar South in economic development and ensure peace in the region.[15]

In Washington, the Republican-led Congress directly intervened in the affairs of the southern states. In 1867, a series of Reconstruction Acts outlined a concrete plan for readmitting the rebellious states, including the establishment of five military districts in the South that would be occupied by federal troops. This legislation prescribed a process for states to regain their seats in Congress: ratify the Fourteenth Amendment, approve new state constitutions, and ensure the voting rights of African-American men. The U.S. military played a crucial role in securing Black civil and political rights and establishing the conditions for democratic elections.[16]

Away from Capitol Hill, freed people and their allies laid the foundation for Republican strength in the South.



In this 1868 print, A.R. Waud portrays the agents of the Freedmen's Bureau as advocates for the interests of freed people in the years following the Civil War.

Image courtesy of the Library of Congress

Black Americans extended the Republican Party's reach throughout the region, building the party from the ground up. A thriving national Black political culture complemented and reinforced this democratic revolution in southern politics and society. An emerging agenda for change united Black communities, and those committed to the cause of Black freedom met in national and state conventions throughout this period. Finally, this diverse constituency of White and Black allies played a major role in the conventions held by southern states to draft new state constitutions that embraced Black suffrage.[17]

By 1870, Reconstruction had transformed southern politics: Republicans controlled southern state governments and African-American lawmakers had been elected to lead state legislatures. Louisiana had three Black lieutenant governors between 1868 and 1877, and Mississippi elected a Black speaker of the house in 1872—future Representative John R. Lynch. But only in South Carolina, where African Americans accounted for 60 percent of the population, were Black majorities possible in the state house from 1868 to 1876 and in the state senate from 1872 to 1876. Black voters were critical to the Republican Party's electoral fortunes throughout the South during this period. By 1877, roughly 2,000 Black men held local, state, and federal offices throughout the South.[18]

Despite grassroots support and the growing institutional power of Republicans at the state and local level, Radicals remained concerned that the gains of Reconstruction were not universally realized throughout the nation. To ensure African Americans could enjoy the full range of rights as citizens, Republicans drafted another constitutional amendment, including an enforcement provision to enable congressional action. Ratified in 1870, the Fifteenth Amendment declared that the right to vote "shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude."

PATHS TO CAPITOL HILL

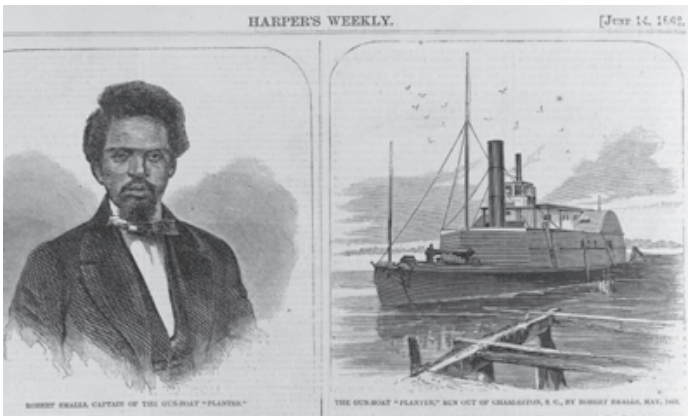
The Fifteenth Amendment ushered in an extraordinary decade in Congress. Sixteen Black lawmakers, nearly three-quarters of the 22 Black Members who served in Congress during the nineteenth century, served in the 10 years after its ratification. The rapid pace of change was consistent with the bold optimism among African-American activists at the beginning of the decade. In December 1870, the month Joseph Rainey was sworn in as the first Black U.S. Representative in American history, Frederick Douglass's

newspaper, the *New National Era*, cited one enthusiastic prediction that neatly connected the Black share of the U.S. population with the seats in the House, expecting that proportional representation would quickly lead to the election of 34 African Americans in Congress. Black voters, now fully counted in the southern states to determine apportionment, would be afforded "strength and power" in the next election, with "a status that neither party can afford to despise."[19]

While proportional representation seemed within reach at this promising juncture, the number of Black Members of Congress never attained such heights in the nineteenth century. But within a brief window in the early 1870s, Black candidates were more likely to find success. Joseph Rainey, for example, traversed a smooth path leading from the South Carolina state senate to Capitol Hill. In August 1870, the state Republican Party nominated Rainey to run in a special election to fill a vacancy in South Carolina's Fourth District for the remainder of the 41st Congress. Rainey was also chosen as the party's candidate for a separate election to the 42nd Congress (1871–1873). He easily won both contests, becoming the first Black lawmaker directly elected by voters.[20]

In a way, the 38-year-old Rainey represented a composite of Black Members elected to the Congress during the nineteenth century. Born enslaved, Rainey was emancipated through the efforts of his father, who purchased his freedom. Rainey had little in the way of a formal education. He was trained in his father's profession and worked as a barber in Charleston, South Carolina, before the Civil War. He escaped to Bermuda during the war, continued working as a barber, and returned to South Carolina following the conflict. He was a dedicated member of the state Republican Party, organizing at the local level, participating in the 1868 state constitutional convention, and serving in the state senate from 1868 to 1870.

With the exception of his years in Bermuda, Rainey's early life, education, work, and political activism were largely comparable to those of his Black colleagues in the 1870s. Many were born enslaved or had parents who were enslaved. The vast majority were self-taught and demonstrated knowledge of contemporary literature, the classics, and the law in their remarks before Congress. They embraced the pursuit of public service and political power as state and local office holders before coming to Congress. And all were activists enmeshed in the ongoing struggle for civil and political rights in the South.



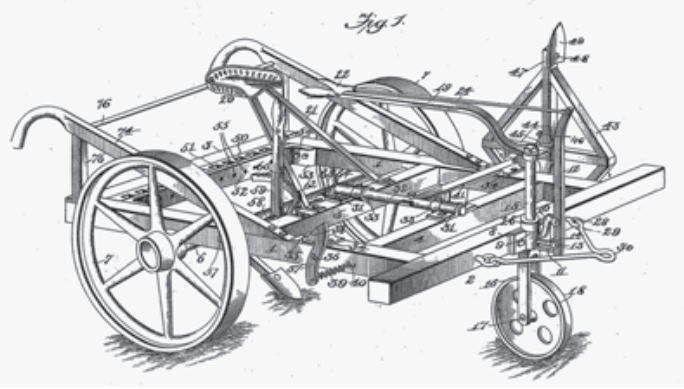
After piloting the Confederate ship *Planter* to freedom in Charleston Harbor, Robert Smalls of South Carolina was celebrated in national publications such as *Harper's Weekly* in 1862. Smalls represented South Carolina in the House during five nonconsecutive Congresses between 1875 and 1887.

Image courtesy of the Library of Congress

A Generation Forged in Upheaval

The vast majority of Black Members elected during the nineteenth century grew up in the antebellum South, a region marked by revolutionary changes in politics and society in the 1860s. Eleven were born enslaved and two more were born to parents who had been emancipated—only Robert Brown Elliott of South Carolina and James E. O'Hara of North Carolina were born and raised elsewhere. Some like Rainey gained freedom well before the Civil War, others like Jeremiah Haralson of Alabama were enslaved until 1865. Robert Smalls of South Carolina became a sensation in 1862, when he commandeered a Confederate ship and led a daring escape from Charleston harbor that freed his and other enslaved families. Smalls's exploits immediately became national news, and he later piloted several ships for the U.S. Navy in the war.[21]

Black Members who served during the 1870s had diverse educational backgrounds. Few had any formal education, as southern states banned teaching both free and enslaved Black children to read and write. Free Black communities, along with sympathetic White neighbors, sometimes operated schools to teach those enslaved in southern cities. Others, like Frederick Douglass, who, as a young man was enslaved in Baltimore, Maryland, learned to read and write using a variety of creative tactics and sheer determination. After the Civil War, schools were funded by state and local governments as well as the Freedmen's Bureau. By 1870, more than 4,000 schools in the South served nearly a quarter-million students.[22]



George Washington Murray of South Carolina patented several farming inventions before his election to Congress. Patent Number 517,961 was a cultivator and marker to "open furrows for the reception of seeds."

Image courtesy of the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office

Many Black Members were self-educated and acquired a broad range of knowledge on history, politics, and culture through their own initiative. Having learned the photographer's trade, future Mississippi Representative John Lynch attended a few months of night school in Natchez, Mississippi, after 1865. Lynch improved upon his brief formal education by reading northern newspapers and listening in on lessons at an all-White school adjacent to his photography studio.[23]

The six Black lawmakers elected for the first time after 1880 had more formal schooling than their predecessors. All had attended college or earned degrees. Several were lawyers, including John M. Langston of Virginia, who went to Oberlin College in Ohio before the war and had a distinguished legal career.

Black Representatives and Senators in the nineteenth century worked in trades and developed important skills before coming to Congress. They were ambitious barbers, tailors, printers, hotel managers, steamboat porters, photographers, and store owners. Most were educators: Seven worked as teachers and five as school administrators. Others were clergymen and farmers.[24]

In some cases, shrewd business investments enabled nineteenth-century Black Congressmen to become affluent. They were planters and landowners. They backed railroad ventures and engaged in real estate speculation. At least seven Members held estates of more than $5,000, a considerable sum at the time. Senator Blanche K. Bruce of Mississippi, the wealthiest among them, amassed a fortune of more than $150,000 primarily through real estate and farming.[25]

Almost every Black Member of Congress in the nineteenth century held widespread influence in state and local politics before arriving on Capitol Hill. Of the 22 Black Members of Congress elected before 1901, only Jefferson F. Long of Georgia and Charles E. Nash of Louisiana did not hold public office before serving in Congress. Four served in local office, two held federal appointments, and 14 sat in their state's legislature before their election to Congress. In fact, John Langston was one of the first Black officeholders in U.S. history, having been elected clerk of Brownhelm, Ohio, in 1855; he later served as a U.S. diplomat in Haiti and Santo Domingo.

Opportunities and Obstacles

Black Members during the nineteenth century represented states and congressional districts undergoing dramatic change during Reconstruction. Southern states elected new leaders, redrew district boundaries, and empowered new constituencies of Black voters across the region.

Majority-Black districts proved crucial for electing African-American Representatives. Only two Black Members during this era served a district whose population was less than 50-percent Black. Republicans in control of state legislatures at the beginning of the 1870s drew favorable congressional districts to boost the party's candidates at the polls. As speaker of the Mississippi state assembly in 1872, John Lynch was directly involved in the reapportionment of the state's six seats in the U.S. House, creating five Republican-dominated districts before winning election in the Sixth District later that year.[26]

South Carolina elected eight Black Members during this period—the most of any state—from multiple districts with majority-Black populations. In North Carolina, gerrymandering created the state's lone majority-Black district. Black candidates frequently competed against each other in the so-called "Black Second," and the district was represented by four Black Representatives before 1901. But with the exception of Alabama and Mississippi, both of which elected three Black Members, Black candidates found less success in the other southern states. Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, and Virginia each elected one Black Representative. Of the states that were once part of the Confederate rebellion, Arkansas, Texas, and Tennessee sent no Black Members to Congress during this period.[27]

Even in districts with large Black populations, Black congressional candidates faced significant challenges. Violence, murder, and intimidation were commonplace during congressional campaigns in many parts of the postwar South. Congressional committees compiled

voluminous firsthand accounts describing threats, beatings, and murders perpetrated against African Americans and their White allies in the Republican Party.[28]

Louisiana was engulfed in violence, uncertainty, and political strife throughout Reconstruction. The lone Black Representative from the state, former Union soldier Charles E. Nash, was elected in 1874 to one term in the 44th Congress. But Louisiana nearly sent three Black Members to Congress before 1873. John Willis Menard, an Illinois-born newspaper editor, Republican Party activist, poet, and federal employee who had worked for the U.S. Department of the Interior, won a special election to fill a vacancy in a New Orleans-based district in 1868 and could have been the first Black Member of Congress. However, when Menard arrived on Capitol Hill late in the 40th Congress (1867–1869) with credentials from the Louisiana state government, his opponent, Democrat Caleb Hunt, contested the results. Menard defended his right to take office and on February 27, 1869, became the first African American to speak before the House while it was in session. Menard disputed Hunt's claims and questioned whether his opponent had followed proper procedure in contesting the vote. The House Committee on Elections recommended the seat be declared vacant based on the "violence, intimidation, and fraud" that compromised the integrity of the election. Menard's case was the first of many contested elections involving Black candidates.[29]

In 1872, Samuel Peters of Shreveport and P.B.S. Pinchback of New Orleans both won election to the House from Louisiana, but neither was ever seated. Peters was a Black teacher and activist from Ohio who in 1871 moved to Louisiana, where he took charge of the Shreveport branch of the Freedman's Savings and Trust Company, also known as the Freedman's Bank. He was also appointed division superintendent of education by Pinchback, then the state's acting governor and one of the first Black state executives in U.S. history. Peters was elected to the House in November 1872, but the 43rd Congress (1873–1875) was not scheduled to convene until December 1873. In September, yellow fever decimated Shreveport, leaving more than 400 dead, including Peters. He died just months before he would have taken the oath of office.[30]

Pinchback faced a different fate. Born in Georgia, he had been a gambler on Mississippi riverboats before his arrival in New Orleans in the early 1860s. After service in the U.S. Army during the Civil War, he was elected to the Louisiana state senate. He served as lieutenant governor of the state and spent 35 days as acting governor. In 1872, he was elected to an At-Large U.S. House seat from Louisiana. He was subsequently chosen as the next U.S. Senator from Louisiana on January 17, 1873. His claim to seats in both houses of Congress was challenged by his opponents, who disputed his credentials for each position. While the state endured months of violent confrontations between Democrats and Republicans, two competing candidates laid claim to the governor's office. Pinchback spoke on the House Floor on June 8, 1874, defending the legitimacy of his election to the House. When the House Committee on Elections ruled in favor of his opponent, Pinchback pursued his claim in the Senate to no avail.[31]

Menard and Pinchback were ensnared in the convoluted contested election process, which was exceedingly common during the nineteenth century. In the House, the Committee on Elections handled contested cases. Established as the House's first standing committee in 1789, it rendered judgments on disputed elections based on



Two years before Joseph H. Rainey of South Carolina was elected, John Willis Menard of Louisiana claimed victory in a special election to the House. Menard, photographed in the late 1860s, would have been the first African American elected to Congress. However, after his opponent contested the election results, the House did not seat either candidate.

Image courtesy of the Library of Congress

evidence and witness testimony. The panel's deliberations often extended well into the second session, and the majority party's candidate had a distinct advantage because votes on each case were often decided along party lines within the committee and on the House Floor. Members forced to defend their seats during contested election investigations lost valuable time in introducing legislation or speaking on the House Floor. The committee handled an unusually heavy caseload in the half century following the Civil War: 60 percent of cases heard by the committee between 1867 and 1911 were from the former Confederacy—a disproportionate share given that Representatives from those eleven states constituted close to 25 percent of the House.[32]

Black Representatives in the nineteenth century routinely had their elections challenged, often to devastating effect. The first sitting Black Member to face a contested election was Robert C. De Large of South Carolina, who had joined the 42nd Congress in March of 1871. After accusations of election fraud from an Independent Republican opponent, the committee recommended his seat declared vacant. The whole House voted to remove De Large from office on January 24, 1873, sending him home five weeks early.[33]

White Democrats used this forum to challenge the victories of Black Republicans. Josiah T. Walls of Florida was elected three consecutive times to the House between 1870 and 1874 but was unseated twice by Democratic challengers


The State of South Carolina.

By the Board of State Canvassers.

To Joseph H. Rainey

Whereas, In pursuance of an Act entitled "An Act providing for the General Elections and the manner of conducting the same," approved the first day of March, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and seventy, amended by an Act approved March 12th, 1872, an election was held on the third day of November, A. D. 1874, for Members of Congress and upon examination of the Returns which have been received it appears that you, the said Joseph H. Rainey have been duly elected by a majority of Votes; We do, therefore, by virtue of the powers in us vested, certify that you, the said Joseph H. Rainey have been duly elected as Member of the 44th Congress of the United States from the County of Georgetown, the first Congressional district of the State of South Carolina.

GIVEN under our Hands, and the Seal of the State, in Columbia, this twenty-third day of November, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and seventy-four, and in the ninety-ninth year of the Independence of the United States of America.

H. E. Hayne, Secretary of State.
L. L. Hoge, Comptroller General.
Sam'l W. Melton, Attorney General.
R. L. Carlisle, State Treasurer.
[illegible], Adjutant General.

Board of State Canvassers.

Joseph Rainey's election credentials from 1874 mark the South Carolinian's fourth victory for a House seat.

Image courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration

following decisions by the Committee on Elections. In the 44th and 45th Congresses (1875–1879), the Democratic Party controlled the House for the first time since the Civil War. Three Black Members in each Congress endured protracted battles before the Committee on Elections but successfully held on to their seats.[34]

For many Black Members, the committee was yet another institution in need of reform. When his opponent challenged his 1876 election, Rainey acknowledged that the proper procedure was to send the case to the Committee on Elections. But he demanded to be seated first, as he held the required credentials from the South Carolina secretary of state. If the House declined this request, it would set a dangerous precedent that could prevent any Member from being sworn in. "Though I be a republican and a colored man," Rainey said, "I know that I have rights under the Constitution." The House agreed, swore in Rainey, and immediately referred the case to the committee.[35]

Several Black candidates unsuccessfully challenged the elections of White Democrats who claimed victory at the polls. They found the committee more receptive to their efforts when Republicans controlled the House, however. During the 1880s and 1890s, five Black contestants unseated White Members who had declared victory on Election Day.[36]

The Election Committee's mercurial decision-making and lengthy proceedings provoked many Members to question its motives and efficacy. The politicized nature of its decisions—and the role of local officials, largely White Democrats, in the vote-counting process as well as the imprecise manner in which vote counts were examined, deciphered, and ruled upon—placed Black candidates at a distinct disadvantage. In a letter to the committee in January 1880, Jeremiah Haralson scolded the committee for the way it handled his 1878 election defeat. Haralson had contested his Democratic opponent's victory that year, citing fraud and intimidation at the polls in a district where an overwhelming majority of registered voters were Black and Republican. He had been unable to collect testimony from individuals in his district after potential witnesses had been jailed. And he was threatened, indicted, and forced to leave the state. After months of silence, the committee notified him in early 1880 that the contest was going to be dismissed if he did not submit additional documentation regarding his claims. For Haralson, the Democratic House majority had engaged in ruthless bureaucratic maneuvering that revealed a lack of integrity among its members. "The

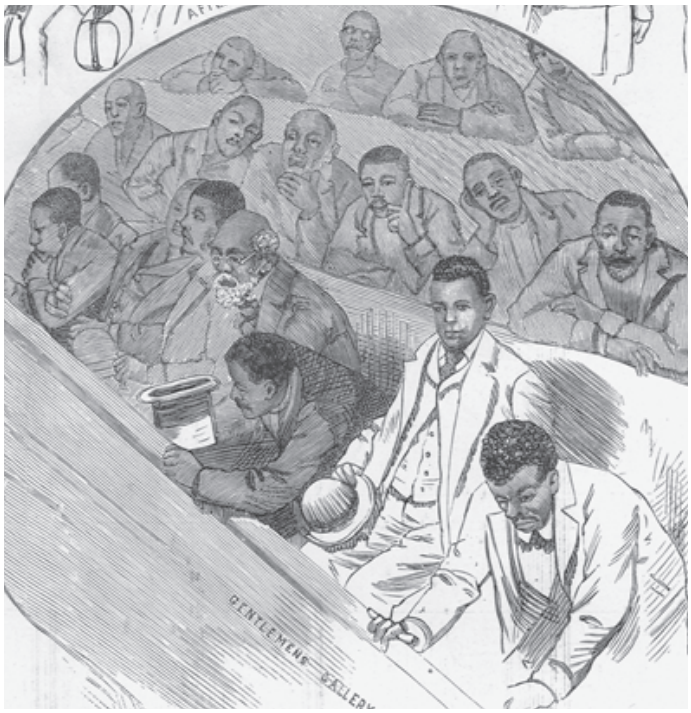
devil will be compelled to look out when the committee on elections of the Forty-sixth Congress gets there, (I mean hell)," Haralson warned, "or they will declare he is not entitled to the seat he holds, or not report at all."[37]

REPRESENTING BLACK AMERICANS IN THE NATION'S CAPITAL

Black Members of Congress arrived in Washington, DC, to find a thriving and expansive African-American community in the years following the Civil War. About 40,000 African Americans lived in the city after the war. Many had belonged to the large free Black population in the antebellum city, but many others had been formerly enslaved and sought refuge there following emancipation. In April 1862, Congress had passed the District of Columbia Emancipation Act, liberating enslaved Black Americans in the territory and providing monetary compensation to slaveholders. Black male suffrage was established within the District in 1867, and African Americans eagerly engaged with political affairs in the nation's capital.[38]

After the war, the Capitol welcomed Black observers in the galleries of both chambers. Black men and women were often described by visitors as occupying a large share of the seats in the visitors' galleries, closely observing proceedings. There was also a small number of Black staff employed at the Capitol, including the congressional candidate Samuel Lee, who was employed as a police officer on Capitol Hill. In 1871, the first Black page, Alfred Q. Powell of Virginia, assisted Members on the House Floor. William H. Smith, a District of Columbia native, worked for the House Library for more than 25 years and was appointed House Librarian in the Republican-controlled 47th (1881–1883) and 51st Congresses (1889–1891). He was demoted to Assistant Librarian when the Democrats controlled the House.[39]

Beyond Capitol Hill, a vibrant Black political culture thrived in Washington, DC. Local newspapers reported on the commemorative events, political gatherings, fundraisers, lectures, and celebrations that often brought together African-American citizens and Members of Congress. Black Members were often asked to address dinner guests or assembled crowds in the District and nearby Baltimore. For example, in 1883, a local event celebrated the twentieth anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation, with Frederick Douglass giving the keynote speech and former and current Black Members in attendance. Even small ceremonial occasions warranted the presence of Black lawmakers, such as the ceremony in which Representative



This detail of an 1889 *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* print documents the great interest of African Americans in observing Congress. Although the Capitol was not formally segregated, in practice the Visitors' Gallery in both the House and Senate separated visitors by gender and race.

Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

Robert Smalls presented the Capital City Guard, a local Black militia company, with new rifles.[40]

Yet in many ways Washington remained a city closely linked to the customs of the old South. African Americans in Congress experienced discrimination in schools, theaters, restaurants, and hotels. In an 1874 newspaper interview, Joseph Rainey documented the second-class treatment he and his colleagues received in Washington. He noted that Black Representatives were "charged more for living than any of the white members" and were often forced to pay higher prices at local restaurants.[41]

Allies and Adversaries

On Capitol Hill, Black Members found a similar contradictory experience. They were often isolated and under the glare of public scrutiny as the press closely reported on their activities on the floor, frequently lacing their articles with racism and condescension. Some commended Black Members for forceful and effective speeches and noted when their arguments were well-received by those seated in the gallery. Others were exceedingly critical and fixated on the physical appearance of Black Members.



As chair of the House Judiciary Committee, Benjamin Franklin Butler of Massachusetts submitted his own version of the civil rights bill in December 1874.

Image courtesy of the Library of Congress



A six-term Representative from Virginia, John Thomas Harris belittled Black Members on the House Floor and opposed civil rights legislation in the 1870s.

Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

Among the overwhelmingly White membership of both houses of Congress, Black Members were generally received without incident. Some White Members went out of their way to ignore new Black Members of Congress. When Jefferson Long was sworn in as the second Black Representative, he was warmly greeted by Joseph Rainey, but not by his fellow lawmakers in the Georgia delegation. Republican colleagues were more likely to welcome Black Members in the House and Senate. Speaker James G. Blaine of Maine praised his Black colleagues in his memoirs. "They were as a rule, studious, earnest, ambitious men, whose public conduct," Blaine emphasized, "would be honorable to any race."[42]

Extensive parliamentary rules established in each chamber at the start of a Congress structured debate on the House and Senate Floor. The rules preserved a modicum of civility among Members during debate on most matters. Any discussion of civil rights legislation, however, elicited frank discussions of White supremacist ideas from many Democratic Members from the South and beyond. While many of these assertions went unchallenged—largely because of the limitations imposed by the rules on interactions between Members on the floor—Black Members were eager to respond even if it was outside the bounds of convention. On January 5, 1874, Democrat John Thomas Harris of Virginia rhetorically asked, "Is there not one gentleman on the floor who can honestly say he really believes that the colored man is created his equal?" Alonzo Ransier interjected with a simple, "I can." Harris dismissed Ransier's words, adding that he was "speaking to the white men of the House." When Ransier again denied Harris's statements about White supremacy, the Virginia Democrat became increasingly enraged before proceeding with his argument.[43]

Ransier's bold response to Harris was an exception. More often, Black Members sought to engage the opposition in debate, if possible. A northern Democrat, New York Representative Samuel Sullivan "Sunset" Cox was consistently adversarial from the 1870s well into the 1890s. Representative George Frisbie Hoar of Massachusetts once noted that Black Members had in Cox "the most formidable antagonist, perhaps the most trained and experienced debater in the House." Cox repeatedly challenged the words and motions of Black Representatives, issuing condescending remarks regarding their race and intelligence. Cox was antagonistic toward Rainey and others, offering patronizing remarks and false accusations to question the motives of the Republican Party and the ability of Black Members.[44]

Black lawmakers contended that they were entitled to the same "privileges and immunities" as any other Member of Congress. They used these words, drawn from

Article IV, Section 2, of the Constitution and reiterated in the Fourteenth Amendment, to stake their claims to full citizenship. Black Americans had embraced the notion of birthright citizenship well before the Civil War. Congressional debates offered an opportunity for Black Members to act upon these fundamental beliefs about their deeply rooted place in American society. "Why cannot we enjoy the same benefits that are accorded to our white colleagues on this floor?" Rainey asked the House. "We are here enacting laws for the country and casting votes upon important questions; we have been sent here by the suffrages of the people." Representative James T. Rapier of Alabama noted that within the House Chamber, he was "the peer of the proudest," but on a steamboat he was treated with contempt.[45]

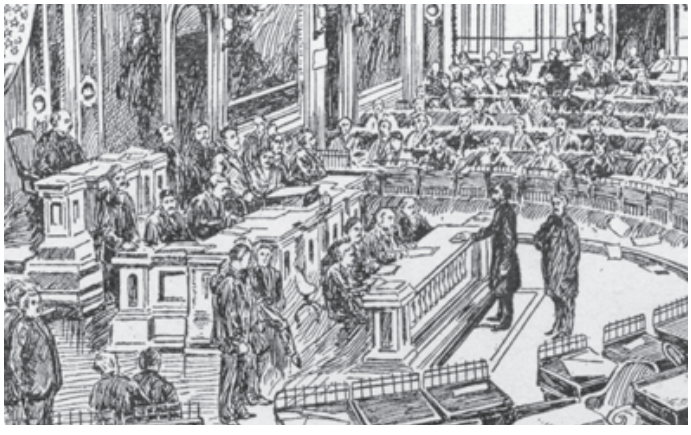
Black Members benefited from the rules of each chamber to demonstrate their status as equals in Congress. Republican control of the House and the Senate afforded several Black Members the opportunity to preside over congressional proceedings during this period. On April 29, 1874, Speaker Blaine gave Rainey the honor of becoming the first Black Member to preside over the House. Rainey's presence on the rostrum symbolized the pace of change on Capitol Hill at the time. "A Liberated Slave in the Speaker's Chair," the *New York Herald* wrote the day after Rainey presided during debate on an appropriations bill funding the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Nearly five years later, on February 14, 1879, Blanche Bruce became the first Black Senator to preside over that chamber during a debate on legislation to bar Chinese immigrants from the United States. The *Chicago Tribune* praised Bruce for presiding "with marked dignity and grace."[46]

On January 11, 1883, Robert Smalls became the second Black Representative to preside over the House, doing so during debate on a bill to encourage and regulate American shipping. His experience was not extensively covered in the press, though one correspondent recorded a brief conversation between Smalls and a passenger on a Washington streetcar a few days later. The passenger was intent on praising the way Smalls preserved order in the proceedings from the rostrum. Smalls's response hinted at the way the rules of the House had the potential to shape interactions between White and Black Members on the floor. Holding the gavel meant that Smalls had significant power but that he could only use it to reprimand those who violated the rules. "White men don't like to be ordered by a colored man to be quiet," Smalls noted. "That is why they kept quiet." The House Rules ensured deference to the occupant of the rostrum during debate, but their jurisdiction ended at the chamber doors.[47]

Legislative Interests

Black lawmakers introduced measures designed to resolve pressing problems in their districts, facilitate public infrastructure development, and bring material improvements to the lives of their constituents. Ultimately, however, the small number of Black lawmakers in each Congress lacked the power to act collectively to drive legislation through each chamber. Most Black Members introduced bills in the House or the Senate only to have them die in committee. But when examined in aggregate, these proposals help illustrate their larger legislative agenda.

Many of the measures Black Members introduced were private bills—legislation intended for the benefit or relief of a specific person or institution. Focus on private legislation was common for Members during this period; this class of legislation made up more than half of the measures passed by Congress between 1869 and 1901. At the time, private bills were the primary method by which Members of Congress aided constituents in making small claims against the federal government, most often collecting federal pensions, correcting military records, and providing monetary "relief" to a constituent or their family for the loss of goods or services or personal hardship. This was especially the case for veterans or the families of veterans, particularly for pensions



In a difficult campaign for the House in 1888, John M. Langston of Virginia lost to his opponent Edward Carrington Venable by 641 votes. However, Langston contested the election results and was seated in the Republican-controlled House in 1890. This sketch depicts Langston taking the oath of office in the well of the House after Democrats left the chamber in protest.

John Mercer Langston, *From the Virginia Plantation to the National Capital* (Hartford, CT: American Publishing Company, 1894)

for former soldiers, including Black soldiers who served in all-Black regiments of the Union Army.[48]

Members of Congress also received petitions and memorials which they entered into the *Congressional Record*. Some were related to relief on an individual basis, such as requests for monetary compensation or for the passage of particular legislation regarding an issue important in their congressional district or state. Those submitted by Black Members provide a window into the political agenda of Black communities across the nation during this period. They called for the funding of schools, new legislation important to a state or district, and federal action to defend African-American rights.[49]

Many of the measures introduced by Black Members addressed the interests of their congressional district. Black lawmakers sought ways to appropriate funds for infrastructure projects, such as public buildings, port expansion, and road and railroad development. Several introduced bills to create post offices. Black Members frequently tried to shape river and harbor bills, with the goal of allocating money to dredge shipping channels or for engineers to secure flood plains. In 1874, James Rapier proposed a bill to make the city of Montgomery, Alabama, a federal customs collections site and fund the salary of a customs collector. This was one of the few bills introduced by a Black Representative and successfully passed into law.[50]



Congress established the Freedman's Bank in 1865 to provide banking services to formerly enslaved people, but rampant corruption and mismanagement depleted the bank's $57 million in deposits, forcing it to close a decade later. This wood-carved print depicts the Freedman's Savings Bank at Pennsylvania Avenue and Madison Place, in northwest Washington, DC.

Image courtesy of the Library of Congress

Several Black Members recognized Congress's vital role in commemorating historic places and events. In 1874, Rainey urged the House to provide funding for the preservation of Fort Sumter and Fort Moultrie in Charleston Harbor because of their significant "historical associations" with the Civil War. Josiah Walls spoke on the planning of the 1876 U.S. centennial celebration, describing the bonds of "common citizenship" that united the nation. Thomas E. Miller of South Carolina proposed a monument for Black Union soldiers in 1890. Henry Plummer Cheatham of North Carolina introduced two bills related to Black history in the 52nd Congress (1891–1893). The first authorized the publication of a history of African-American soldiers in the Civil War. He also proposed appropriating funds to produce a history of the "moral, intellectual, and industrial progress of the colored people of the United States of African descent" following the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863. Cheatham hoped to have this 30-year study exhibited at the highly-anticipated Chicago World's Fair in 1893. Ultimately, however, none of these measures became law.[51]

Black Members closely observed the fate of the Freedman's Savings and Trust Company, also known as the Freedman's Bank. Congress had chartered the bank in 1865 to bolster Black Americans' pursuit of economic freedom in the immediate aftermath of emancipation. The Freedman's Bank was immensely popular, providing banking services to formerly enslaved people as well as African Americans who were free before the war and some White depositors.[52]

Risky loans and questionable management practices, along with the financial panic of 1873, depleted the bank's deposits, causing it to fail in 1874. Black Members, some of whom had invested in the bank themselves, attempted to intervene to secure payments to depositors, many of whom were at risk of losing their remaining savings. In 1875, Rainey spoke on the House Floor in defense of the interests of depositors, calling for a proper accounting of the bank's assets and urging Congress to ensure its remaining liquidity was distributed properly.[53]

During the last decades of the nineteenth century, Black Members introduced legislation designed to provide relief to the bank's depositors and distribute at least a portion of their savings. Even Michael Patrick O'Connor, a White Democrat from Beaufort, South Carolina—Robert Smalls's hometown—introduced a bill for relief of the bank's depositors in 1879, demonstrating the significance of this issue to Representatives serving districts with Black voters. None became law, however. Ultimately, few depositors received compensation despite repeated proposals from both Black and White Members.[54]

Committee Service

Black Members were assigned to a range of standing committees during this period but found few opportunities to drive a legislative agenda. Even during the early 1870s, when Black Members had Radical allies in the House, they did not receive assignments to the House's most powerful committees, including Ways and Means, Judiciary, and Appropriations. The House and Senate committees with jurisdiction over education and labor were the most frequent appointments for Black Members. In the House, four Black Representatives served on the influential Agriculture Committee. The brevity of African-American careers during this era meant that they did not accumulate the seniority and influence needed to acquire the most desirable committee assignments.[55]

The collapse of the Freedman's Bank resulted in two congressional investigations in which Black Members played significant roles in committee proceedings for the first time. In 1876, the House established a Select Committee on the Freedman's Bank and assigned Rainey to the committee to help investigate why the bank failed and secure restitution for depositors. In accepting this position, Rainey became one of the first Black Members to fully participate in committee hearings as a panelist, directing pointed questions to witnesses to probe the basis of the bank's collapse.[56]

In 1879, another investigation was led by Senator Blanche Bruce, who was appointed chair of the Senate Select Committee on the Freedman's Bank. Two years earlier, Bruce became the first Black Senator to chair a select committee when he was appointed head of the Select Committee on Levees of the Mississippi River, which oversaw development of the river's delta region. Although Democrats controlled the 46th Congress (1879–1881), Bruce was appointed chair of the Select Committee on the Freedman's Bank despite serving in the minority. Still, no African-American Member during this era chaired a standing committee in the House or Senate.[57]



Senator Blanche Bruce served from 1875 to 1881 and was the first African American to complete a full six-year term in the chamber. He was also the first Black Member to chair a select committee.

Image courtesy of the Library of Congress

Joseph Rainey earned accolades for his work on the Joint Committee on Enrolled Bills, where he collaborated with House clerks and his Senate colleagues to ensure accuracy in every measure considered by both chambers of Congress. The procedural expertise Rainey developed in this role was not a path to power on Capitol Hill, however. Where Congress's true power lay—behind the closed doors of committee meetings and markup sessions—African-American Members, despite their tireless efforts, had limited influence and their legislative hopes were routinely left unfulfilled. In this way, Black Members shared a common experience with those of most Representatives and Senators with short careers on Capitol Hill. While middling committee assignments may have hindered the personal legislative agendas of most Black Members, debate on the House Floor offered the possibility for substantial contributions to significant legislation. Black Members seized these opportunities to act.[58]



In this 1872 print "Visit of the Ku-Klux," Frank Bellew portrays the terror caused by the Ku Klux Klan. As an African-American woman cooks at home with her children, hooded Klansmen approach, and one points a rifle at the family.

Image courtesy of the Library of Congress

IN PURSUIT OF "PRACTICAL FREEDOM"

On January 5, 1874, Representative Alonzo Ransier spoke on the House Floor for the first time. Ransier had lived the changes wrought by the war and Reconstruction. He had been a member of the delegation that lobbied President Johnson and Congress in 1866, participated in his state's constitutional convention in 1868, was elected to the state legislature, and also was elected as the first Black lieutenant governor of South Carolina. Yet he recognized the difficulties African Americans continued to face in his home state. He hoped to see an improved civil rights bill signed into law to fortify, expand, and guarantee the rights ostensibly protected by the federal government during Reconstruction.

During his remarks in 1874, Ransier lamented the burgeoning strength of White supremacists in southern state and local governments. He warned of the potency with which Democrats wielded the doctrine of states' rights against African Americans and Republicans in the South, creating a society insulated from the powers of the federal government. For Ransier and his Black colleagues, it was incumbent on Congress to create a coordinated response to injustice—even beyond the South. Ransier observed that "in very many, if not in all of the States of the Union, there is no practical freedom" for African Americans, "nor would there be any worth talking about if left to the States to regulate." It was the "solemn duty" of Congress, he added, to pass necessary legislation "for a full and complete remedy as is demanded by the situation."[59]

Ransier's speech distilled a larger agenda shared by each Black lawmaker, evidenced in their many speeches during debate. During Reconstruction, Black Members used their voices on the floor to shape policy and leave a historical record of their efforts. When they could, African-American Representatives and Senators provided firsthand accounts of civil rights abuses and advocated for corrective legislation. They embraced opportunities to advocate for strong federal legislation that directly affected the lives of freed people and all African Americans, especially in support of bills designed to guarantee the civil and political rights of Black Americans.

The comments of Black Members on these measures provide a window into an attempt to forge a transformative agenda in the national legislature and reach beyond their congressional districts. Richard H. Cain of South Carolina regularly referred to the "five million people for whom I speak," a reference to the total African-American population in the United States in the 1870s. Though Robert Elliott represented citizens within the boundaries of the Third District of South Carolina, he described his constituency as "restricted by no territorial limit." And Joseph Rainey told his colleagues on the House Floor that he represented "the outraged and oppressed negro population of this country, those I may strictly call my constituency."[60]

On the House Floor, Black Members described the constitutional rights of U.S. citizens in broad terms—with some glaring omissions. Few voiced support for voting rights for women, for example, and throughout this period, Congress largely disregarded measures designed to secure women's rights. The Fourteenth Amendment asserted that only "male citizens" could vote, explicitly adding gender to the Constitution for the first time. In Congress, Black Members were rarely asked to take a position on this issue; many rooted their understanding of individual rights in contemporary notions of "manhood," and largely avoided the rights of women in debate. In January 1871, Jefferson Long voted for and Rainey voted against a bill to grant women suffrage in the District of Columbia. Neither Representative commented on the vote, but other Black Members spoke about extending rights to women. In 1874, Cain appealed for educational opportunities for "black men and black women" in the South. And that year, Ransier questioned whether the U.S. government could claim "to rest upon the 'consent of the governed,'" if all citizens—men

and women alike—were not granted suffrage. "And may the day be not far distant," Ransier declared, "when American citizenship in civil and political rights and public privileges shall cover not only those of our sex, but those of the opposite one also."[61]

Black Members often promoted an expansive vision of human rights for their day. This was a common refrain of Senator Charles Sumner, for whom a central tenet of Reconstruction was protecting the "human rights" of freed people. The Massachusetts Senator deployed this term almost interchangeably with "equal rights" and "the rights of man." Black Members embraced this approach and often looked abroad to find inspiration for their pursuit of human rights.[62]

James Rapier, who had lived in Canada and traveled to Europe, told his colleagues that distinctions of color faded away as soon as he stepped onto the deck of a ship scheduled to leave an American port. Amid their urgent calls to action, Black Members also embraced allusions to revolutionary movements around the globe, historic slave uprisings, and the bravery of African-American soldiers in the Civil War. They decried the slow pace of change and hailed those with the revolutionary spirit to struggle for their rights. Rainey praised the Haitian revolutionary Toussaint Louverture and the resistance of the Zulus against British forces in 1879 in what is today South Africa. Josiah Walls printed a lengthy speech backing the Cuban independence movement in January 1874, calling on the federal government to support an effort he likened to the American struggle for self-determination in 1776. Blanche Bruce opposed a measure excluding Chinese immigrants in 1879, informing his colleagues that he had "confidence in the strength and assimilative power of our institutions," and he rejected the notion that this particular group of immigrants would be detrimental to American society. He reminded his colleagues that Black Americans "but a few years ago were considered essentially disqualified from enjoying the privileges and immunities of American citizenship."[63]

In the Constitution, Black Members found the instrument that could make these dreams of equality a reality. By amending—and upholding—the Constitution, Black Members identified a route for change. They enthusiastically embraced the founding document, which they read as a clear statement of the power of the federal government to act. Federal legislation was the means to ensure equality when states ignored the needs of their citizens, providing an active guarantor of the many individual freedoms promised by the American system. The power to amend the Constitution when necessary, Walls said in 1875, was "the genius of our American ideas of civilization."[64]

"Protect the Loyal Men of the South"

On March 4, 1871, the 42nd Congress convened with a clear agenda and a sense of urgency conveyed by an official proclamation from President Ulysses S. Grant. Throughout the southern states, organized White vigilantes had been brutally attacking anyone sympathetic to the Republican Party, including voters, officeholders, and candidates on the campaign trail. With state and local governments in the region indifferent to the violence or incapable of responding, Grant urged Congress to pass legislation to protect the rights of individuals in the South.[65]

The previous Congress had passed two laws in response to this burgeoning crisis. The first was designed to prohibit state officials from discriminating against voters based on race and the second to provide additional federal oversight of elections. On March 28, 1871, Samuel Shellabarger of Ohio introduced a third measure in this series of laws known as the Enforcement Acts. Later referred to as the Ku Klux Klan Act of 1871, the bill enabled the federal government to use the full extent of its power to quell the prevailing lawlessness in the South and protect the rights of individuals. To ensure equal protection, federal law enforcement was empowered to intervene in southern states,



On April 20, 1871, President Ulysses S. Grant, shown with U.S. Secretary of the Navy George M. Robeson and presidential advisor General Horace Porter in this *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* print, signed into law the third Enforcement Act, also known as the Ku Klux Klan Act, which empowered the federal government to act decisively to guarantee all citizens of the United States the rights afforded by the Constitution and to provide equal protection under the law.

Image courtesy of the Library of Congress

and federal district attorneys could prosecute the Klan under federal law. Congress also provided the President with the power to suspend the writ of habeas corpus and to send federal troops to intervene in unruly counties in the South.[66]

Black lawmakers welcomed this expansive vision of federal power. On April 1, Robert Elliott declared the bill necessary because of "the present posture of affairs in the southern states." Elliott challenged those who claimed the bill was unconstitutional, defending its provisions as legally compatible with the Constitution and pointing to examples of Klan violence in his district.[67]

Elliott emphasized that the Constitution created a government for "securing the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity." He noted that Article IV, Section 4, begins: "The United States shall guarantee to every State in this Union a Republican Form of Government." This mandate, Elliott said, compelled the federal government to act; it could not remain a "passive observer" as citizens were robbed of "the blessings of liberty." He denounced those perpetrating the violent attacks on African Americans in the South for seeking "to defeat the ballot with the bullet and other coercive means."[68]

Democratic opponents of the bill warned of the "centralization" of federal power and foretold of irreparable damage to states' rights under the Constitution. Rainey joined Elliott in rejecting this argument. Calling on the federal government to act, Rainey told the House of the indifference of local law enforcement and the lack of justice in state and local courts. Rainey reminded his colleagues that the Constitution provided "protection to the humblest citizen, without regard to rank, creed, or color." It was designed to be a "bulwark of freedom" protecting "inalienable rights" for all against "foreign invasion and domestic violence." This was an essential function of any system of government, Rainey said. "Tell me nothing of a constitution which fails to shelter beneath its rightful power the people of a country!"[69]

For the first time, African-American Representatives in the House were able to speak as advocates for significant legislation designed to protect the rights of African-American citizens. All five Black Members of the House supported the bill as it moved towards passage in the chamber. President Grant signed it into law on April 20, 1871.[70]

In October 1871, Grant declared a "condition of lawlessness" in nine South Carolina counties, suspended the writ of habeas corpus, and dispatched federal troops to the region. Many Klansmen fled the state as hundreds were arrested and several dozen brought to trial and sentenced to prison by majority-Black juries. This show of governmental force smashed the Klan. With the terror organization in disarray, the South Carolina counties where it operated experienced a drastic decline in violence in the early 1870s. Four of the nine counties were represented by Rainey and Elliott, while the other five were in Republican Representative Alexander Stuart Wallace's Fourth District. For Elliott and his Black colleagues, this decisive action was necessary to uphold the principles upon which the U.S. government was founded. "If you cannot now protect the loyal men of the South," Elliott warned in April 1871, "then have the loyal people of this great Republic done and suffered much in vain, and your free Constitution is a mockery and a snare."[71]

Amnesty Act of 1872

Loyalty was at the heart of congressional debates in the transitional decade of the 1870s. Immediately following the Civil War, Radical Republicans wanted to prevent former Confederates from ever serving in public office. But President Johnson had issued pardons for some former Confederates, and congressional Democrats urged new legislation to extend amnesty to nearly everyone who took up arms against the United States.

In the 41st and 42nd Congresses, several bills were introduced to address the "political disabilities" imposed on participants in the rebellion. The bill debated in early 1872 offered near blanket amnesty; only former federal officeholders and military personnel who resigned their positions to join the Confederacy were ineligible for what amounted to a large public pardon.[72]

Black Members were adamant that passage of any amnesty bill should be contingent on support for a new civil rights bill. In 1870, Senator Sumner introduced a broad civil rights bill to empower the federal government to guarantee equal access to public accommodations, transportation, schools, churches, and cemeteries. Sumner's bill was met with resistance in the 41st and 42nd Congresses and referred to the Judiciary Committee each time. In the House, Republicans introduced similar legislation to no avail. Both the Senate and House efforts were framed as amending, clarifying, and strengthening the 1866 civil rights bill.[73]

Black Representatives recognized the crucial role new civil rights legislation could play in solidifying the gains of Reconstruction and made the bill central to the debate over amnesty. Removing the "political disabilities" of former

Confederates while allowing outright discrimination against African Americans was a galling act of treachery in the eyes of Black Members. Rainey was among those who supported amnesty provided that the House reciprocate by considering a new civil rights bill. Robert De Large considered amnesty the path to cooperation in a new postwar South. He asked his colleagues if they believed those still facing restrictions would have any incentive to use "their influence and best endeavors for the preservation of the public peace, when they have nothing to look for politically in the future?"[74]

Not all Black Members agreed with this transactional act of reconciliation, however. During his brief term in office near the end of the 41st Congress, Representative Jefferson Long objected to a bill modifying the "test oath" for those who were still confined by "political disabilities," which would provide those who participated in the rebellion a way to circumvent the strict terms of the then mandated loyalty oath for those serving in elected office. He wanted Congress to solidify Black rights in the South before creating new opportunities for former Confederates. On February 1, 1871, Long delivered the first speech by a Black Representative on the House Floor. He described the prevailing lawlessness in his home state, where White vigilantes assaulted and murdered "loyal men" with impunity. Long demanded that the oath be maintained to prevent those he called "disloyal men" from returning to power in Georgia. Otherwise, he warned, "I venture to prophesy you will again have trouble from the very same men who gave you trouble before."[75]

The amnesty bill that passed by a voice vote in May 1872 attracted Republican support in Congress after party leadership decided it would help President Grant win re-election that fall. The incumbent Grant faced a potential challenge from Horace Greeley and the Liberal Republican movement, which was attempting to splinter the ranks of the Republican Party by objecting to most of the policies associated with Reconstruction and calling for universal amnesty.[76]

Black Members recognized the party imperatives at play yet firmly stated their reservations about codifying this drastic change in law without an accompanying civil rights bill. They were determined to use government action to make justice a reality, prioritizing the rights of those loyal to the U.S. government, not those who engaged in violent rebellion.

Education as a Civil Right

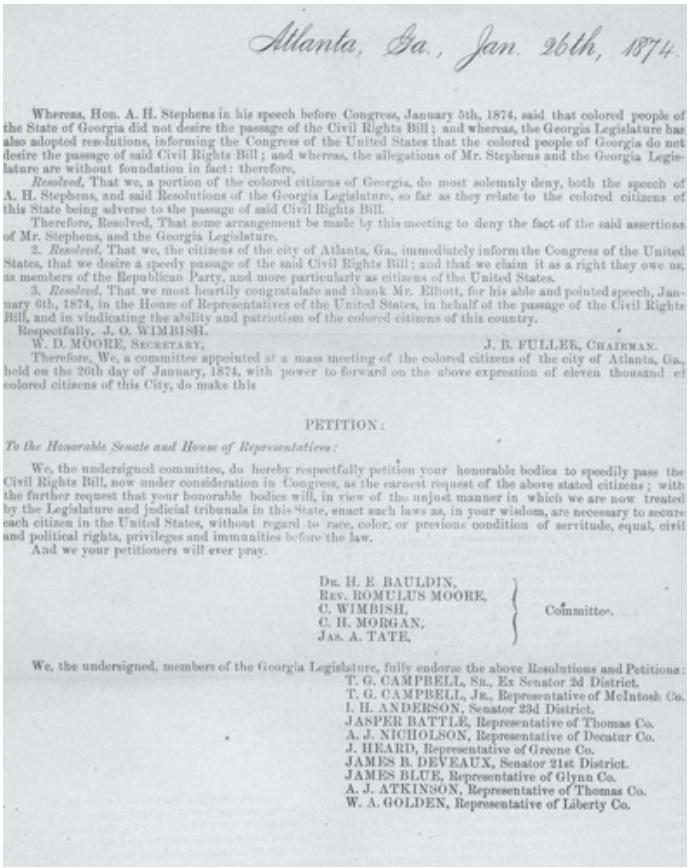
For African Americans—and especially freed people living in southern states—federal legislation to fund and establish a national education system was a leading priority. Before the Civil War, southern states barred Black students from attending public schools or from receiving any form of instruction. Though the Freedmen's Bureau established thousands of schools in the early years of Reconstruction, many Black students still lacked access to formal education. Those institutions that did exist were largely underfunded, isolated, and struggled to serve the needs of Black communities across the South.[77]

Senator Hiram Revels was the first to speak on this matter in February 1871, when he opposed an amendment to a bill on public education in the District of Columbia that would have segregated schools based on race. For Revels, equal access to education was a fundamental right for all citizens. If Congress adopted the amendment, he said, the law "will increase that prejudice which is now fearfully great against" Black Americans—and potentially lead to further restrictions, as "the next step may be to ask Congress to prevent them from riding in the street cars, or something like that."[78]

Black Members were adamant that the federal government should fund public education and take steps to ensure equal access to schools regardless of race. They backed initiatives that used federal expenditures to expand public education throughout the nation, such as a bill to fund schools through the sale of federally owned land in the South and West. But even congressional allies considered such a program controversial. Opponents of the idea feared federal funding for schools would impede states' prerogatives, and they blocked the efforts by Black Members to enact such legislation. On the House Floor in 1872, Josiah Walls recounted a brief history of the ways states in the antebellum South zealously restricted the rights of enslaved African Americans to access education. He told his colleagues that the Democratic Party in the South would never agree to build a truly universal education system, as they "know that no educated people can be enslaved. They know that no educated people can be robbed of their labor." For Walls, the federal government was "the guardian of the liberties of all its subjects" and had the responsibility to provide funding for African-American education in the South if the states refused to act.[79]

For many in the House and Senate, this debate over the role of government was central to the fate of Reconstruction. Black Members representing districts from across the South knew that their legislative interests were better served when the federal government was willing to

act to protect the rights of individuals. Advocates for states' rights, however, rejected any encroachment upon the powers of the states. But for Republicans such as Benjamin Franklin Butler of Massachusetts, the Constitution provided the means by which Congress could—and should—intervene to guarantee the rights of individuals and ensure equal protection. A flamboyant former Democrat who had supported the doctrine of states' rights before the Civil War, Butler changed his party allegiance and his attitude toward African Americans while serving as a brigadier general in the U.S. Army, where he had witnessed the sacrifice of Black soldiers on the battlefield. "State rights are one thing and State wrongs are another," Butler advised his southern colleagues in 1873, "and State wrongs must yield to the Constitution of the United States." Black Members embraced this understanding of the role of the federal government and used their place on the House Floor to make these ideas central to the prolonged debate over civil rights legislation. For the next two years, the prospect of passing a new civil rights bill consumed Congress and proved pivotal in the history of Reconstruction.[80]



Atlanta, Ga., Jan. 26th, 1874.

Whereas, Hon. A. H. Stephens in his speech before Congress, January 5th, 1874, said that colored people of the State of Georgia did not desire the passage of the Civil Rights Bill; and whereas, the Georgia Legislature has also adopted resolutions, informing the Congress of the United States that the colored people of Georgia do not desire the passage of said Civil Rights Bill; and whereas, the allegations of Mr. Stephens and the Georgia Legislature are without foundation in fact: therefore,

Resolved, That we, a portion of the colored citizens of Georgia, do most solemnly deny, both the speech of A. H. Stephens, and said Resolutions of the Georgia Legislature, so far as they relate to the colored citizens of this State being adverse to the passage of said Civil Rights Bill.

Therefore, Resolved, That some arrangement be made by this meeting to deny the fact of the said assertions of Mr. Stephens, and the Georgia Legislature.

2. *Resolved*, That we, the citizens of the city of Atlanta, Ga., immediately inform the Congress of the United States, that we desire a speedy passage of the said Civil Rights Bill; and that we claim it as a right they owe us, as members of the Republican Party, and more particularly as citizens of the United States.

3. *Resolved*, That we most heartily congratulate and thank Mr. Elliott, for his able and pointed speech, January 6th, 1874, in the House of Representatives of the United States, in behalf of the passage of the Civil Rights Bill, and in vindicating the ability and patriotism of the colored citizens of this country.

Respectfully, J. O. WIMBISH.
W. D. MOORE, SECRETARY. J. B. FULLER, CHAIRMAN.

Therefore, We, a committee appointed at a mass meeting of the colored citizens of the city of Atlanta, Ga., held on the 26th day of January, 1874, with power to forward on the above expression of eleven thousand of colored citizens of this City, do make this

PETITION:

To the Honorable Senate and House of Representatives:

We, the undersigned committee, do hereby respectfully petition your honorable bodies to speedily pass the Civil Rights Bill, now under consideration in Congress, as the earnest request of the above stated citizens; with the further request that your honorable bodies will, in view of the unjust manner in which we are now treated by the Legislature and judicial tribunals in this State, enact such laws as, in your wisdom, are necessary to secure each citizen in the United States, without regard to race, color, or previous condition of servitude, equal, civil and political rights, privileges and immunities before the law.

And we your petitioners will ever pray.

DR. H. E. BAULDIN,
REV. ROMULUS MOORE,
C. WIMBISH,
C. H. MORGAN,
JAS. A. TATE,
} Committee.

We, the undersigned, members of the Georgia Legislature, fully endorse the above Resolutions and Petitions:

T. G. CAMPBELL, Sr., Ex Senator 2d District.
T. G. CAMPBELL, Jr., Representative of McIntosh Co.
I. H. ANDERSON, Senator 23d District.
JASPER BATTLE, Representative of Thomas Co.
A. J. NICHOLSON, Representative of Decatur Co.
J. HEARD, Representative of Greene Co.
JAMES B. DEVEAUX, Senator 21st District.
JAMES BLUE, Representative of Glynn Co.
A. J. ATKINSON, Representative of Thomas Co.
W. A. GOLDEN, Representative of Liberty Co.

This petition, written by "a committee appointed at a mass meeting of the colored citizens of the city of Atlanta, Ga.," urged the House and Senate to pass a civil rights bill in 1874. Petitioners refuted claims made by Georgia Representative Alexander Hamilton Stephens and the Georgia state legislature that African Americans in the state opposed the measure and praised the "able and pointed speech" of Robert Brown Elliott of South Carolina on the House Floor in support of the bill.

Image courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration

Civil Rights Act of 1875

Like clockwork, on December 1, 1873, the Opening Day of the 43rd Congress, Senator Charles Sumner dutifully submitted his civil rights bill. Later that month in the House, Representative Butler initiated 15 months of debate when he introduced H.R. 796, his version of the civil rights bill, which echoed much of Sumner's proposal.[81]

On December 19, Joseph Rainey was the first Black Member to speak on the bill in the new Congress. He stressed that Congress had the power to pass what was referred to at the time as "class legislation," which, in practice, had the effect of providing rights or restrictions differently to diverse groups. Rainey urged the House to assume this responsibility, revise the law, and contribute to making American society more equitable. Black Members repeatedly emphasized that the civil rights bill would not create new restrictions. But in the absence of state and local protections in the South, Congress alone could intervene to rectify this imbalance in the law and guarantee the rights of citizens.[82]

When Butler's bill came to the House Floor in early January, Democrats stood up one by one to denounce the civil rights bill by claiming that it enforced rights beyond the scope of the Constitution; that it usurped the power of the states to regulate public schools; and that it forced southerners to accept what they believed to be unattainable—a multiracial society. They rejected the notion that the bill would merely protect the rights of African Americans. Instead, they insisted the measure would directly inhibit the individual rights of White citizens and undermine longstanding social and economic relationships. Democrat John Brutzman Storm of Pennsylvania declared "the colored people are now in substantial enjoyment of their full rights and privileges granted by the recent amendments to the Constitution," adding, "this bill is thrust upon us now for no other purpose than exciting bad feelings."[83]

Representative Alexander Hamilton Stephens of Georgia, the former vice president of the Confederacy, who had only recently returned to the House after a 14-year absence, spoke on January 5. One of the nation's most notorious defenders of slavery, Stephens framed the debate as a battle between "constitutionalism and centralism" in

a lengthy address covered by major national newspapers. For Stephens, the civil rights bill unnecessarily extended the federal government into the affairs and associations of private individuals and businesses. He called for a return to "constitutionalism," which he claimed was rooted in "the absolute unrestricted right of State self-government in all purely internal municipal affairs."[84]

Black Members, meanwhile, repeatedly invoked the Constitution and the guarantee of equal protection of the law to make the case for the civil rights bill. Alonzo Ransier dismissed those who constantly raised the "bugbear of 'social equality'" to stoke fear and suspicion that personal relationships would no longer remain the preference of individuals. Black Americans, he said, sought to secure "the same privileges and protection meted out to other classes of people in our land." Ransier was joined by Richard Cain, James Rapier, and Rainey who all ardently spoke out in favor of the bill. They appealed to general notions of the rights of American citizens but also emphasized the responsibility of Congress to intervene on behalf of African Americans. Even as southern Democrats denied that railroads, hotels, theaters, and restaurants discriminated against Black customers, African-American Representatives provided vivid anecdotes of personal experiences with racism and segregation in public accommodations as evidence of the need for a civil rights bill.[85]

But it was Robert Elliott's response to Stephens on January 6 that made national headlines. Elliott dismissed Stephens's argument, adding that he refused to take any such legal lessons from someone who had so recently sought "the break up of the Union of these States." While Stephens asserted that there was a distinction between the laws of the states and the rights inscribed in the Constitution, Elliott stated that "all discrimination, all denial of equality before the law, all denial of the equal protection of the laws, whether State or national laws, is forbidden" by the Fourteenth Amendment. And the Reconstruction Amendments, he reminded his opponent, "invest Congress with the power to protect the citizen in his civil and political rights." This bill, Elliott said, would do just that by forming "the cap-stone of that temple of liberty," surpassing "the highest hopes of those who, in the name of equal, impartial, and universal liberty, laid the foundation stones."[86]

A few months later, as Sumner lay dying, the old Senator allegedly urged Representative George Hoar to ensure the passage of the civil rights bill. His bill passed the Senate in May and was referred to the House Judiciary Committee in June.[87]



This 1874 print, "The Shackle Broken–by the Genius of Freedom," memorializes a defining moment in Robert Elliott's congressional career, his January 6, 1874, speech in support of the Civil Rights Act.

Image courtesy of the Library of Congress

James Rapier made an urgent appeal for the House to pass the bill. He argued that the existence of discriminatory state laws and practices undermined the Constitution itself. How could he be a Member of the House of Representatives and not enjoy equal protection of the law? For Rapier, the law must be passed to resolve his own seemingly contradictory status: "either I am a man or I am not a man. If one, I am entitled to all the rights, privileges, and immunities common to any other class in this country; if not a man, I have no right to vote, no right to a seat here upon this floor; or if I am tolerated here, it is in violation of the Constitution of our country."[88]

The 1874 midterm elections were a turning point for the civil rights bill in the House. Republicans lost control of the chamber for the first time since before the Civil War. The large GOP majority in the House during the 43rd Congress gave way to a 79-Member Democratic advantage in the 44th Congress. The extensive losses were blamed on a financial panic in 1873, along with multiple charges of corruption in President Grant's administration. But many on Capitol Hill, including top House Republican James A. Garfield of Ohio, were wary that "a general apathy among the people" prevailed when it came to civil rights and the ongoing process of Reconstruction. Even the bill's sponsor in the House, Benjamin Butler, was voted out of office in 1874. On the other hand, the 43rd Congress still had months before it was required to adjourn, and the electoral loss rallied Republican

Representatives, who returned to begin the second session on December 7, 1874, determined not to adjourn without passing some form of civil rights legislation.[89]

The sticking point on the final version of the civil rights bill became the section concerning public education. Opponents warned that integrated, federally funded schools would undermine the educational system, such that it existed, throughout the South. Black Members vigorously defended the education component of the legislation. Rainey would later point out in debate that "the only ground upon which these privileges and immunities are withheld," he said, "is because of complexional differences." John Lynch contended that increased federal funding for education was another way to realize equality in everyday life: "All share its benefits alike," he said.[90]

After a lengthy debate and multiple attempts to amend the legislation, however, the final version of the civil rights bill omitted all references to public education, as well as provisions ending discrimination in churches and cemeteries. These alterations proved decisive, and the bill passed the House and Senate in February before President Grant signed it into law on March 1, 1875, only two days before the end of the Congress. It was a partial victory. The law prohibited discrimination in juries, transportation, and public accommodations but also lacked effective enforcement power.[91]

The fact that Republicans, who within days would be relegated to minority status, managed to steer such a bill through the chamber was an achievement. But in their desperation to pass the measure, Republicans had left the Civil Rights Act of 1875 in such a weakened state that it did little to impede the creation of an insidious system of segregation in the South. Moreover, the limited protection that the legislation did afford would soon be stripped by the Supreme Court.

THE DEMISE OF RECONSTRUCTION

The 1874 elections signaled a turning point in the history of Reconstruction. Robert Elliott anticipated that an impending struggle for control of state governments was going to determine the future of the South. In early 1874, he turned his attention away from Capitol Hill, resigning his seat in the U.S. House to pursue a state house seat back in his home state of South Carolina. He became speaker of the state house later that year and worked to establish a solid Republican government in South Carolina, aided by a majority-Black state legislature still held by Republicans.[92]

Across the South in the summer and fall of 1874, Black and Republican voters faced unending physical violence and intimidation from Democrats intent on reasserting their control of the region's state and local governments, no matter the means. Black Members from the South, along with their Republican colleagues, also encountered dangerous conditions. In his unsuccessful re-election bid that fall, James Rapier and his backers faced stolen and destroyed ballot boxes, bribery, fraudulent vote counts, armed intimidation, and violence in his southeastern Alabama district.[93]

A congressional investigation into the 1874 elections in Alabama, coupled with other investigations into White violence in the South, had led Republican Members to push for federal legislation designed to ensure the integrity of elections across the region. As a result, in 1875 a proposed federal elections bill was drafted to preserve access to the polls in the South. Opponents quickly criticized the proposal as federal overreach. Speaker Blaine took the extraordinary step of opposing the measure during debate on the floor. According to John Lynch, who supported the bill and thought federal action was necessary, Blaine claimed that the bill endangered Republican chances in the 1876 election. Ultimately, the bill passed the House after a contentious debate but was abandoned in the Senate.[94]

Lynch defied the odds and won re-election to the 44th Congress even as Mississippi Democrats swept most other offices. Lynch described local Democratic clubs as having been converted into "armed military companies" that raided Republican meetings. Despite Bruce's appointment to the Senate, Mississippi reverted to Democratic control. Former Mississippi Senator Hiram Revels accused Republicans of corruption in administering the state government and cited these actions as the reason for the party's losses at the polls. In testimony before a Senate committee, he was one of the few witnesses to state that in his home county, Mississippi's Election Day was free of violence and controversy. Senator Bruce, meanwhile, told his colleagues on the Senate Floor that Mississippi's elections had been plagued by "flagrant wrongs," orchestrated by White Democrats who embraced "a violent method for political supremacy." He warned that election violence was "dangerous to the integrity of our free institutions."[95]

The 1876 elections also featured a presidential contest, but when an inconclusive count in the Electoral College produced no candidate with a majority, Congress created a special commission to resolve the crisis. Disputed state

elections in South Carolina and Louisiana produced rival state governments, while Florida's previously certified election results were altered by the new Democratic administration elected in 1876. In Oregon, a dispute over an elector's qualifications put one Electoral College vote in question. The commission's slim Republican majority allocated the disputed electoral votes to Republican Rutherford B. Hayes. During his one term in office, however, Hayes turned the attention of the federal government away from the South, effectively ending Reconstruction by reducing the number of federal troops in the region and doing little to protect the civil and political rights of African Americans.[96]

"Freedom as a Mere Name and Sham"

During the 1870s, the Democratic Party recaptured local and state governments across the South, largely through the use of violence and other means to stop African Americans from voting and undermine the Republican Party. White supremacists referred to this process as the "redemption" of the former Confederate states.

By 1879, as conditions worsened in the South, many African Americans sought a way out of the region. Rainey and other former Black Members were vocal in their support for emigration. In an interview with a reporter from the *New-York Tribune*, Rainey outlined the political and economic obstacles confronting Black communities across the former Confederacy. Speaking four months after he left office in March 1879, Rainey still carried a satchel full of letters he had received from South Carolina residents that described these conditions in stark terms. Rainey noted that Black Americans' concentration in the South gave the region more seats in Congress, but their needs were rarely addressed on Capitol Hill. To Rainey, southern states were "defrauding the other parts of the country" by refusing to work on behalf of all their citizens. Under these circumstances, Rainey added, African Americans considered "freedom as a mere name and sham."[97]

At the time, Rainey's views were embraced by many Black Americans who had departed the region for Kansas and other midwestern areas. The U.S. Senate was sufficiently interested in these developments to form a select panel to investigate. A three-part Senate report compiled the results of hearings held in 1879 and 1880. Questions pursued the extent to which Black Americans were being driven out of the South, with Senators of both parties inquiring about wages, land ownership, political violence, and increasing discrimination faced by Black Americans in southern states.[98]

In March 1880, former Representative James Rapier appeared before the committee to comment on the social, economic, and political conditions in Alabama at the time. Rapier's family had significant financial resources before the Civil War, and he had returned to Lowndes County, Alabama, to invest his money in agriculture and to serve as a collector of internal revenue. He offered the Senate panel an extensive description of the exploitative system of sharecropping that trapped many in poverty and went on to outline his own process for providing opportunities to Black farmers. Rapier claimed that he rented land and offered more reasonable rates of interest on securing food and supplies to farmers. Rapier urged African Americans to flee the region, as he knew that most sharecroppers could not find such favorable terms.[99]

The 47th Congress began with no Black Members serving in the House or Senate. Several House candidates were prepared to contest election losses, however. John Lynch and Robert Smalls were eventually able to use the contested election process to wrest seats from Democrats who claimed victory at the polls. Their good fortune was not entirely the result of partisan goodwill, however, as two other Black candidates were unsuccessful in contesting their election losses. In addition to Lynch and Smalls, the only other Black Members to serve in Congress during the 1880s were two North Carolina Representatives, James O'Hara, who served



The Electoral Commission comprising House Members, Senators, and Supreme Court Justices investigated the disputed Electoral College ballots from four states after the 1876 presidential election. The commission, depicted here meeting by candlelight in the Old Supreme Court Chamber in the Capitol, awarded all the disputed ballots to Republican Rutherford B. Hayes, who became President by a single electoral vote.

Image courtesy of the Library of Congress

from 1883 to 1887, and Henry Plummer Cheatham, who was elected to the first of two terms in in the House in 1888.[100]

Congress continued to collect information regarding the widespread efforts to limit Black voting rights and destroy the Republican Party in the South during the 1880s. The Senate held occasional investigations into violence and discrimination, particularly in relation to elections in the South. The House Committee on Elections, meanwhile, compiled evidence of violence and intimidation in reports on contested elections.[101]

A series of Supreme Court decisions from 1873 to 1883 also steadily eroded the legal gains of Reconstruction. The civil rights legislation and the constitutional amendments that formed the foundation for Radical Reconstruction were repeatedly challenged in court. In 10 years, the Supreme Court negated the effectiveness of civil rights legislation and circumscribed the power of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments. This began with the 1873 decision in the *Slaughterhouse Cases*. Louisiana butchers challenged a state law that combined the state's slaughterhouses into one private company for public health reasons. The butchers claimed protection under the Fourteenth Amendment, viewing this as a violation of their constitutional rights. The Supreme Court eventually ruled that the issue would need to be resolved at the state level because the Fourteenth Amendment applied only to rights protected by national, not state, citizenship—a significant precedent that prevented an expansive reading of federal power to protect the rights of African Americans.[102]



Pictured here with his wife Elizabeth and son Raphael, James E. O'Hara of North Carolina was the only Black Member on the first day of the 48th Congress (1883–1885).

Image courtesy of the Hanna Holborn Gray Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library

The 1876 Supreme Court decision in *United States v. Cruikshank* further limited the power of the federal government by overturning the convictions of the perpetrators of the 1873 Colfax, Louisiana, massacre, in which dozens of Black residents were murdered at a local courthouse. The court ruled that the charges of murder and conspiracy were under the jurisdiction of the states, rather than the federal government, leaving Black Americans and others targeted for political violence to seek redress from southern state governments and local law enforcement.[103]

The weakened Civil Rights Act of 1875 had also proved difficult to enforce. Although the law broadened federal power to enforce equal treatment, the government lacked the power to initiate civil rights lawsuits on its own. This required the aggrieved party to take the initial step of filing a lawsuit—a legal and financial hurdle for many African Americans. The constant threat of violence, intimidation, and job loss in the South deterred many from ever taking legal action under the law. In 1883, the Supreme Court struck down the provisions in the law prohibiting discrimination by private businesses in the *Civil Rights Cases*, again emphasizing that the federal courts only had jurisdiction over discriminatory practices by the states.[104]

These Supreme Court decisions severely curtailed the federal government's efforts to guarantee the rights of the millions of formerly enslaved men and women. As a result, White Democrats in the South applied the states' rights doctrine with impunity. Black communities found redress extremely unlikely in this context.

A Crossroads on Capitol Hill

The two Black Representatives serving in the 48th and 49th Congresses (1883–1887), James O'Hara and Robert Smalls, attempted to reassert the federal government's power to enforce civil rights laws. When a proposed bill to establish an interstate commerce board came to the House Floor in December 1884, O'Hara introduced an amendment designed to prohibit discrimination on railroad cars. He noted that

Congress enjoyed significant regulatory power over interstate commerce, including the use of freight cars, and that it therefore "must certainly follow that it unqualifiedly has the same right to regulate the use of passenger cars."[105]

Charles F. Crisp of Georgia, a future Speaker of the House then in his first term, was a vocal opponent of the measure. Crisp objected to O'Hara's amendment, claiming it extended the reach of the federal government into personal affairs and read from a Georgia state law that, on paper, guaranteed equal access to transportation for all. Most objectionable to Crisp was O'Hara's decision to stipulate that access must be provided "without discrimination." Crisp insisted that railroads should be able to offer separate and equal accommodations.[106]

Smalls joined the fray to back O'Hara's effort, citing his personal experience while traveling in the region. In describing a train trip south from Washington, DC, Smalls made one of the first references to "Jim Crow" cars in railroad travel in the *Congressional Record*. He recalled that when entering the state of Georgia, all of the Black passengers were forced to change cars.[107]

Ultimately, the bill passed the House without O'Hara's amendment, only to stall in the Senate. But this battle between the two Black lawmakers and Crisp of Georgia starkly outlined the divergent fortunes of Democrats in the South and Black Americans in Congress in the mid-1880s. Crisp, a former Confederate officer, would be elected Speaker within a decade, benefiting from the rising number of Democrats in the House. O'Hara and Smalls represented North Carolina and South Carolina, respectively—the only two states that elected Black Members of Congress in the 1890s. They were both defeated in 1886 and left office at the conclusion of the 49th Congress (1885–1887). On December 5, 1887, Congress convened without a Black Member in either chamber. "All the men who stood up in awkward squads to be sworn in on Monday had white faces," noted a *Philadelphia Record* correspondent who witnessed 317 Members of the 50th Congress (1887–1889) take the oath of office on the House Floor. "The negro is not only out of Congress, he is practically out of politics."[108]

TOWARD A "TEMPORARY FAREWELL"

The decline of Black representation in Congress during the 1880s coincided with the gradual emergence of a state-sanctioned system of racial segregation in the South. Although three Black Representatives served in the 51st Congress, only Henry Cheatham was seated on Opening Day in December 1889. John Langston and Thomas Miller were seated in September 1890 after successfully contesting the elections of their Democratic opponents. In the 10 years that remained of the nineteenth century, only two more African Americans would win election to the House. Even though their numbers were small, each Representative brought the pressing issues facing Black Americans to the House Floor and demanded action.

In 1889, with Republican President Benjamin Harrison in the White House and Republicans in control of Congress for the first time in eight years, education and voting rights were once again at the center of debate. Known as the "billion-dollar Congress" for its prominent spending spree, the 51st Congress was ineffective at passing legislation important to Black Americans.[109]

In 1889, Senator Henry William Blair of New Hampshire reintroduced an education bill that he had first proposed in 1881. It was designed to provide direct federal investment to support a national education system—and establish mechanisms for federal oversight of local schools to ensure equal access, particularly in the South. Money would be distributed based on a formula that assessed the literacy rate in each state, which would allocate nearly 75 percent of the federal funding to southern states. With federal oversight in place, those states could not discriminate in the distribution of monetary aid to schools. At the same time, the Blair bill did not prohibit segregated schools. In fact, it allowed for separate schools so long as funding was equal. This provision was largely uncontroversial at the time. In one of his first acts in the House in December 1889, Henry Cheatham introduced a similar education bill with provisions for separate schools.[110]

In early 1890, the Blair bill came before the Senate but was defeated in an otherwise crowded legislative calendar packed with tariff and election issues. Congress did establish an important source of federal education funding in the Second Morrill Act, named after Vermont Senator Justin Smith Morrill, the namesake of the 1862 Morrill Act that created land-grant colleges. The 1890 law provided significant funding for those institutions, regardless of whether they served Black or White students.[111]

On June 14, 1890, Representative Henry Cabot Lodge of Massachusetts introduced a new federal elections bill in the House. Lodge emphasized the necessity of election safeguards, denouncing the "bitter appeal to race supremacy" which he called "a convenient stalking horse to defraud white men as well as black men their rights." To limit fraud and discrimination,

the bill allowed a small number of constituents in any given precinct to petition a federal judge to take charge of a federal election rather than leave the process in the hands of local—and, in the South, usually Democratic—officials. The bill also enabled the federal government to appoint supervisors to oversee all phases of federal elections, from voter registration to the certification of the results.[112]

Opponents in the South soon labeled the Lodge bill the "Force Bill" and likened it to federal policy during Reconstruction. Despite strong words in support of fair elections from Republicans in both chambers, the bill barely passed the House and then languished and died in the Senate, where competing regional factions argued over separate issues related to trade and the money supply that they considered more important.[113]

In January 1891, Thomas Miller and John Langston—both of whom had won their contested election cases and joined the House in September of 1890—spoke in favor of the bill and implored the Senate to act. Although they could only encourage Senators to pass the bill, they demanded action from Congress to address the increasing restrictions on African-American life in the South.

Langston argued that the elections bill should not be considered solely of interest to Black Americans; rather it was part of a larger discussion of the meaning of American democracy. If the Civil War had made the country confront "the question of slavery or freedom," he said, this bill would make the nation answer "whether every American citizen may wield the ballot in this country freely and according to his own judgment." Senate passage of the bill, Langston said, would allow the nation to "realize the glory and distinction which the fathers knew this country would attain in the future."[114]

Miller saw things slightly differently. While the federal elections bill would likely provide Black residents of South Carolina with greater political representation, it did little to solve other pressing issues Black Americans faced in the South, such as lack of fair wages and an imbalanced court system in which justice was impossible for Black plaintiffs. Above all, Black southerners faced an immediate threat from "the infernal lynch law," the brutal practice of murder and terror directed against individuals with impunity. "We need protection at home in our rights," Miller declared, "the chiefest of which is the right to live."[115]

"A Peculiar Crisis"

Only the Carolinas sent Black Representatives to the House after 1891. George Washington Murray of South Carolina and Henry Cheatham and George Henry White of North Carolina made the nineteenth century's last stand against racial discrimination in Congress. They were committed to using their seat in the chamber to push meaningful and practical legislation to improve the lives of Black Americans. At the same time, they observed in their districts and region a striking rise in disenfranchisement and violence against African Americans. When the Democratically controlled 53rd Congress (1893–1895) repealed the remaining federal elections protections in 1894, the prospect for intervention from Washington on behalf of Black voters appeared remote. Rapid changes in the 1890s solidified the system of segregation that came to be known as Jim Crow, producing what Representative White called "a peculiar crisis" in the South.[116]

This social and political system was reinforced by the economic changes coursing through American society during the final decades of the nineteenth century—a period often referred to as the Gilded Age for its emerging extremes of wealth and poverty. It was also a period of unprecedented immigration to the United States from southern and eastern Europe, regional and global economic transformations, and an expanding role for the United States in the world.

In the 1890s, Black Members engaged with the most pressing matters of the Gilded Age for their constituents. Thomas Miller outlined the manipulative system of credit and company stores that entrapped Black agricultural workers in debt. George Washington Murray called for the coinage of silver, which he hoped would increase the money supply and aid struggling farmers trying to repay loans.[117]

Isolated and marginalized, Black Members were stifled in their limited attempts to legislate. At home in their districts, White Democrats worked feverishly to shut African Americans and opposition parties out of the political process using a toxic mix of new laws, constitutional revisions, and violence. They rewrote state constitutions to codify segregation and implemented a maze of local and statewide electoral devices between 1889 and 1908. The range of barriers erected to impede Black voter registration included property qualifications, poll taxes, literacy tests, and so-called grandfather clauses, which tied an individual's right to vote to the voting rights or registration status of their ancestors. The "understanding clause" placed potential voters at the mercy of voter registrars, who capriciously administered a test concerning knowledge of state and federal laws, among other subjects. State governments insisted these measures applied to all and were not designed to discriminate. While

these restrictions also prevented many White southerners from voting, they disproportionately affected Black voters. Lest there be any doubt who bore the brunt of the era's trend toward disenfranchisement, the Democratic Party held all-White primaries to completely bar Black participation.[118]

State constitutional conventions proved to be the final disenfranchising blow in most southern states. Between 1890 and 1910, southern state constitutional conventions assembled to rewrite state charters with the intention of eviscerating the remaining eligible Black vote. In South Carolina, for instance, the 1895 constitutional convention was called by the Democratic Party of the former governor, Senator Benjamin Ryan Tillman, who openly advocated for White supremacy. South Carolina Representative George Washington Murray was part of an organized effort to extend the voter registration period and mobilize Black voters to send Black delegates to the convention. Former Representatives Robert Smalls and Thomas Miller were two of six Black delegates elected to the convention, several of whom drew national attention to the efforts of Tillman and the Democrats to disenfranchise Black voters in a letter of protest published in the New York *World* in September 1895. The Black delegates also tried to delay convention proceedings through dilatory motions and objections. However, they could not prevent the convention from including an effective array of disenfranchising methods in the new state constitution.[119]

Similar disenfranchisement tactics were deployed across the South to dramatically reduce the number of registered voters, measures that disproportionately affected African Americans. Just three years after Mississippi's 1890 constitutional convention, fewer than 9,000 African Americans out of a total population of nearly 748,000 were registered to vote. In 1896—before the enactment of Louisiana's literacy test, poll tax, and property qualifications—there were approximately 130,000 registered Black voters in the state, composing the majority in 26 parishes. Only 5,320 voted in 1900, after the changes went into effect. By 1904, there were little more than 1,300 registered Black voters statewide.[120]

In 1899, George White challenged the House to punish southern states by reducing the size of their congressional delegations, which he said should be limited to "the votes that are allowed to be cast in their representation on this floor, and no more." He stressed that he was not inveighing "against Mississippi, not against South Carolina, not against Louisiana, but for justice—simple justice. Unmitigated justice is what we ask." White's speech was well received on the floor but did not produce legislative action.[121]

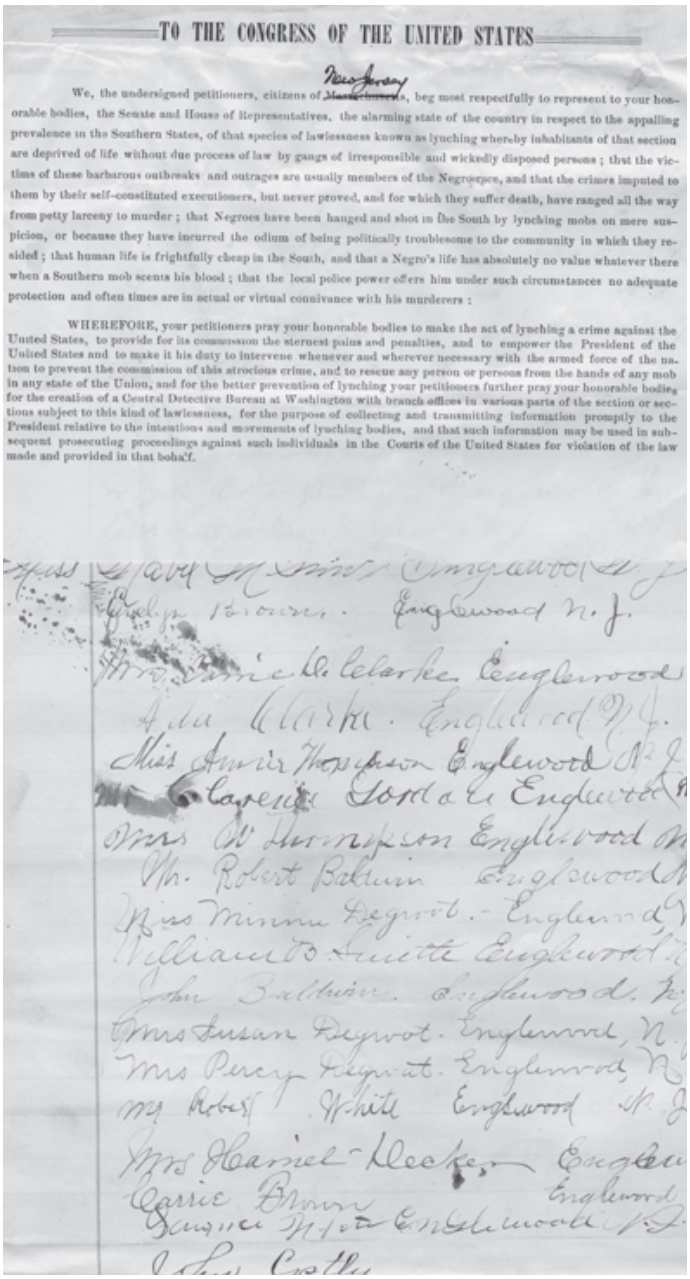
As these efforts to disenfranchise Black voters decimated the ranks of Black elected officials, the Supreme Court once again intervened to provide constitutional sanction for discrimination. Whereas the court's decisions in the 1870s and 1880s had determined that state and local authorities had jurisdiction over any infringement of individual rights, the 1896 case of *Plessy v. Ferguson* set new boundaries for a society increasingly defined by racial segregation. The court ruled that public accommodations and transportation could be provided on a "separate but equal" basis. States could set the standards, and the federal government was unlikely to intervene when equal accommodations were not available. A rigid system of segregation, codified in state law and tacitly sanctioned by the federal government, flourished in the South.[122]

The First Congressional Antilynching Campaign

On November 10, 1898—two days after George White was re-elected—violence consumed Wilmington, North Carolina, as White citizens murdered at least seven and possibly as many as 20 Black residents and overthrew the local government. While George White did not address the events in Wilmington directly on the House Floor in January 1899, he did speak generally about the violence plaguing Black Americans in the South. He spoke of an imagined future, "when civilization will so develop all over this nation that there will be no more lynchings and barbarity and mobocracy, now so prevalent in some portions of this country." A year later, on January 20, 1900, White introduced H.R. 6963, the first federal antilynching bill, intended "for the protection of all citizens of the United States against mob violence."[123]

Lynching was the brutal act of public execution, often by hanging or shooting and preceded by torture. This practice was used by White citizens in the South to terrorize Black communities. Some lynchings were perpetrated by small groups, others occurred as grotesque public spectacles. Black men, women, and children were lynched, but a disproportionate number of the victims were Black men.[124]

Particularly in the South, lynching victims were targeted because of their political activism, economic success, and other perceived violations of the prevailing order of the Jim Crow South. Many Black men were falsely accused of sexual violence against White women. The antilynching activist and journalist Ida B. Wells of Memphis, Tennessee, documented the misinformation campaign that established



TO THE CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES

New Jersey

We, the undersigned petitioners, citizens of ~~Massachusetts~~, beg most respectfully to represent to your honorable bodies, the Senate and House of Representatives, the alarming state of the country in respect to the appalling prevalence in the Southern States, of that species of lawlessness known as lynching whereby inhabitants of that section are deprived of life without due process of law by gangs of irresponsible and wickedly disposed persons; that the victims of these barbarous outbreaks and outrages are usually members of the Negro race, and that the crimes imputed to them by their self-constituted executioners, but never proved, and for which they suffer death, have ranged all the way from petty larceny to murder; that Negroes have been hanged and shot in the South by lynching mobs on mere suspicion, or because they have incurred the odium of being politically troublesome to the community in which they resided; that human life is frightfully cheap in the South, and that a Negro's life has absolutely no value whatever there when a Southern mob scents his blood; that the local police power offers him under such circumstances no adequate protection and often times are in actual or virtual connivance with his murderers:

WHEREFORE, your petitioners pray your honorable bodies to make the act of lynching a crime against the United States, to provide for its commission the sternest pains and penalties, and to empower the President of the United States and to make it his duty to intervene whenever and wherever necessary with the armed force of the nation to prevent the commission of this atrocious crime, and to rescue any person or persons from the hands of any mob in any state of the Union, and for the better prevention of lynching your petitioners further pray your honorable bodies for the creation of a Central Detective Bureau at Washington with branch offices in various parts of the section or sections subject to this kind of lawlessness, for the purpose of collecting and transmitting information promptly to the President relative to the intentions and movements of lynching bodies, and that such information may be used in subsequent prosecuting proceedings against such individuals in the Courts of the United States for violation of the law made and provided in that behalf.

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Representative George Henry White of North Carolina introduced H.R. 6963, the first federal antilynching bill, on January 20, 1900. This petition from New Jersey residents, submitted by White on the House Floor on February 21, urged Congress to pass legislation that would empower the federal government to end the brutal practice of lynching in the United States.

Image courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration

the narrative of sexual violence as the most common justification for lynching—a narrative largely accepted outside the South. Although Wells devised a national and international campaign against lynching that successfully drew attention to the practice, the murders continued well into the twentieth century. The actual number of lynchings in the United States might never be known, but a recent study by the Equal Justice Initiative identified "4,084 racial terror lynchings in twelve southern states between the end of Reconstruction in 1877 and 1950."[125]

Wells's celebrated work and international renown informed the first attempt to focus the attention of the House on this issue. In 1894, newly elected Representative Henry Blair of New Hampshire—the former Senator—introduced a joint resolution to investigate "unlawful violence" against Americans. Blair's resolution would have funded a report by the Commissioner of Labor to collect "the attendant facts" on lynchings in the United States and report the findings to Congress, presumably with the intent of shaping new legislation.[126]

Blair's effort attracted widespread support among Black women activists who joined Wells in campaigning against lynching and formed groups such as the Women's Loyal Union in Brooklyn, New York. Press coverage documented Wells's presence at hearings held by the House Committee on Labor, waiting for her turn to testify. She was never called before the panel, though, and the bill was shuffled between the Committee on Labor and the Committee on the Judiciary in the remaining months of the 53rd Congress.[127]

White's antilynching measure was more direct. It sought to revive the role of the federal government in protecting the individual rights of citizens in the South. On February 23, 1900, during general debate on American territorial expansion in the Caribbean and Pacific, White defended his bill on the House Floor. He provided statistics and graphic accounts of lynching atrocities and singled out House Members who had sanctioned these acts. White demanded access to a trial by jury for all and called on Congress to make lynching a crime under the jurisdiction of federal courts. This "most dangerous evil," White said, required lawmakers to act, and he provided legal citations to argue that Congress was well within its constitutional rights to do so. For White, the fate of the nation was imperiled "if mob violence is not stamped out of existence and law once permitted to reign supreme." White's bill died in the Judiciary Committee at the close of the 56th Congress (1899–1901).[128]

A "RISING PEOPLE, FULL OF POTENTIAL FORCE"

In 1900, George White declined to run for re-election. As the last Black Member remaining in Congress, he anticipated defeat in any contest held following the widespread efforts to disenfranchise Black voters in North

Carolina. On the eve of his departure from the House, White reflected on his imminent exit.

> This, Mr. Chairman, is perhaps the negroes' temporary farewell to the American Congress; but let me say, Phoenix-like he will rise up someday and come again. These parting words are in behalf of an outraged, heart-broken, bruised, and bleeding, but God-fearing people, faithful, industrious, loyal people—rising people, full of potential force.

No African-American lawmaker served in the U.S. Congress for nearly three decades following the end of Representative White's House career on March 3, 1901. The length and persistence of this exile starkly conveyed the suffocating effect of Jim Crow, the brutal system of racial segregation imposed by law and by custom upon African Americans in the South.[129]

By the time Oscar De Priest of Illinois was elected to the House in 1929—becoming the first Black Representative elected in the twentieth century—a cohort of historians led by Columbia University professor William Dunning had popularized an interpretation of Reconstruction that criticized the motives and actions of the Republican Party and employed racist stereotypes to undermine the role of African Americans in government during this period. Black Members of Congress were marginalized in this story, framed as unsophisticated puppets of Republican Party functionaries or corrupt and ineffective lawmakers subverting American democracy. This interpretation prevailed for much of the twentieth century, even as African-American activists, politicians, and scholars refuted the so-called Dunning school.[130]

In fact, this struggle to set the historical record may have begun on the House Floor. In an 1879 speech, Joseph Rainey alluded to the argument of a northern journalist, James S. Pike, whose 1874 book, *The Prostrate State: South Carolina Under Negro Government*, denounced Black participation in government as a wrong turn for the nation and laid the groundwork for Dunning's interpretation. For Rainey, this was part of a coordinated effort by "the old leaders" to eliminate the transformative record of Reconstruction.[131]

Another Reconstruction-era Black Representative, John Lynch, published several works during his long lifetime that criticized the writing of White historians who portrayed Reconstruction in erroneous terms. In his 1913 book, *The Facts of Reconstruction*, as well as several articles in the *Journal of Negro History*, Lynch offered pointed critiques of this literature and touted the achievements of Black officeholders. In 1935—four years before the nonagenarian Lynch died—W.E.B. Du Bois, the African-American scholar and activist, issued one of the most thorough refutations of the Dunning school in his classic work, *Black Reconstruction in America*. Du Bois also praised the Black Congressmen who served during these pivotal decades, highlighting their speeches on the floor and their valiant efforts to legislate. "The words of these Black men," Du Bois concluded, "were, perhaps, the last clear, earnest expression of democratic theory of American government in Congress."[132]

By the 1890s, African Americans were well aware of the importance of history and memory as well as the need to celebrate the political achievements of African Americans since the Civil War. As the number of Black Members of Congress dwindled, newspapers began to publish articles compiling their names and stories.



John Langston took his seat in Congress after successfully contesting his election loss in 1888. In 1855, he was one of the first African Americans elected to public office in Brownhelm Township, Ohio.

John Mercer Langston, *From the Virginia Plantation to the National Capital* (Hartford, CT: American Publishing Company, 1894)

In February 1890, before the seating of John Langston and Thomas Miller and the election of George Murray and George White, a story in the Washington, DC, newspaper the *Evening Star* chronicled the lives of the Black Representatives and Senators elected since 1870. The *Leavenworth Advocate*, a Black newspaper in northeast Kansas, culled the basic facts from this article to produce a similar story in its spartan pages a few weeks later. Writing for a Black audience, the *Advocate* celebrated two decades of Black electoral achievement, lamented the isolation of the then lone Black Member of Congress, Henry Cheatham, and hoped Langston would be seated. Published to remind readers of the promise and possibilities of Reconstruction, the article also documented the inestimable loss in Black-American representation that was the product of discrimination, violence, and corruption—a concerted effort to prevent the election of Black Members of Congress. "Had we had justice," the *Advocate* declared, "there would have been more."[133]

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Hiram R. Revels

1827–1901

UNITED STATES SENATOR

1870–1871

Republican from Mississippi



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Hiram R. Revels was the first African-American lawmaker to serve in the United States Congress. Revels was a preacher and educator in at least nine states before pursuing public office in Mississippi in 1868. His election to the state senate in 1869 led to his election as a U.S. Senator by the Mississippi legislature in January 1870, filling a vacant seat in the 41st Congress (1869–1871). In his brief time on Capitol Hill, he was an advocate for Mississippi and embraced his status as the first Black Member of Congress by bringing to the Senate Chamber the petitions, concerns, and needs of the freed people in the South as well as African Americans throughout the United States.

Hiram Rhodes Revels was born in Fayetteville, North Carolina, on September 27, 1827. He claimed his ancestors "as far back as my knowledge extends, were free." Despite restrictions in antebellum North Carolina regarding access to education for most free Black children, Revels was able to attend a school taught by a free Black woman. He worked for a few years as a barber and a schoolteacher before moving north to continue his education in 1844. Revels enrolled at the Beech Grove Quaker Seminary in Liberty, Indiana, and at a seminary for Black students in Darke County, Ohio. He was ordained in the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church and was a pastor in churches in Richmond and Terre Haute, Indiana. In the early 1850s, Revels married Phoebe A. Bass, a free Black woman from Ohio, and they had six daughters.[1]

Revels traveled throughout the country, carrying out religious work and educating African Americans in Indiana, Illinois, Kansas, Kentucky, and Tennessee. Although Missouri prohibited by law free Black Americans from living in the state for fear they would foster discontent among the enslaved population, Revels moved to St. Louis in 1853 to serve as pastor of an AME Church, noting that the law was "seldom enforced" in cities. "I sedulously refrained from doing anything that would incite slaves to run away from their masters," he recalled, and instead focused on religious instruction so that "even slave holders were tolerant of me." Despite his cautiousness, Revels was briefly imprisoned for preaching to the Black community. He also claimed to have assisted fugitive slaves when living in free states. In 1854, he accepted a position with the Presbyterian Church in Baltimore, Maryland. He also worked as the principal of a Black school in Baltimore and subsequently attended Knox College in Galesburg, Illinois, from 1855 to 1857.[2]

When the Civil War began in 1861, Revels helped recruit two Black regiments from Maryland. In 1862, he served as the chaplain for a Black regiment in campaigns in Vicksburg and Jackson, Mississippi. In 1863, Revels returned to St. Louis, where he established a freedmen's school. At the end of the war, Revels was a minister in Leavenworth, Kansas, and engaged in similar work in churches in Louisville, Kentucky, and New Orleans, Louisiana, before settling in Natchez, Mississippi, in 1866.[3]

Two years later, in 1868, Revels was appointed as an alderman on the Natchez city council by the U.S. military governor, General Adelbert Ames. In 1869, encouraged to run for office by future Representative John R. Lynch, Revels won a seat in the Mississippi state senate. The newly elected state senate was tasked with filling two U.S. Senate seats—all Senators were elected by the state legislature until 1913. In January 1861, Democrat Albert Gallatin Brown and future Confederate president Jefferson Davis withdrew from the Senate when Mississippi seceded from the Union. The Senate declared both seats vacant on March 14, 1861. In 1870, as former Confederate states gained readmission to representation in Congress, the Mississippi state legislature proposed electing a Black candidate to fill the remainder of the term due to expire in 1871 and a White candidate for the other term ending in 1875. As Revels recalled, Black legislators believed this would "be a weakening blow against color line prejudice," while the Democratic minority also cynically endorsed the plan, hoping a Black Senator would "seriously damage the Republican Party." After three days and seven ballots, on January 20, 1870, the Mississippi state legislature voted 85 to 15 to elect Revels to Brown's former seat—the term ending March 3, 1871. They chose Ames to fill the seat formerly held by Davis. At the same time, the legislature elected then-Governor James Lusk Alcorn to fill the seat held by Revels beginning in the 42nd Congress (1871–1873).[4]

Revels arrived in Washington, DC, on January 30, but could not be sworn in as Mississippi had not yet been formally readmitted to the United States following the Civil War. On February 5, he met with President Ulysses S. Grant in the White House. Revels observed proceedings in the Senate, occasionally sitting in the gallery and joining his Republican colleagues on the floor. When Congress approved the bill to readmit Mississippi on February 23, the Senate began three days of debate regarding Revels's credentials for the seat. Senator Willard Saulsbury Sr. of Delaware questioned the legitimacy of the Mississippi state legislature that chose Revels. Others, such as George Vickers of Maryland and Garrett Davis of Kentucky, focused on questions regarding Revels's status as a citizen, attempting to make a constitutional argument undermining his claim to the seat. Both pointed to the Supreme Court's 1857 decision in *Dred Scott v. Sandford*, which declared those of African descent to be ineligible for citizenship. Even though the 1868 ratification of the Fourteenth Amendment had conferred citizenship on African Americans, Revels's opponents argued that the *Dred Scott* ruling meant that any prospective Black Senator in 1870 lacked the constitutionally required nine years as a citizen to hold a seat in the Senate.[5]

Senate Republicans rallied to his defense. John Sherman of Ohio stated that Revels had voted in Ohio before the Civil War. "He was always a citizen," Sherman declared, and added that the *Dred Scott* decision was "a denial of the truth of history" and should be ignored. Though Revels would not fill Davis's seat, Nevada Senator James Warren Nye called the prospect of a Black Senator representing the former Confederate president's home state "a magnificent spectacle of retributive justice." On the afternoon of February 25, the Senate voted along party lines 48 to 8 to seat Revels. He received assignments to the Committee on Education and Labor and the Committee on the District of Columbia.[6]

Revels entered the Senate as a figure of national renown. He estimated that he received 10 times the interview requests of his Senate colleagues. So many meeting invitations were delivered to him in the Senate Chamber that he had to instruct the doorkeepers to stop accepting the cards of interested parties. He recalled, however, welcoming inquiries from African Americans when possible. When a group of Black mechanics from Baltimore sought his assistance to counter discriminatory hiring practices at the city's U.S. Navy Yard in 1871, Revels successfully appealed to the U.S. War Department on their behalf.[7]

Revels embraced his fame by engaging in an extended speaking tour throughout 1870, traveling widely to address crowds in Massachusetts, New York, Indiana, Illinois, and elsewhere. In July, he spoke to the graduating class at Avery College in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and was given the honorary title of doctor of divinity.[8]

When Revels arrived on Capitol Hill, a reporter asked him if, as the first Black Member of Congress, he could act

"impartially" and serve the interests of White and Black citizens of Mississippi. Revels insisted he was "a representative of the State, irrespective of color." But Revels also felt the weight of his place in history and in the Senate Chamber he acknowledged his status as "the recognized representative of my downtrodden people," and often spoke as an advocate for civil and political rights for all Black Americans.[9]

During his first weeks in office, Revels introduced several petitions, including one conveying the sentiments of the Mississippi state legislature, which requested that Congress urgently remove the "political disabilities" prohibiting many residents of the state from holding office because of their participation in the rebellion. Petitions also came from other states. He introduced a petition from a group of Black citizens from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, who called on the Senate to pass a federal civil rights bill. And on March 11, Revels presented a petition from Black members of the Georgia legislature. They had been elected following the creation of a new, reconstructed state government, but in September 1868, Democrats expelled them from the legislature, arguing that the state constitution did not permit Black officeholders. Georgia's Black state legislators appealed to Congress to settle this dispute and pass legislation that would return them to office. Otherwise, they wrote, "violence and bloodshed will mark the course of such elections, and a fair expression of the will of the people cannot be had."[10]

On March 16, before a packed Senate Chamber and a gallery filled with Black men and women eager to hear him speak, Revels defended the Black legislators in Georgia who had sought Congress's help. With his remarks, Revels became the first Black Senator to deliver a speech in American history. Revels acknowledged and celebrated his unique status, noting that he was ready to give voice to "feelings which perhaps never before entered into the experience of any member of this body." Revels insisted that the Black lawmakers needed protection in Georgia, as recent events had resulted in "a distinction as to race and color, so far as civil and political rights are concerned." The federal government owed Black Americans "a deep obligation" for their loyalty and service during the war. "Many of my race," he reminded his colleagues, "sleep in the countless graves of the South." Ignoring the pleas of the Black state legislators would validate the restrictions imposed upon African Americans in Georgia and undermine democracy in the state. Revels called on Congress to reinstate the legislators who were duly elected and reject attempts to force the state to hold an election before the end of the year. While Congress heeded Revels's call to return the Black Georgia legislators to their seats, their terms were not extended, and Democrats soon took control of the state.[11]

Revels balanced his uncompromising stance on the political rights of Black Americans in the South with a sincere commitment to amnesty for those citizens of Mississippi who had fought against the Union and who had been stripped of certain rights as punishment. "If you can find one man in the South who gives evidence that he is a loyal man," Revels declared, and "has ceased to denounce the laws of Congress as unconstitutional, has ceased to oppose them, and respects them and favors the carrying of them out, I am in favor of removing his disabilities." Revels hoped this gesture of goodwill would promote a spirit of reconciliation in his state.[12]

Revels's appeals for unity were part of a larger vision of recovery and improvement for Mississippi. In December 1870, he introduced a bill to appropriate $2 million for the construction of levees to protect the land between the Mississippi and Yazoo rivers in the western part of the state. A month later, Revels spoke in the Senate Chamber to convey the need for federal funding. The damage to Mississippi during "our long internecine struggle" had ceded significant shares of the market for cotton to global competitors, particularly Egypt, Brazil, and India. Despite the emergence of these rivals, Revels said, the "prodigal hand of nature" had endowed the western Mississippi lands and large tracts of other southern states with clear advantages in fertile, arable acreage—if properly managed. Revels cited contemporary statistics demonstrating that levees increase the cotton yield to make his case. He stressed that the "building of the levees on the Mississippi is a national work," as cotton production was inextricable from the national interest and an invaluable part of manufacturing in the United States and abroad. Federal investment, Revels added, would help the South "reign supreme as the ruler and master of the cotton markets of the world."[13]

In his final Senate speech, Revels defended legislation to prohibit discrimination in District of Columbia schools based on "race, color, or previous condition of servitude." Opponents, such as Ohio Senator Allen Granberry Thurman, warned that enrolling Black and White children in the same schools would result in "forced mingling" imposed by a "tyrannical" federal government.

Revels pointed to the experience of northern states such as Massachusetts where, he said, "mixed schools" existed without fundamentally transforming social relations. For Revels, racial discrimination—be it imposed by state and local governments, school boards, or even railroad companies—perpetuated and strengthened prejudice throughout the nation. He referred to his personal experience of attempting to circumvent segregated railcars during a family journey in Kansas to demonstrate the profound ways discriminatory rules and statutes affected Black Americans. Revels believed that if policymakers no longer had the ability to establish and enforce such prejudice, "the people will soon forget."[14]

After the expiration of his Senate term on March 3, 1871, Revels declined several patronage positions offered by President Grant at the recommendation of Senators Oliver Hazard Perry Throck Morton of Indiana and Zachariah Chandler of Michigan. Instead, Revels returned to Mississippi when he was appointed the first president of Alcorn University, named for his political ally Governor Alcorn. Located in Rodney, Mississippi, Alcorn University was the first land-grant school for Black students in the United States. Revels took a leave of absence for about eight months in 1873 to serve as Mississippi's secretary of state after the sudden death of James Lynch. The election of Mississippi Governor Adelbert Ames in 1874 led to Revels's resignation as president of Alcorn University. Revels was a close ally of Alcorn and Ames wanted to choose a new appointee. Revels moved to Holly Springs, Mississippi, to work as a minister in the Methodist Episcopal Church, which he had joined in 1868. He also taught theology at Shaw University, which was later renamed Rust College.[15]

In 1875, Mississippi held simultaneous elections for Congress and for state and local offices. The Democratic Party used violence and intimidation to keep Republicans from the polls and picked up four of Mississippi's six House seats as well as numerous state and local offices. Four days after the election, Revels wrote a letter to President Grant that offered startlingly direct criticism of the Republican Party in Mississippi, accusing a faction of White Republicans of disregarding the needs of Black citizens. Revels described the many Black supporters of the Republican Party as "enslaved in mind by unprincipled adventurers" whose only goal was "to secure power for themselves and perpetuate it." He hoped that the Democratic victory in 1875 would encourage like-minded reformers to lead Republicans to victory in 1876. Although he was careful to emphasize that he remained committed to the Republican Party, the nuance of Revels's arguments were not apparent to all. One critic called him an "apostate to his race" and another accused him of being "bought and paid for by the enemy."[16]

Revels later clarified his position, emphasizing that his "every sentiment, utterance and action in a political direction, has been strictly Republican" and that he continued "to work and pray against the success of the Democrat party." Nevertheless, his letter to President Grant was hailed by some in the press as evidence of a fair Democratic victory in the state and used by Mississippi Democrats to justify their claims of Republican corruption. In March 1876, when Revels appeared as a witness before a U.S. Senate select committee investigating the well-documented fraud and violence in the 1875 Mississippi elections, his testimony seemed to support Democratic claims, despite overwhelming testimony to the contrary. Revels told the committee that, to the best of his knowledge, conditions had been relatively peaceful and he was unaware of any widespread violence.[17]

Revels never sought other elected office. In July 1876, he was appointed to his former position as president of Alcorn University. He resigned in 1883 and returned to Holly Springs to serve as the district presiding elder for the Methodist Episcopal Church. In February 1900, Senator George Frisbie Hoar of Massachusetts introduced a resolution to pay Revels about $4,800—the salary he would have received had he served a full term in the 41st Congress. On January 16, 1901, Revels died from complications of a stroke he experienced while at a church conference in Aberdeen, Mississippi. The Senate did not vote on Hoar's resolution before the end of the 56th Congress (1899–1901) and the resolution failed.[18]

Manuscript Collection

New York Public Library (New York, New York). *Papers:* 1870–1948. The collection consists principally of a scrapbook of news clippings and biographical articles on Hiram R. Revels. The scrapbook (1870–1893) discusses Revels as a Senator, pastor of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, and president of Alcorn University; it also describes local events and contains homilies and miscellany. Materials also include letters written to Revels; programs and invitations; several letters Revels wrote to his family (1870–1900); a biographical sketch written about him in the first person that appears to have been written by his daughter, Susie; a typescript of an obituary of Revels; and legal papers regarding settlement of his estate. *Photographs:* An accompanying photograph collection gives a glimpse of Revels's personal life and includes a Mississippi town street scene during Reconstruction. Personal photographs consist of a family portrait and a portrait Revels's wife.

Notes

1 "Autobiography of Hiram Revels," Carter G. Woodson Collection of Negro Papers and Related Documents, Box 11, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC; Julius E. Thompson, "Hiram R. Revels, 1827–1901: A Biography" (PhD diss., Princeton University, 1973): 20–21, 28–29, 49.

2 "Autobiography of Hiram Revels," Carter G. Woodson Collection, LC; Thompson, "Hiram R. Revels, 1827–1901": 35–37; William B. Gravely, "Hiram Revels Protests Racial Separation in the Methodist Episcopal Church (1876)," *Methodist History* 8, no. 3 (April 1970): 13–14.

3 Gravely, "Hiram Revels Protests Racial Separation in the Methodist Episcopal Church": 13–14; Thompson, "Hiram R. Revels, 1827–1901": 47–48.

4 Thompson, "Hiram R. Revels, 1827–1901": 52; "Autobiography of Hiram Revels," Carter G. Woodson Collection, LC; "State Politics," 22 January 1870, *Boston Daily Advertiser*: 1.

5 "Washington: The Colored Brother from Mississippi Revels in a Seat that Does Not Exist," 7 February 1870, *Courier-Journal* (Louisville, KY): 1; "Washington," 24 February 1870, *Chicago Tribune*: 1; "Washington," 15 February 1870, *New-York Semi-Weekly Tribune*: 1; *Congressional Globe*, Senate, 41st Cong., 2nd sess. (23 February 1870): 1504, 1509–1510; *Congressional Globe*, Senate, 41st Cong., 2nd sess. (25 February 1870): 1557–1560; Richard A. Primus, "The Riddle of Hiram Revels," *Harvard Law Review* 119, no. 6 (April 2006): 1683, 1686.

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8 "Senator Revels in Boston," 5 May 1870, *Boston Journal*: 1; "Senator Revels," 12 May 1870, *New York Herald*: 7; "Senator Revels," 15 August 1870, *Daily Evansville Journal* (IN): 5; "Lectures at Aurora," 26 November 1870, *Chicago Daily Tribune*: 1; "Colored Men and the Doctorate," 14 July 1870, *Daily Albany Argus* (NY): 1; "College Commencements," 15 July 1870, *New-York Tribune*: 2.

9 "Washington," 31 January 1870, *World* (New York, NY): 1; *Congressional Globe*, Senate, 41st Cong., 2nd sess. (16 March 1870): 1987.

10 *Congressional Globe*, Senate, 41st Cong., 2nd sess. (4 March 1870): 1676; *Congressional Globe*, Senate, 41st Cong., 2nd sess. (1 March 1870): 1607; Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863–1877* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988): 453; "Georgia: The Rebel Perfidy in the Legislature," 9 September 1868, *New-York Tribune*: 1; *Congressional Globe*, Senate, 41st Cong., 2nd sess. (11 March 1870): 1856.

11 *Congressional Globe*, Senate, 41st Cong., 2nd sess. (16 March 1870): 1986–1987; Foner, *Reconstruction*: 453–454; W.E.B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America: 1860–1880* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1935; New York: Free Press, 1998): 500–511.

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13 S. 1136, 41st Cong. (1870); *Congressional Globe*, Senate, 41st Cong., 3rd sess. (11 January 1871): 425–426.

14 S. 1244, 41st Cong. (1871); *Congressional Globe*, Senate, 41st Cong., 3rd sess. (8 February 1871): 1057, 1059–1060.

15 "Autobiography of Hiram Revels," Carter G. Woodson Collection, LC; "Appointment of Secretary of State," 2 January 1873, *Weekly Clarion* (Jackson, MS): 2; "Appointment of the Governor," 4 September 1873, *Weekly Clarion*: 3; Thompson, "Hiram R. Revels, 1827–1901: A Biography": 143; Senate Select Committee to Inquire into the Alleged Frauds in the Recent Election in Mississippi, *Report*, 44th Cong., 1st sess., S. Rept. 527 (1876): 1015; Gravely, "Hiram Revels Protests Racial Separation in the Methodist Episcopal Church": 14.

16 "Ex-Senator Hiram R. Revels on the Mississippi Election," 20 November 1875, *New Orleans Times*: 4; "Senator Revels," 20 November 1875, *Copiahan* (Hazlehurst, MS): 3; "An Apostate to his Race," 27 December 1875, *Daily National Republican* (Washington, DC): 1; "Revels as a Deserter," 28 March 1876, *Daily Inter-Ocean* (Chicago, IL): 4.

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Joseph H. Rainey

1832–1887

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1870–1879

Republican from South Carolina



Image courtesy of the New York Public Library

Born enslaved, Joseph H. Rainey was the first African-American lawmaker elected to the U.S. House of Representatives, the first Black American to preside over the House, and the longest-serving African American in Congress during Reconstruction. Like many Representatives of the era, Rainey had a limited legislative record, but he was one of the House's most able orators and labored tirelessly in committee. During his more than eight years in the House, Rainey worked to pass civil rights legislation, fund public schools, and guarantee equal protection under the law. Throughout, he sought to use his position to advocate for the concerns of African Americans on the House Floor. "I can only raise my voice," Rainey said in 1877, "and I would do it if it were the last time I ever did it, in defense of my rights and in the interests of my oppressed people."[1]

Joseph Rainey was born on June 21, 1832, in Georgetown, South Carolina, a seaside town surrounded by low country rice plantations. Much of his early life is difficult to document. His parents were enslaved, but his father, Edward L. Rainey, was permitted to work as a barber and keep a portion of his earnings. He used that money to buy his family's freedom in the early 1840s. South Carolina barred African Americans from attending school and Joseph Rainey never received a formal education. He learned his father's trade and by the 1850s he worked as a barber at the exclusive Mills House hotel in Charleston, South Carolina. In 1859, Rainey traveled to Philadelphia, where he married his wife, Susan, who was originally from South Carolina. The Raineys returned to Charleston and later had three children: Joseph, Herbert, and Olive.[2]

When the Civil War began in 1861, the Confederate army forced Rainey to construct defenses for the city of Charleston. He also worked as a ship's steward aboard a Confederate blockade runner which clandestinely carried goods through the Union Navy's maritime cordon of the South. In 1862, Rainey and his wife escaped to Bermuda, a self-governed British colony in the Atlantic that had abolished slavery in 1834. The Raineys took advantage of the island's economy, which had thrived from the lucrative blockade-running business. The Raineys lived in the towns of St. George's and Hamilton, where Joseph set up a successful barbershop and Susan opened a dress store.[3]

The Raineys returned to the United States in 1866 following the end of the Civil War, settling first in Charleston before moving to Georgetown, South Carolina, the following

year. Rainey helped found the state Republican Party and represented Georgetown on the party's central committee. In 1868, he was a delegate to the state constitutional convention and won election to the state senate, where he chaired the senate finance committee.[4]

In February 1870, Representative Benjamin Franklin Whittemore resigned his northeastern South Carolina seat, having been accused of selling appointments to U.S. military academies. The Republican Party nominated Rainey for the remainder of the 41st Congress (1869–1871) and for a full term in the 42nd Congress (1871–1873). On October 19, 1870, Rainey won the full term, topping Democrat C.W. Dudley with 63 percent of the vote. On November 8, he defeated Dudley once again, garnering more than 86 percent of the vote in a special election to fill the seat for the remainder of the 41st Congress.[5]

When Joseph Rainey was sworn in on December 12, 1870, he became the first African-American lawmaker to serve in the U.S. House of Representatives. During his career on Capitol Hill, Rainey served on a range of committees and developed a firm grasp of the institutional workings of the House. Rainey's committee appointments included the Freedmen's Affairs Committee, the Indian Affairs Committee, and the Invalid Pensions Committee, the last of which considered pensions and federal benefits for wounded veterans. He also served on the Select Committee on the Centennial Celebration and the Select Committee on the Freedman's Bank during the 44th Congress (1875–1877). In the 45th Congress (1877–1879), Rainey served with distinction on the Joint Committee on Enrolled Bills, where he worked with House clerks and his counterparts from the Senate to ensure that the bills that passed between chambers were accurate. On April 29, 1874, Rainey also became the first African-American legislator to preside over the House from the Speaker's chair when he oversaw debate on an appropriations bill providing for the management of Native-American reservations.[6]

On the House Floor, Rainey relished the opportunity for spirited debate. On April 1, 1871, Rainey delivered his first major speech in Congress, calling for the passage of the Ku Klux Klan Act. As state and local governments in the South either ignored or proved incapable of preventing White vigilante violence against African Americans, Rainey called on the federal government to intervene to combat the Klan and other terror organizations. The act expanded the reach of federal law enforcement in the South, giving the President the power to use federal troops to suppress violence and empowered federal district attorneys to aggressively prosecute the Klan.[7]

While Democratic opponents argued the bill was unconstitutional, Rainey emphasized the federal government's responsibility to protect individual rights. The Constitution, Rainey said, was designed to provide "protection to the humblest citizen, without regard to rank, creed, or color." For Rainey, it was paramount that the federal government act, adding, "Tell me nothing of a constitution which fails to shelter beneath its rightful power the people of a country!"[8]

The Ku Klux Klan Act was signed into law by President Ulysses S. Grant on April 20, 1871. Several months later, Grant used the powers authorized by the legislation to decisively damage the Klan. Even as Rainey received death threats from the Klan and Democrats tried to eliminate funding for the law's enforcement, he continued to defend the legislation. In March 1872, Rainey successfully argued for new federal appropriations to strengthen the law in the South.[9]

Alongside the fundamental protection afforded by the Klan Act, Rainey worked to pass comprehensive civil rights legislation to guarantee both legal equality and the promises of freedom for the four million formerly enslaved people in the South. In 1870, Radical Republican Senator Charles Sumner of Massachusetts proposed a civil rights bill to outlaw racial discrimination in juries, schools, transportation, and public accommodations. Rainey and his Black colleagues spoke on the House Floor in favor of the bill, describing their personal experience with discrimination in Washington and beyond. Rainey declared they were "determined to fight" to end discrimination, adding that the Constitution guaranteed equal rights to all citizens. Rainey described his experiences riding segregated trains and streetcars, but made his most ardent plea for equal access to education. Three years earlier, he had supported an unsuccessful effort to establish a national system of public schools funded with proceeds raised through the sale of public lands. In 1875, Rainey again called on legislators to embrace what he called "mixed schools" as a means to "annihilate" prejudice. Though the civil rights bill was signed into law March 3, 1875, provisions related to education were removed and the Supreme Court later declared key portions of the law unconstitutional.[10]

Throughout his career, Rainey sought to bolster legal protections for what he called "human rights." Rainey's

expansive vision of human rights included not only civil and political rights, but economic rights for working people, immigrants, formerly enslaved people, and others. He supported the sovereignty of Native American tribes and called on the United States government to respect existing treaties. He praised immigrants and opposed legislation that tried to limit the rights of Chinese laborers in the workplace. He also sought to protect the economic interests of African Americans, particularly in the South. Following the Civil War, for instance, the federal government had chartered the Freedman's Bank to help formerly enslaved families build wealth. But the bank failed in 1874. As one of many African Americans who had deposited money with the new financial institution, Rainey knew the long-term ramifications of the bank's collapse. He successfully argued against a measure designed to limit oversight of the distribution of the bank's remaining assets. Rainey also served on the House select committee charged with determining the cause of the bank's failure and aiding depositors in recovering their money—although largely without success.[11]

Though Rainey won re-election without opposition in 1872, his subsequent campaigns were more competitive. In 1874, Samuel Lee, an African American and a former speaker of the South Carolina house of representatives, challenged Rainey as an Independent Republican. Rainey won the election, taking 52 percent of the vote, but Lee demanded that the House Committee on Elections void some of Rainey's votes because of a spelling error in Rainey's name on some ballots. The committee upheld Rainey's election in May 1876, with the whole House concurring a month later.[12]

The 1876 election cycle occurred during an extraordinarily violent period across the South. That year, South Carolina's Democratic gubernatorial candidate Wade Hampton and his supporters, known as "Red Shirts," orchestrated a campaign of violence and intimidation against Republican voters throughout the state. Similarly, in early July, following a White farmer's dispute with the local Black militia in the town of Hamburg, South Carolina, near the border with Georgia, a White mob attacked the Black militia, killing six men, taking 25 prisoners, and destroying homes and property in the town's African-American neighborhood. Rainey and his House colleague Robert Smalls of South Carolina denounced the assault on the House Floor on July 15, calling on the federal government to maintain troops in their state to prevent further violence against African Americans. Rainey called this incident "a cold-blooded atrocity" and warned that continued violence would undermine the fragile democracy in the South.[13]

Threats of violence shaped Rainey's re-election bid. In one instance, as Rainey traveled between campaign stops, he was warned of a group of armed Democrats outside of Bennettsville, South Carolina. More than 50 Republicans joined him in anticipation of a violent confrontation. Rainey recalled that only the presence of federal troops prevented hostilities.[14]

In November 1876, Rainey defeated Democrat John Smythe Richardson for a seat in the 45th Congress, winning a tight race with 52 percent of the vote. Richardson accused Rainey and the Republican Party of voter intimidation, claimed victory, and traveled to Capitol Hill to dispute the election result. Rainey's election had been certified by South Carolina's existing Republican secretary of state, but Richardson had brought documents from Hampton's victorious Democratic administration declaring him the victor. The House seated Rainey, but in May 1878 the Democratic majority on the Committee on Elections judged that the presence of federal troops in the state unduly influenced the outcome of the election. Although the committee declared the seat vacant, the full House failed to act on the committee report and Rainey kept his seat for the remainder of the term.[15]

In 1878, Richardson challenged Rainey again—this time bolstered by a concerted effort by Democrats to suppress Republican votes. Richardson defeated Rainey with nearly 62 percent of the vote. Rainey accused South Carolina Democrats of corruption and election fraud, but did not formally challenge the results in the House. In the remaining months of his House career, Rainey continued his committee work and introduced a bill to impose federal oversight of state voting practices.[16]

When Rainey left Congress, Republicans nominated him for the position of Clerk of the House of Representatives, but the Democratic majority in the 46th Congress (1879–1881) elected their candidate. In 1879, Rainey was appointed a special agent of the U.S. Treasury Department in South Carolina. And, in 1881, he started a brokerage and banking business in Washington, but the firm folded five years later. Rainey managed a wood and coal business with a partner before returning to Georgetown, South Carolina, where he died on August 1, 1887.[17]

Manuscript Collection

University of South Carolina, South Caroliniana Library (Columbia, SC). *Papers*: 1832–1877, four letters. The collection, which is in the South Carolina Vertical Files from Clemson (Biographical Vertical Files, Rainey, Joseph Hayne), contains Joseph H. Rainey's letters to various correspondents.

Notes

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3 Cyril Outerbridge Packwood, *Detour–Bermuda, Destination–U.S. House of Representatives: The Life of Joseph Rainey* (Hamilton, Bermuda: Baxter's Limited, 1977): 10–12; "South Carolina Congressmen," 18 November 1870, *Cincinnati Daily Gazette*: 3; "The Congressmen Elect in South Carolina," 19 November 1870, *Pittsburgh Post*: 4.

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8 *Congressional Globe*, House, 42nd Cong., 1st sess. (1 April 1871): 395.

9 An Act to enforce the Provisions of the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution of the United States, and for other Purposes, 17 Stat. 13 (1871); Foner, *The Second Founding*, 120; Foner, *Reconstruction*: 457–459; "More Loyal Men Threatened in South Carolina," 18 May 1871, *New York Times*: 1; *Congressional Globe*, House, 42nd Cong., 2nd sess. (5 March 1872): 1439–1440.

10 *Congressional Record*, House, 43rd Cong., 2nd sess. (3 February 1875): 959–960; *Congressional Globe*, Appendix, 42nd Cong., 2nd sess. (3 February 1872): 15–17; Foner, *The Second Founding*: 139, 143, 151.

11 *Congressional Record*, Appendix, 45th Cong., 3rd sess. (3 March 1879): 267; *Congressional Record*, House, 44th Cong., 1st sess. (20 April 1876): 2669; *Congressional Record*, House, 43rd Cong., 1st sess. (13 June 1874): 4967–4968; *Congressional Record*, Appendix, 43rd Cong., 2nd sess. (2 March 1875): 184–185; *Congressional Record*, House, 43rd Cong., 2nd sess. (3 March 1875): 2262–2263; House Select Committee on the Freedman's Bank, *Freedman's Bank*, 44th Cong., 1st sess., H. Rept. 502 (1876); Reginald Washington, "The Freedman's Savings and Trust Company and African American Genealogical Research," *Prologue* 29, no. 2 (1997): 170–181.

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13 Fritz Hamer, "Wade Hampton: Conflicted Leader of the Conservative Democracy?," in *South Carolina and the Civil War and Reconstruction Eras*, eds. Michael Brem Bonner and Fritz Hamer (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2016): 240–254.

14 *Congressional Record*, Appendix, 44th Cong., 2nd sess. (21 February 1877): 218.

15 Dubin, *United States Congressional Elections, 1788–1997*: 240; Rowell, *A Historical and Legal Digest of All the Contested Election Cases*: 337.

16 Dubin, *United States Congressional Elections, 1788–1997*: 247; *Congressional Record*, Appendix, 45th Cong., 3rd sess. (3 March 1879): 265; H.R. 5250, 45th Cong. (1878).

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Jefferson F. Long

1836–1901

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1870–1871

Republican from Georgia

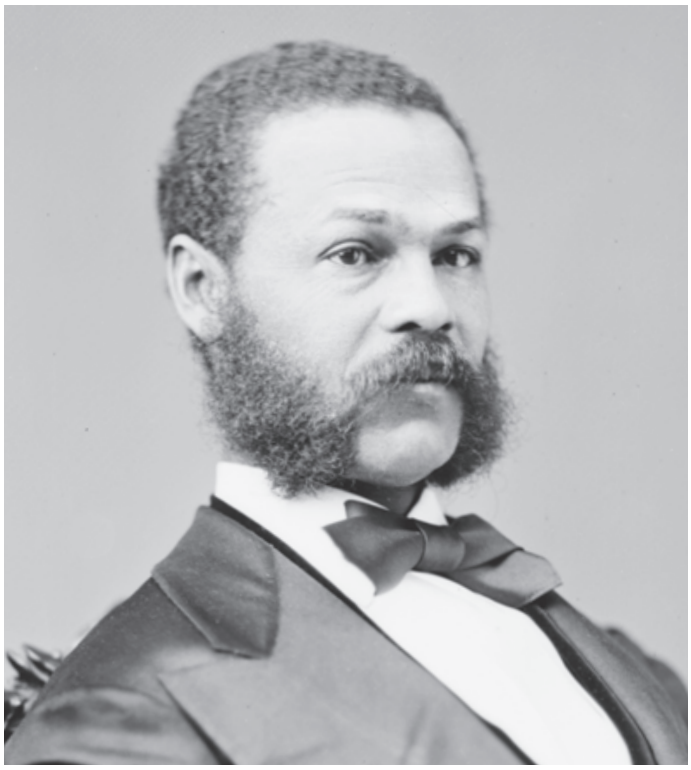

Image courtesy of the Library of Congress

In December 1870, Jefferson F. Long became the second African American elected to the U.S. House of Representatives. His term expired less than three months later—the shortest term of any Black Member in the nineteenth century. Born enslaved, Long was a tailor who embraced the possibilities and politics of Reconstruction in his native state of Georgia. Though he did not introduce a single bill while a Member of Congress, Long became the first Black Representative to speak on the House Floor.

Jefferson Franklin Long was born to an enslaved mother on March 3, 1836, in Knoxville, a small town in west-central Georgia. His White father, James C. Lloyd, was a local tailor. Lloyd listed his son as his property before transferring ownership of Long to a Macon, Georgia-area businessman sometime before 1850. Trained as a tailor while enslaved, Long was emancipated sometime in the 1850s and opened a successful business in Macon, which continued to prosper after the Civil War. Long and his wife, Lucinda, raised seven children. One of Long's sons helped run his business, and one of his daughters later became a schoolteacher.[1]

Starting in 1866, Long emerged as a community leader among Black Americans in Macon as well as in the nascent Republican Party in the region. By the late 1860s, he began promoting literacy among African Americans and advocating for higher wages for Black laborers. In 1867, he became active in the Georgia Educational Association, which was formed to protect and advance the interests of freedmen. Described by many as an impressive orator, he preached the virtues of the Republican Party to Black Americans in Georgia. While traveling the state, he organized local branches of the Republican Party and encouraged potential Black voters to register. He also brought many White Georgians into the Republican fold. In 1869, he served on the Republican state central committee and was president of the Georgia labor convention, which organized Black agricultural workers to demand increased wages, better jobs, and improved working conditions.[2]

After the war, Georgia faced multiple hurdles blocking its readmission into the Union. First, the state legislature refused to ratify the Fourteenth Amendment, then several White Republicans voted with Democrats to expel legally elected Black lawmakers from the state legislature in September 1868. Georgia finally met these requirements in the summer of 1870, after reseating the Black state house members and ratifying the Fifteenth Amendment.

Congress permitted its state delegation to retake its seats in the House and Senate. State officials scheduled a special election for December 20, 1870, to fill Georgia's vacant seats in the House for the final 10 weeks of the 41st Congress (1869–1871) and for the full term in the 42nd Congress (1871–1873). The Georgia Republican Party chose several Black candidates to run for the abbreviated terms, reserving the full term for White candidates. In the state's central district, the party nominated Long for the 41st Congress and state senator Thomas Jefferson Speer for the 42nd Congress.[3]

In the lead up to the election, Long gave a series of speeches across the district encouraging Black voters to support the Republican ticket. Long had to compete with the Democratic opposition as well as a local Black barber, Aleck Gaston, who had made a third-party run but dropped out of the race before the multiday-voting process began. As the election approached, both Republicans and Democrats accused the opposition of threatening voters and stoking violence. "This is the last day of the election," the Republican *Atlanta Daily New Era* informed readers on December 22. "Much depends upon your vigilance and firmness. Fraud and intimidation have been resorted to freely, on the part of our opponents." Black voters were also reportedly arrested at the polls as a way to deter others. Ultimately, Long defeated his opponent, Democrat Winburn J. Lawton, with 53 percent of the vote.[4]

Because of complications related to Georgia's readmission to the Union, Long was not sworn in until January 16, 1871. He took his seat one month after Representative Joseph H. Rainey of South Carolina was sworn in as the first Black Member of the House. One Virginia newspaper observed that Rainey and Long "fraternized at once, and struck up a conversation as soon as the latter was sworn in." Long was not assigned to any committees during his short term in office.[5]

Long was closely observed by the press at the start of his short stint on Capitol Hill. Most news articles announcing his election and swearing-in to the House were one or two lines, with little information beyond a physical description or a reference to his race. The *Boston Evening Transcript* described him as a "Republican of African descent." He reportedly attended every session and observed each proceeding from his desk on the House Floor. One of his first formal actions as a Member was a vote on an amendment to a bill establishing a territorial government in the District of Columbia. On January 20, 1871, Representative George Washington Julian of Indiana tried to amend the bill to guarantee women's suffrage in the capital city. The *Boston Journal* noted that Long supported the voting rights amendment, but his Black colleague from South Carolina, Rainey, did not. "The colored vote of the House divided on this question," the *Journal* was quick to note, even though neither Member explained their vote on the unsuccessful amendment.[6]

Long did not draft a single bill or resolution, but on February 1, 1871, he became the first Black Representative to speak before the House. Two years earlier, on February 27, 1869, John Willis Menard was the first Black American to address the House while it was in session. In 1868, Menard had won a special election to represent a district centered on New Orleans, Louisiana. However, his opponent contested the election and Menard was never seated.[7]

Long made his only speech before the House in opposition to a bill designed to modify the "test-oath" for Members of Congress. The measure was designed to accommodate former Confederates who were prohibited from holding public office by altering the text of the federal loyalty oath, thereby allowing them to circumvent its strict terms. Long questioned why the House would act on behalf of those who had tried to destroy the government before securing the rights of millions of Black Americans who had supported the Union. He lamented the violence plaguing his home state, where White vigilantes assaulted and murdered those he called "loyal men" without consequence. Long pleaded with his colleagues to consider the timing of this proposal. "Do we, then, really propose here to-day, when the country is not ready for it, when those disloyal people still hate this Government, when loyal men dare not carry the 'stars and stripes' through our streets, for if they do they will be turned out of employment, to relieve from political disability the very men who have committed these Kuklux [*sic*] outrages?" Long added that he will be "doing my duty to my constituents and my duty to my country when I vote against such a proposition."[8]

Long argued against allowing former Confederates to return to Congress, noting that many belonged to the Ku Klux Klan and feigned loyalty only to gain access to political power. "If this House removes the disabilities of disloyal men," Long warned, "I venture to prophesy you will again have trouble from the very same men who gave you trouble before." The House did not heed Long's warning and voted 118 to 90 to approve the bill later that day.[9]

One of the few votes Long cast in the House was to seat Thomas P. Beard, a Black Republican state legislator from northeast Georgia, after his defeat by Democrat Stephen Alfestus Corker. Beard was one of the state house members expelled from the Georgia assembly in 1868. In sworn testimony, he described the violence that marred his campaign. Beard wrote that many who arrived at the polls intending to vote for him were "shot, beat or otherwise maltreated" by "organized bands of desparadoes [*sic*]" connected to the Democrats. Corker and his Georgia colleague, Pierce Manning Butler Young, denied the allegations. Led by Massachusetts Republican Benjamin Butler, several Republicans—Long among them—objected to seating Corker when he presented his credentials on January 24, 1871. Butler introduced a resolution objecting to Corker's credentials, but it was soundly defeated in a 148 to 42 vote. Both Democrat Michael C. Kerr of Indiana and the Radical Republican George Frisbie Hoar of Massachusetts, among others, urged Members to seat Corker and allow Beard to contest the election if he desired to do so, as they believed Corker's credentials qualified him to remain seated until the Elections Committee ruled on the case. Beard's case never came before the panel, and Corker served out the term.[10]

After leaving Congress on March 3, 1871, Long returned to his tailoring business in Macon, though he bore a considerable personal cost. His life was threatened, and his reputation as a Republican political leader meant his affluent White clientele went elsewhere. By the summer of 1871, he had opened a grocery store in Macon with money he had saved from his congressional salary and from having "lived economically in Washington," he told a reporter. The store was frequented by Black customers, and the reporter noted that Long wore "a shiny hat, faultless white shirt, Nilsson necktie and white Marseilles vest" at work.[11]

Long remained politically active, holding meetings in his store and campaigning for Republican candidates throughout the 1870s. Long served as a member of the Southern Republican Convention in 1874 and as a delegate to the Republican National Conventions from 1872 to 1880. He made an unsuccessful run for a seat in the Georgia state assembly in 1881.[12]

Long eventually became frustrated by White Republican leaders, who had failed to protect Black civil and political rights. Looking to leverage his influence in the state for practical gains, Long backed several Independent Democrat candidates running against Democratic nominees. He rejected requests from the Republican Party to automatically support its White candidates. For Long, Republican candidates had done little in terms of legislation or patronage to warrant his support. They were "office-holders" beholden to their personal interests rather than having built a Republican Party more responsive to the needs of Black Americans.[13]

Long tried to mobilize Black voters with this argument, searching for a way to wield some measure of political power in a state where the Republican Party and Black voters were increasingly marginalized. "We have trusted our white republican leaders too long, and now discovered what we should have discovered a long time ago," he told a local reporter, "that loyalty to our standard and interest in the welfare of our race does not prevail to any great extent among them. We have been made the paw of the hungry, chestnut-loving cat long enough, and now we proposed to sit right square down with them." In April 1882, Long called a conference in Macon to discuss the need for action. Newspapers described this event as a meeting of the "colored caucus" in the state. Long told attendees that the best way forward would be to form a "compact" and strategically align with Independent Democrats to make their votes count.[14]

Long found it difficult to build this opposition movement, however. He continued to back Republican candidates and was active in local Republican politics into the 1890s. Long also spoke on behalf of presidential candidate William McKinley in 1896, which may have secured his son-in-law, Henry Rucker, a patronage position as an internal revenue collector in Atlanta.[15]

By the 1880s, Long was once again a tailor and had started a dry-cleaning business. He was also active in establishing the Union Brotherhood Lodge, a Black mutual aid organization. Long died on February 4, 1901, in Macon, after a brief illness.[16]

Notes

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2 Rosenbaum, "Incendiary Negro": 503–504; Matthews, "Jefferson Franklin Long": 145–147.

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9 *Congressional Globe*, House, 41st Cong., 3rd sess. (1 February 1871): 882, 887.

10 "Georgia: Protest of the Expelled Members of the House of Representatives," 10 September 1868, *New York Times*: 1; *Congressional Globe*, House, 41st Cong., 3rd sess. (24 January 1871): 703–707; *Memorial of Thomas P. Beard*, 41st Cong., 3rd sess., H. Misc. Doc. 48 (1871); *Testimony in the Case of Beard vs. Corker*, 41st Cong., 3rd sess., H. Misc. Doc. 103 (1871).

11 Foner, *Freedom's Lawmakers*: 136; Foner, *Reconstruction*: 361–362; Rosenbaum, "Incendiary Negro": 512; "The Journal of Commerce Commissioner at the South, Letter No. 16," 20 July 1871, *New York Weekly Journal of Commerce*: 6.

12 Matthews, "Jefferson Franklin Long": 149; Rosenbaum, "Incendiary Negro": 522–523.

13 Rosenbaum, "Incendiary Negro": 514–521; Matthews, "Jefferson Franklin Long": 149–155.

14 "Some Plain Talk: From a Noted Colored Politician," 20 January 1882, *Atlanta Constitution*: 3; Rosenbaum, "Incendiary Negro": 523–525, 528; "The Colored Caucus," 29 April 1882, *Atlanta Constitution*: 4.

15 Rosenbaum, "Incendiary Negro": 528–529; "Jefferson Long is Dead," 5 February 1901, *Atlanta Constitution*: 2.

16 Matthews, "Jefferson Franklin Long": 155; Rosenbaum, "Incendiary Negro": 526–529; "Macon, Ga., Feb. 4," 5 February 1901, *Augusta Chronicle* (GA): 1; "Jefferson Long is Dead."

Robert C. De Large

1842–1874

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1871–1873

Republican from South Carolina



Image courtesy of the Library of Congress

Robert C. De Large won election to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1870, one of five Black Representatives elected to a full term in the 42nd Congress (1871–1873). Although a protracted contested election ended his term in office in less than two years, De Large participated in several landmark debates on the House Floor, including the consideration of the Ku Klux Klan Act of 1871 and the Amnesty Act of 1872. De Large was committed to Black civil and political rights in his home state of South Carolina and across the nation, and he implored Democrats—and even his fellow Republicans—to find solutions. "The statesman," De Large declared in 1871, "regards the actual and acts upon it; the desirable, the possible, and even the probable furnishes but poor basis for political action."[1]

Robert Carlos De Large was born on March 15, 1842, in Aiken, South Carolina. Much is unknown about De Large's early life, including whether or not he was born enslaved. He attended high school in Charleston, South Carolina, before working as a barber, tailor, and farmer. He later married and had a daughter: Victoria. During the Civil War, the Confederate government began to force men into hard labor constructing fortifications for the city of Charleston. To avoid this fate, De Large worked on a Confederate navy blockade runner that smuggled goods in and out of South Carolina. By 1870, he had amassed a small fortune and belonged to Charleston's elite circles, joining the Brown Fellowship Society, an exclusive mutual aid and fraternal organization founded by free Black Americans in antebellum Charleston.[2]

After the war, De Large worked for the Republican state government as an agent in the Freedmen's Bureau. He became an organizer for the South Carolina Republican Party, serving on important committees at several state conventions. He chaired the credentials committee at the 1865 Colored People's Convention at Charleston's Zion Church, where he made impassioned speeches comparing the effect of the Civil War to that of the American Revolution. At the 1867 South Carolina Republican Convention, he chaired the platform committee, and he served on the committee on franchise and elections at the state's 1868 constitutional convention.[3]

In 1868, De Large won his first elected office, serving in the state house of representatives, where he chaired the ways and means committee. He also served on a board for an organization that sought resources for those living with mental illness and was a member of the state sinking

fund commission, an institution charged with repaying public debt. In 1870, the legislature chose De Large as land commissioner, a position in which he helped oversee the sale and transfer of small tracts of land.[4]

De Large ambitiously pursued power in South Carolina politics at a moment of internal conflict in the state Republican Party. He maintained a personal friendship and political relationship with South Carolina's White Republican governor, Robert K. Scott, who had been born in the North and served in the U.S. Army during the Civil War before being detailed to South Carolina to help run the Freedmen's Bureau in the late 1860s. Scott was representative of many White Republicans in the state who had moved to South Carolina following the war and accrued power by holding many of its elected and appointed offices. But De Large also sought to keep his party accountable and refused to defend White Republicans against charges of corruption, often publicly chiding party leaders in South Carolina.[5]

In June 1870, De Large was one of several speakers at a large Republican meeting calling for a new direction for the party. He joined a group of Black South Carolina legislators and activists who criticized a faction of White Republicans for holding disproportionate power in the state and for entering politics for their own personal financial gain. De Large told the crowd that he joined the Republican Party because it "professed equal right and privileges to all" and that he wanted to maintain such a standard. Because South Carolina's Black majority was the basis of the Republican Party's power, De Large wanted more Black officeholders in state and local positions. "We placed them in position; we elected them, and by our votes we made them our masters," De Large explained of the White lawmakers. "We now propose to change this thing a little, and let them vote for us."[6]

In 1870, De Large set his sights on South Carolina's Second District, representing Charleston and the southeastern portion of the state in Congress. He secured the Republican nomination over the incumbent, Republican Christopher Columbus Bowen, a former Confederate soldier turned Republican who had been elected to the House in 1868. After losing the primary, Bowen ran against De Large as an Independent Republican in the general election. But De Large ultimately carved out a win by less than 1,000 votes in the majority-Black district after Bowen's allies in Charleston used patronage and job promises to court support for their candidate. Bowen formally challenged the election results, but De Large was sworn in to the 42nd Congress (1871–1873) when it convened on March 4, 1871, and assigned to the Committee on Manufactures.[7]

De Large's legislative efforts as a first-term Member were undermined by the large workload created by Bowen's decision to challenge the election results. Although he never introduced a bill during his truncated term in office, De Large engaged in debate on the House Floor several times on significant legislation that shaped the ongoing process of Reconstruction in the South. He supported a bill providing amnesty to former Confederates who had been outlawed from holding office following the rebellion. But he was emphatic that this measure should be coupled with federal protection for loyal Black and White southerners from intimidation and violence. De Large emphasized that this vision of reconciliation was the only way to achieve "the preservation of the public peace."[8]

During debate on the amnesty bill, De Large engaged in a rare direct confrontation on the House Floor. Missouri Representative James Gorrall Blair, a Liberal Republican opposed to the Reconstruction goals of the Radical Republicans, accused De Large and other Black Republican lawmakers of extending what he called the degradation and humiliation of former Confederates. "I would appeal to the colored Representatives here to say why the withholding of this measure to-day, refusing to remove these disabilities, will remedy the evil of which they speak in the southern States?" Blair asked. De Large responded succinctly that he intended to vote with Blair in favor of amnesty. But he also favored a bill granting the federal government enforcement powers to intervene in states where rising incidents of violence had undermined the civil and political rights of Black Americans. De Large asked if Blair would "use his best endeavors with us to secure the passage immediately afterward of some measure for the protection of the loyal people of the South?" When Blair demurred, claiming he had to carefully consider his vote, De Large pressed the issue. "I should like to have the gentleman give us a direct answer," he demanded. Blair responded that he promised to vote for "every possible protection."[9]

A month later, De Large voted in favor of the third Enforcement Act, later referred to as the Ku Klux Klan Act, and spoke in favor the bill in April 1871. He called for congressional action and noted that the governor of South Carolina urgently requested federal aid from the President. He believed the federal government should use "the strong

arm of the law to interpose and protect the people in their lives, liberty, and property." For De Large, the need for federal intervention was clear. "I believe that if there was a single gentleman upon the floor of this House who, before the commencement of this debate, doubted that lawlessness, confusion, and anarchy existed in some portions, of the South," he observed, "he is at least cured of that doubt by this time." It was vital that Congress pair a Confederate amnesty bill with legislation offering protections for Black Americans, De Large said, otherwise "neither this legislation nor any other that you may pass from now until the hour of doom will be of any benefit."[10]

Hoping to find a compromise, De Large said "that neither the Republicans of my State nor the Democrats of that State can shake their garments and say that they had no hand in bringing about this condition of affairs." But he objected when Members such as Democrat Samuel Sullivan Cox of New York accused Black politicians of fueling the corruption in South Carolina's government. Responding to Cox on the floor, De Large explained that blame should be placed elsewhere. "While there may have been extravagance and corruption resulting from the placing of improper men in official positions," De Large declared, "these evils have been brought about by the men identified with the race to which the gentleman from New York belongs, and not by our race."[11]

Meanwhile, the House Committee on Elections had begun considering De Large's contested election case in December 1871. He took a leave of absence in April 1872 to prepare his defense. Bowen—who at the time faced additional legal proceedings after forged divorce papers had resulted in accusations of bigamy against him—accused De Large not only of election fraud but also of aiding the Confederacy. De Large acknowledged that while he had worked as "a hired servant" on a blockade runner, he did so to avoid "forced labor" constructing the fortifications for Charleston. Bowen asserted that De Large had engaged in hostile acts against the U.S. government, which would make him ineligible for a seat in Congress. In response, De Large noted that Bowen had voluntarily served in the Confederate cavalry and had sought "to perpetuate the vassalage to which my race had been doomed for many generations." De Large also argued that the Supreme Court's 1857 decision in *Dred Scott v. Sandford* could be used in his defense. Even if he had "yielded such support" to the rebellion, De Large claimed he would not be disqualified "for I am of the negro race" and the U.S. government "at the time alleged vested in me none of the rights and imposed upon me none of the obligations of an American citizen."[12]

Bowen also charged De Large's supporters with stuffing ballot boxes with false votes. De Large countered by accusing Bowen of bribing a lawyer to keep exonerating evidence from the Committee on Elections; De Large called, among other witnesses, future Representative Robert Smalls of South Carolina to testify on his behalf. The case was further complicated when De Large's health failed in the summer of 1872. South Carolina Representative Joseph H. Rainey pleaded on the House Floor for a delay in the case, but the committee reported that the many abuses and irregularities during the election made determining a victor impossible. On January 24, 1873, the House declared the seat vacant with about five weeks remaining in the 42nd Congress.[13]

De Large was not a candidate for re-election in 1872, and the Second District seat in the House was filled by South Carolina's lieutenant governor, Alonzo J. Ransier, who won election that fall. De Large returned to the state capital in Columbia and later moved to Charleston after Governor Scott appointed him a trial justice in that city. His health continued to decline in early 1874, and he died on February 14, at the age of 31.[14]

Notes

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8 *Congressional Globe*, Appendix, 42nd Cong., 1st sess. (6 April 1871): 230.

9 *Congressional Globe*, House, 42nd Cong., 1st sess. (14 March 1871): 103–104.

10 *Congressional Globe*, Appendix, 42nd Cong., 1st sess. (6 April 1871): 230.

11 *Congressional Globe*, Appendix, 42nd Cong., 1st sess. (6 April 1871): 230.

12 *Congressional Globe,* House, 42nd Cong., 2nd sess. (20 April 1872): 2594; "The Case of C.C. Bowen," 15 June 1871, *New York Times*: 4; "News Summary," 9 June 1871, *Cincinnati Daily Inquirer*: 4; *Papers and Testimony in the Case of C.C. Bowen vs. R.C. De Large in the Second District of South Carolina*, 42nd Cong., 2nd sess., H. Misc. Doc. 37 (1872): 7.

13 *Papers and Testimony in the Case of C.C. Bowen vs. R.C. De Large in the Second District of South Carolina*: 2; "Bowen Again," 25 December 1871, *Chicago Tribune*: 4; "The Ballot Box," 13 February 1871, *Charleston Daily News*: 3; *Congressional Globe*, 42nd Cong., 3rd sess. (24 January 1873): 842–847; House Committee on Elections, *Bowen vs. DeLarge*, 42nd Cong., 3rd sess., H. Rept. 37 (1873); Chester H. Rowell, *A Historical and Legal Digest of All the Contested Election Cases* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1901): 282.

14 "The New Trial Justices," 2 April 1873, *Charleston Daily News*: 5; "Death of a Colored Ex-Member of Congress," 18 February 1874, *Baltimore Sun*: 4; "South Carolina News," 19 February 1874, *Yorkville Enquirer* (SC): 3.

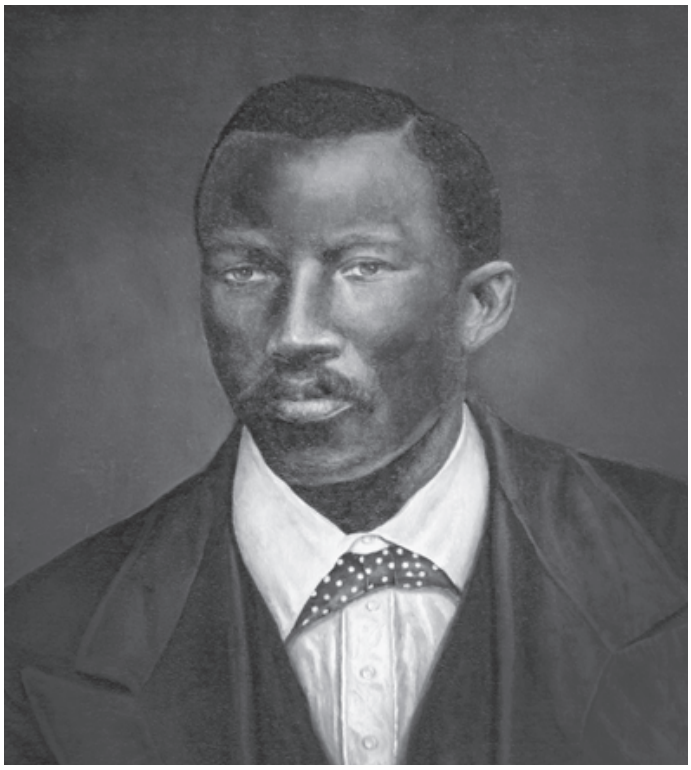
Robert Brown Elliott

1842–1884

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1871–1874

Republican from South Carolina



Speaker Robert Brown Elliott, Larry Lebby, Collection of the South Carolina House of Representatives

A renowned lawyer, activist, and public speaker, Robert Brown Elliott was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives from South Carolina in 1870. During his three years on Capitol Hill, Elliott pressed Congress to protect the political gains Black Americans had won after the Civil War and to stem rising rates of violence back home that threatened to undermine the democratic reforms of the Reconstruction Era. Described by a colleague as "a man of character, ability, and marvelous energy," Elliott had a leading role during debate on the bill that would become the Civil Rights Act of 1875. He ultimately resigned from the House midway through the 43rd Congress (1873–1875) to return to South Carolina and serve in the state legislature in Columbia.[1]

The details of Elliott's early life have been clouded by contradictory sources, rumors, conflicting statements by people who knew him, and different interpretations by historians. According to the *Congressional Directory* for the 42nd Congress (1871–1873), Robert Brown Elliott was born on August 11, 1842, in Boston, Massachusetts. While some sources claim Elliott was born in Liverpool, England, contemporary sources, the U.S. Census, and the *Directory* from his time in office cite Boston as his birthplace. In the 1880 Census, Elliott declared he was born in Massachusetts. He also listed Massachusetts as the birthplace of his mother and Jamaica as the birthplace of his father. When his congressional career commenced, several references were made to his origins in the North. The *New York Times* called him "a Massachusetts man," and an 1871 *Charleston Daily News* article referred to him as a "carpet-bagger," a derogatory moniker applied to people from the North who moved to the South after the Civil War.[2]

Another point of contention in Elliott's personal biography was his education. In the *Congressional Directory*, Elliott asserted that he had been educated in England at High Holborn Academy and Eton College, but no sources can be located to verify he attended these institutions. He also claimed he had studied the law with a famous London barrister, which, again, cannot be verified. Some contemporary sources referenced his service in the British Navy and others cited his time the U.S. Navy, though no records exist to confirm either.[3]

By late 1867, Elliott was living in Charleston, South Carolina, where he was an associate editor for the *South Carolina Leader*, a Black newspaper owned by future

South Carolina Representative Richard Harvey Cain. Elliott married Georgia-born Grace Lee, sometime before 1870. They had no children.[4]

Elliott quickly dove into Reconstruction-era Republican politics in his new South Carolina home, emerging as a leading figure at the January 1868 state constitutional convention. One of 78 Black delegates at the convention, he advocated for compulsory public education and helped defeat the imposition of a poll tax and a literacy test for voters. At the state Republican convention that year, he was nominated for lieutenant governor but dropped out of the race after finishing third on the first ballot. In 1868, while serving as the only Black member of the Barnwell County board of commissioners, Elliott was elected to the state house of representatives, where he remained until 1870. He was almost elected speaker—placing second in the balloting—but went on to chair both the committee on railroads and the committee on privileges and elections. Elliott was admitted to the South Carolina bar in September 1868. In 1869, Republican Governor Robert K. Scott appointed Elliott the assistant adjutant general of the South Carolina militia. He also served on the South Carolina Republican executive committee from 1872 to 1879. "He knew the political condition of every nook and corner throughout the state," Elliott's law partner Daniel Augustus Straker recalled.[5]

In October 1870, Republicans in a west-central South Carolina congressional district nominated Robert Elliott over incumbent Solomon Lafayette Hoge to run for a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives. The district included the capital, Columbia, and had a slight Black majority. Representative Preston Smith Brooks, notorious for his caning assault on Senator Charles Sumner of Massachusetts in 1856, once held the seat. Elliott faced John E. Bacon, a lawyer from a prominent Edgefield County family, who campaigned under the banner of the Union Reform Party—a short-lived party mainly consisting of Democrats running on an anti-corruption platform against the Republican-controlled government of South Carolina. Although the *New York Times* predicted Bacon's victory based on the number of votes the Democratic candidate received in the 1868 election, Elliott soundly defeated him with 60 percent of the vote. Elliott was sworn in to the 42nd Congress on March 4, 1871, and assigned to the Committee on Education and Labor, on which he served during both of his terms in the House.[6]

On Capitol Hill, Elliott gave his maiden speech just 10 days after his swearing-in. In an era when new Members of Congress participated in debate sparingly, Elliott did not hesitate to take to the floor. On March 14, he questioned the merits of a proposed measure to re-establish the political rights of nearly all former Confederates, who, after the Union's victory, had lost the right to vote and hold office. Elliott told his colleagues that "to relieve those men of their disabilities at this time would be regarded by the loyal men of the South as an evidence of weakness of this great Government, and of an intention on the part of this Congress to foster the men who today are outraging the good and loyal people of the South."[7]

Only two weeks later, on April 1, Elliott spoke in favor of a bill designed to grant extraordinary powers to the federal government to respond to increasing incidents of violence across the South. In particular, the bill sought to curb the terrorist activities of the Ku Klux Klan. Democrats had made the case that the bill crossed constitutional lines separating the powers of the federal government and state governments. Elliott addressed the argument of Democratic Representative—and future Speaker of the House—Michael C. Kerr of Indiana, who claimed that the federal government should intervene in the affairs of a state only at the request of the state in question.[8]

Elliott, however, argued that Article IV, Section 4 of the Constitution gave the federal government the power to "guarantee to every State in this Union a Republican Form of Government" and to protect states from invasion and "domestic Violence." The Constitution, he said, "vests in the federal government the right to act" whenever any state was confronted with internal or external threats. Those engaged in the violent attacks on African-American citizens in the South, Elliott said, sought "to defeat the ballot with the bullet and other coercive means," and were engaged in "acts of organized lawlessness."[9]

To inform his colleagues of the severity of the threat, Elliott included in his remarks excerpted correspondence from his home state describing the Klan's activities as well as public threats the terrorist organization made against local officeholders. One of the Klan letters, posted at the courthouse in the town of Union, South Carolina, demanded the resignation of town officials, and Elliott cited acts of Klan violence committed throughout his district and the state. Elliott also referenced Democratic newspapers that described Black Americans as "being in a semi-barbarous

condition," before turning to his colleagues in the House and asking simply "Who is the barbarian here, the murderer or the victim?"[10]

The bill was the third in a series of Enforcement Acts designed to protect Black civil and political rights in the South. Also known as the Ku Klux Klan Act, the measure was signed into law three weeks later. The following October, President Ulysses S. Grant used the powers granted him by the bill to suspend habeas corpus in nine southern states, facilitating the prosecution of Klan members and effectively destroying the organization in South Carolina.[11]

Elliott thrived as an orator and in debate on the House Floor. During his remarks, he often included historical references and allusions to works of literature and poetry. In his April 1 speech, he included several lines from American poet John Greenleaf Whittier's poem, "Toussaint," about the Haitian revolutionary Toussaint Louverture, to frame the struggle of Black Americans in historical perspective. "History has been to me the delight and study of my life," Elliott told a crowd in 1874. History also informed how Elliott understood the law and the Constitution, lessons that he often imparted during his remarks on civil rights legislation before the House. His law partner, Straker, noted that he was "a man capable of giving to the profession a book on constitutional law, for in this branch he excelled." Away from the House Floor, he was just as powerful a speaker. His eulogy for Senator Sumner in Boston, Massachusetts, in April 1874, was hailed by the *Boston Globe* as "a magnificent production, particular portions of it being worthy of a place by the side of the best efforts of America's great orators."[12]

In addition to his oratory, Elliott also tried to use House procedure to further his legislative agenda. During debate in May 1872, Elliott urged his colleagues to pair the Confederate amnesty bill with a robust civil rights bill, and to pass them together. Elliott wanted to "test the sincerity" of those who backed amnesty, and who claimed to be concerned about limitations imposed upon former Confederates. How could they support the rights of White southerners while dismissing the need for new protections for African Americans? For Elliott, the "magnanimous" act of passing an amnesty bill for former Confederates must be followed with a reciprocal vote on the civil rights act. Following the voice vote that passed the amnesty bill in the House, Elliott introduced a resolution directing the Judiciary Committee to immediately report a civil rights bill for debate, but the House voted against his measure.[13]

Much of the legislation Elliott introduced in the House were private bills related to claims individual people made against the U.S. government. In May 1872, Elliott also defended the South Carolina government amid Democratic criticism that Republicans had mismanaged the state's finances. Elliott provided a detailed breakdown of the state's spending history and outlined the many factors involved in creating and perpetuating the debt.[14]

In October 1872, Elliott easily won re-election to the House, garnering 93 percent of the vote against two Democrats, W.H. McCaw and Samuel McGowan. But a month later, in November, Elliott attempted to become the first African-American lawmaker to win a full term in the U.S. Senate. Until 1913, all Senators were elected by the individual state legislatures. And when the South Carolina general assembly voted in the fall of 1872, it chose the Pennsylvania-born banker and former newspaper owner John J. Patterson over Elliott. Patterson, a wealthy Republican, had settled in South Carolina after the Civil War, and Elliott claimed "it was Patterson's money that elected him. His strength was in his purse." Elliott accused many of the state legislators who backed Patterson—including Black Republican lawmakers—of accepting bribes in exchange for their votes. "If this senatorial election had been before the people I would have beaten Patterson ten votes to one," he said. In this era, a new Congress typically did not convene for more than a year after House elections, and Elliott's Senate candidacy did not prevent him from retaking his seat in the House. When Elliott arrived back on Capitol Hill in December 1873 for the opening of the 43rd Congress, he received an additional assignment on the Committee on the Militia.[15]

During his second term, Elliott was one of five Black Representatives who seized the opportunity to advocate for Senator Sumner's civil rights bill to eliminate discrimination from public transportation, public accommodations, and schools. Elliott gained national attention for a January 6, 1874, speech that made the case for federal civil rights legislation while eviscerating the argument of Representative Alexander Hamilton Stephens, who had returned to the House after a 14-year absence to represent a Georgia district. Stephens had lectured the House a day earlier about what he said was the unconstitutional basis of the civil rights bill. The former Confederate vice president argued that "the germinal and seminal principle of American constitutional liberty is the absolute unrestricted right of State self-government in all

purely internal municipal affairs." He claimed that federal intervention in any form "would be against the very genius and entire spirit of our whole system."[16]

Elliott rejected Stephens's assertion that Congress lacked the power to pass legislation that pertained to individual rights in the states. In fact, Elliott argued the opposite: that it was the right and the duty of Congress to legislate against discrimination. "The constitution of a free government ought always be construed in favor of human rights," Elliott said, and it was the role of the federal government to defend these rights. He also rejected the claim by opponents of the bill that there were distinctions between the rights protected by the Constitution and the laws of an individual state. This was irrelevant, Elliott said, as "all discrimination, all denial of equality before the law, all denial of the equal protection of the laws, whether State or national laws, is forbidden" by the Fourteenth Amendment, which broadly defined citizenship and guaranteed equal protection of the law.[17]

Elliott identified the many venues where society discriminated against Black Americans, and argued that the civil rights bill would outlaw "our exclusion from the public inn, from the saloon and table of the steamboat, from the sleeping-coach on the railway, from the right of sepulture in the public burial-ground." To those on the Democratic side who framed the bill as an unconstitutional exercise of the "police power of the State," Elliott asserted that a civil rights bill was the government rightly exercising its regulatory power.[18]

In 1874, Elliott turned his attention away from Capitol Hill and toward South Carolina. In April, he told a reporter that the many accusations of financial mismanagement against the Republican-controlled state government were largely false and rebutted claims that the state government was poorly run because of the presence of Black lawmakers. He acknowledged that some Republicans had engaged in corrupt dealings in Columbia, but emphasized that these critiques were part of a larger effort by the Democratic Party to regain control of the state government. For Elliott, maintaining Republican control of the South Carolina state government was a vital part of protecting Black civil and political rights and preserving the gains of Reconstruction. He contemplated pursuing the position of lieutenant governor, but instead ran for and won a seat in the state house of representatives. He resigned his seat in Congress on November 1, 1874.[19]

In November, the South Carolina state house elected Elliott speaker—he succeeded South Carolina's first Black speaker, Samuel Lee. Elliott served as speaker for two years, and he was elected state attorney general in 1876. Across the state that year, the election cycle was marred by widespread violence that brought to power a new Democratic government led by Governor Wade Hampton. In May 1877, Elliott was forced out of office along with other state officers by the Democratic administration, which used court proceedings to throw out votes from certain counties from the 1876 election, thereby undermining the claim to office held by Elliott and his Republican colleagues.[20]

Afterward, Elliott founded a law practice with two partners, but it closed in 1879. Later that year, he accepted an appointment as a special customs inspector for the U.S. Department of Treasury in Charleston. On a trip to Florida, he contracted malaria, which severely undermined his health for the remainder of his life. Elliott remained active in politics, however, working on Treasury Secretary John Sherman's campaign for President in 1880, seconding his nomination and mobilizing support from Black delegates at the Republican National Convention. In January 1881, Elliott was part of a Black delegation that met with President-elect James A. Garfield to protest the lack of civil and political rights in the South. In May of that year, the Treasury Department transferred him to New Orleans. Elliott was dismissed as a Treasury inspector in 1882—a decision attributed in the press to his affiliation with the Republican faction opposed to Louisiana Senator William Pitt Kellogg. He started another law practice in New Orleans.[21]

Robert Elliott died on August 9, 1884, in New Orleans, at the age of 42. Contemporary press accounts cited malarial fever as the cause. Newspapers from across the nation printed notices of his death—large and small publications from states including Illinois, New York, Ohio, and Vermont. Upon learning of Elliott's death, Frederick Douglass was compelled to write a letter to the editor of the *New York Globe*, mourning the loss of the former Representative "in the midst of his years." Douglass recalled that "Elliott was to me a most grateful surprise, and, in fact a marvel." Elliott's words and actions, Douglass said, contradicted every prejudicial remark directed at Black Americans, for "under his dark brow there blazed an intellect worthy of a place in the highest Legislative hall

of the nation." Douglass added that he had hoped Elliott would someday return to a seat in Congress. "But alas! He is gone, and we can only hope that the same power that gave us one Elliott, will give us another in the near future."[22]

Manuscript Collection

University of South Carolina, South Caroliniana Library (Columbia, SC). *Papers*: 1880–1881, two items. Correspondence written by Robert Brown Elliott includes a letter dated October 16, 1880, written to Louis Dunneman, Esq., requesting money for trip expenses, and a letter dated April 18, 1881, written to U.S. Assistant Secretary of the Treasury Henry Flagg French regarding Elliott's failure to repay debts to Dunneman. Available for research by advance notice only.

Notes

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7 *Congressional Globe*, House, 42nd Cong., 1st sess. (14 March 1871): 102–103.

8 *Congressional Globe*, Appendix, 42nd Cong., 1st sess. (28 March 1871): 46–50.

9 *Congressional Globe*, House, 42nd Cong., 1st sess. (1 April 1871): 391–392.

10 *Congressional Globe*, House, 42nd Cong., 1st sess. (1 April 1871): 392.

11 An Act to amend an Act approved May thirty-one, eighteen hundred and seventy, entitled, "An Act to enforce the Right of Citizens of the United States to vote in the several States of this Union, and for other Purposes," 16 Stat. 433 (1871); Eric Foner, *The Second Founding: How the Civil War and Reconstruction Remade the Constitution* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co.: 2019): 117–120.

12 *Congressional Globe*, House, 42nd Cong., 1st sess. (1 April 1871): 391; "Oration by the Hon. Robert B. Elliott," 15 April 1874, *Boston Globe*: 2; *Congressional Record*, House, 43rd Cong., 1st sess. (6 January 1874): 407–410; "R.B. Elliott as Lawyer"; M. Sammy Miller, "Elliott of South Carolina: Lawyer and Legislator," *Negro History Bulletin* 36, no. 5 (May 1973): 114; "Great Mass Meeting in Faneuil Hall," 15 April 1874, *Boston Globe*: 2.

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17 *Congressional Record*, House, 43rd Cong., 1st sess. (6 January 1874): 409.

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Benjamin Sterling Turner

1825–1894

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1871–1873

Republican from Alabama



Image courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration

Benjamin Sterling Turner was the first African-American lawmaker elected to the U.S. House of Representatives from Alabama. Born enslaved, he was a self-made businessman and philanthropist who opened a school for formerly enslaved people after the Civil War. During his one term in office, Turner tirelessly defended the ambitions and industriousness of his Black constituents and sought to restore peace and repair the lingering economic damage in the war-ravaged South. "These people have struggled longer and labored harder, and have made more of the raw material than any people in the world," he noted on the House Floor. "Since they have been free they have not slackened in their industry, but materially improved their economy."[1]

Benjamin Sterling Turner was born enslaved on March 17, 1825, in Halifax County, North Carolina. When Elizabeth Turner, his widowed enslaver, moved to Selma, Alabama, in 1830, she brought five-year-old Turner with her. As a child, Benjamin Turner secretly learned to read. Turner was sold at age 20 to Major W.H. Gee, the husband of Elizabeth Turner's stepdaughter. Gee owned a hotel that Turner managed. After Gee's death, his brother, James, became Turner's enslaver. Turner married Independence, an enslaved Black woman on January 8, 1857, but their union was severed when Gee sold her. The 1870 Census indicates that Turner cared for a nine-year-old boy named Osceola. In 1872, Turner married Ella Todd.[2]

By the start of the Civil War, Turner had accumulated enough money to purchase property. When James Gee left to serve in the Confederate army, he permitted Turner to operate another of the family's hotels and to run and profit from a livery stable. Selma became a hub for weapons manufacturing and was captured by Union cavalry in the spring of 1865. U.S. troops burned two-thirds of the city and Turner suffered great financial loss as a result. He later sought compensation from the Southern Claims Commission, but it is unclear if he received it. Turner continued to work as a merchant and a farmer after the war, recouping many of his losses. Eager to provide freed people with educational opportunities that they had long been denied, he founded a school in Selma in 1865. In 1867, he attended the Republican state convention and attracted the attention of local Republican officials. In 1869, Turner was elected a Selma councilman, but he resigned in protest nine months later after the council voted to take monthly compensation from the city. He believed public officials should decline payment when the city was in dire financial straits.[3]

In 1870, Turner made a bid for a southwestern Alabama seat in the U.S. House of Representatives. He received a chilly reception among White Republicans and was largely forced to finance his own campaign—even selling a horse. Turner worked to position himself as candidate who could appeal to all southerners, regardless of race. "I emphatically say that my platform is universal pardon, universal suffrage, and universal repudiation of the war debt," he told a crowd at a speech in Jackson, Alabama. "Let the war debt go to the devil, the father of the war." He also made specific promises to his Black constituents, pledging to weed out federal officials who refused to hire Black employees. Turner was able to earn strong support from the Black population, which at nearly 52 percent of the district constituted the second-largest Black voting bloc in Alabama. Despite a prominent Democrat's prediction that Turner's nomination "will seal the doom of the Republican Party in Northern Alabama" and that "the party will be killed so dead that the hand of resurrection will never reach it," Turner defeated Democrat Samuel J. Cummings with 58 percent of the vote in the November 8 election.[4]

In the 42nd Congress (1871–1873), Turner took a generous approach to those who had taken up arms against the government, introducing a bill to eliminate legal and political disabilities imposed on former Confederates. Though his bill was never voted on, the amnesty bill that passed in 1872 cleared the restrictions limiting the political activities of most participants in the rebellion.[5]

Having witnessed firsthand the devastation of the Civil War in the South, Turner spent much of his congressional career seeking financial aid for his state. Turner sought to repair his battle-scarred hometown by sponsoring a bill to appropriate $200,000 for the construction of a federal building in Selma and the reconstruction of Selma's St. Paul's Episcopal Church. Vowing "to not relinquish one foot of ground until I shall have succeeded in my efforts," he argued that an infusion of federal money would help heal wounds from the war. Turner included a plea for federal funding in the appendix of the *Congressional Globe*. "The Government made a display in that unfortunate city of its mighty power," Turner wrote of Selma's experience during the war. "They may have sinned wonderfully, but they suffered terribly." With eyes firmly on the future, Turner continued magnanimously: "I have no coals of fiery reproach to heap upon them now. Rather would I extend the olive branch of peace, and say to them, let the past be forgotten and let us all, from every hue and shade, go to work peacefully to build up the shattered temples of this great and glorious Republic." Although the appropriation for Selma failed to pass, Turner was able to help individual Alabamians from his position on the Committee on Invalid Pensions. Turner passed two private pension bills, one of which put a Black Civil War veteran, Daniel Wooden, on the pension roll at $8 per month.[6]

In Congress, Turner advocated for the region's organized farm interests as well as its aspiring smallholders. On February 21, 1872, he presented a petition from the board of trade in Mobile, Alabama, requesting a refund of the cotton taxes collected from the southern states from 1866 to 1868. On May 31, he submitted a speech to be printed in the *Congressional Globe*, declaring the tax unconstitutional and decrying what he called its impoverishing effect on cotton workers—a disproportionate number of whom were freed people. He pleaded "on behalf of the poor people of the South, regardless of caste or color, because this tax had its blighting influence. It cut the jugular vein of our financial system, bled it near unto death. … It so crippled every trade and industry that our suffering has been greater under its influence than under that of the war." In the same speech, Turner called for the government to purchase private land, divide it into tracts of no more than 160 acres, and sell it to new landowners, especially freedmen. This reprised a call he had made in a bill he had submitted more than a month earlier, authorizing the government to buy land sold at public auction and facilitating sales to the "landless citizens of the United States."[7]

Turner also introduced legislation that protected new Black landowners. His proposal was to enable the transfer of land disputes exceeding $500 from state courts to federal ones. The bill allowed a claimant to appeal to federal authorities if "he has reason to believe, and does believe, he will not be able to obtain justice in such State courts." The House, however, took no action on his proposal, nor did lawmakers consider a refund for the cotton tax.[8]

Although Republicans renominated Turner in 1872, he faced an uphill battle to remain in Congress. His economic revitalization bills had failed to pass, and he had been the target of derision from some prominent African-American leaders. One noted condescendingly that during his industrious but modest past Turner had been a "barroom owner, livery stable keeper, and a man destitute of education." In the Republican primary, Turner defeated

Philip Joseph, a Mobile newspaper editor, who then ran against Turner as an Independent Republican, trying to attract voters aligned with the party's philosophy but opposed to the state party's leadership. Joseph's entry into the race effectively split the Black vote. White candidate Frederick George Bromberg, running on the Democratic and Liberal Republican ticket, benefited from the split, winning the general election with a 44 percent plurality. Turner took 37 percent, and Joseph garnered 19 percent.[9]

After his congressional career, Turner curtailed his political activities for several years before emerging in 1880 to serve as a delegate to the Republican National Convention in Chicago, Illinois. He also served as chair of the Republican executive committee in the Fourth District in 1882.[10]

In 1886, Turner campaigned for the House seat representing Alabama's Fourth District. Seeking a return to Capitol Hill for the 50th Congress (1887–1889), Turner promised "a bold and aggressive campaign against the hydraheaded Democracy that has ever struggled to keep us in ignorance and darkness." One of two Republicans to compete in the three-way race, Turner placed last, garnering just 12 percent of the vote.[11]

Turner eventually bought a 640-acre farm in Dallas County, Alabama, but his businesses suffered during a national economic downturn at the end of the 1870s. Though he may have regained his fortune by 1890, he hit financial trouble again amid another economic recession. Turner suffered a stroke in the early 1890s, and as both his health and investments failed, he sold the remainder of his farm to pay off debts a few months before his death near Selma on March 21, 1894.[12]

Notes

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8 H.R. 1694, 42nd Cong. (1872).

9 Quotation from Eric Foner, *Freedom's Lawmakers: A Directory of Black Officeholders During Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993): 215; Rogers, "Turner, Benjamin Sterling," *American National Biography*: 10; Gilliard, "'He Means to Have His Way'": 41; "A Probable Reform Victory in Alabama," 20 September 1872, *New-York Semi-Weekly Tribune*: 4; "Alabama," 2 November 1872, *New York Herald*: 11; Dubin, *United States Congressional Elections, 1788–1997*: 223.

10 Rogers, "Turner, Benjamin Sterling," *American National Biography*: 10; Richard Bailey, *Neither Carpetbaggers Nor Scalawags: Black Officeholders During the Reconstruction of Alabama, 1867–1878*, rev. 5th ed. (Montgomery, AL: NewSouth Books, 2010): 284.

11 "Ex-Congressman Turner Accepts the Nomination in the 4th District," 23 October 1886, *Huntsville Gazette* (AL): 2; Dubin, *United States Congressional Elections, 1788–1997*: 271.

12 Gilliard, "'He Means to Have His Way'": 41; "Colored Solons," 8 February 1890, *Evening Star* (Washington, DC): 8; "Ex-Congressman Turner Dead," 23 March 1894, *Selma Times*: 2.

Josiah T. Walls

1842–1905

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1871–1873; 1873–1876

Republican from Florida

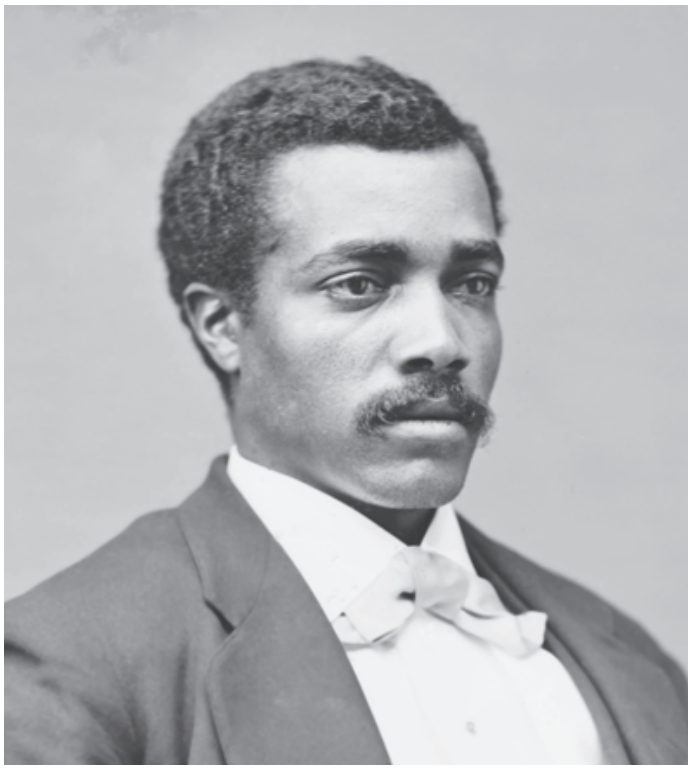

Image courtesy of the Library of Congress

Overcoming deep political divisions in the Florida Republican Party, Josiah T. Walls became the state's first Black Member of Congress in 1871. During his career in the U.S. House of Representatives, opponents often challenged his election victories, and the House twice voted to remove him from office based on disputed election results. When he was not fiercely defending his seat in Congress, Walls fought for internal improvements for Florida and federal support for education. He also pushed the federal government to take an active role protecting individual rights to build a better future for all southerners, particularly his Black constituents. "Yet we demand that our lives, our liberties, and our property shall be protected by the strong arm of our government," Walls said, "that it gives us the same citizenship that it gives to those who it seems would, if it were possible, sink our every hope for peace, prosperity, and happiness into the great sea of oblivion."[1]

Josiah Thomas Walls was likely born enslaved near Winchester, Virginia, on December 30, 1842. He may have been the son of his enslaver, Dr. John Walls, and maintained contact with him throughout his life. In July 1863, Josiah Walls joined the Union Army as part of the 3rd Infantry Regiment of United States Colored Troops (USCT) based in Philadelphia. His regiment moved to Union-occupied northern Florida in February 1864. The following June, he transferred to the 35th Regiment USCT, where he served as the first sergeant and artillery instructor. While living in Picolata, Florida, Walls met and married Helen Fergueson, with whom he had one daughter: Nettie. He was discharged in October 1865 and decided to stay in Florida, working at a sawmill on the Suwannee River and, later, as a teacher with the Freedmen's Bureau in Gainesville.[2]

Walls began his political career by representing north-central Florida's Alachua County in the 1868 Florida constitutional convention. That same year, Walls ran a successful campaign for state assemblyman. The following fall, he was elected to the state senate and took his seat as one of five freedmen in the 24-man chamber in January 1869. In 1871, Walls attended the Southern States Convention of Colored Men in Columbia, South Carolina.[3]

The Republican Party nominating convention met in August 1870 to consider candidates for federal and statewide office. For the previous three years, a campaign of violence and intimidation orchestrated by the ruthless Jacksonville branches of the Ku Klux Klan had plagued the state. As a result, Florida's Black voters were widely

expected to avoid the polls on Election Day. Republicans feared that Democrats would capture the election if Black turnout was suppressed, so state Republican Party leaders decided to bypass the incumbent, former Union soldier Representative Charles Memorial Hamilton, and nominate a Black candidate for the state's lone At-Large seat in the U.S. House of Representatives. Fierce competition between the nominees and factional divisions within the party led to intense debate at the convention; attempts to cast fraudulent votes also almost led to violence. Walls's reputation as an independent politician outside the control of any one faction gave him the edge, and the convention selected him for the party's nomination on the eleventh ballot.[4]

Walls faced former slaveholder and Confederate veteran Silas Leslie Niblack in the general election. Niblack attacked Walls relentlessly, telling voters that Walls's former enslavement meant he was not fit to serve in Congress. Walls, meanwhile, held political rallies throughout northern Florida—the most populous section of the state—and challenged Niblack to a debate. The campaign was tumultuous and often punctuated by violence, including gunfire at a Walls rally in Gainesville. As one Clay County observer noted, Florida had been "turned upside down with politics and the election." Walls emerged victorious, edging out Niblack by 627 votes out of the more than 24,000 cast. After presenting his credentials on March 4, 1871, Walls was immediately sworn in to the 42nd Congress (1871–1873) and given a seat on the Committee on the Militia.[5]

Niblack contested the election. He provided what he said was evidence showing that the canvassers who rejected Democratic ballots in at least eight Florida counties were not legally allowed to do so; their job, he said, had been limited to counting votes. In his defense, Walls argued that he would have had more votes due to voter intimidation and violence at the polls in several counties. The committee granted Walls 29 additional votes in Gadsden County, after each individual provided sworn testimony. But in other counties, Walls lost votes based on evidence provided by Niblack, who disputed Walls's claims regarding voter suppression. Walls was in office for nearly two years when the House Committee on Elections ruled on his case on January 21, 1873, in the final weeks of the 42nd Congress, recommending that Walls was not entitled to his seat. The House Republican majority declared Niblack the winner on January 29, 1873—a rare case in which the committee majority decided in favor of the candidate from the minority party.[6]

Despite his ouster, Walls's congressional career was not over. In November 1872, he had won one of Florida's two At-Large seats in the 43rd Congress (1873–1875). In the four-way race, the top-two vote-getters won a seat. Walls was just 34 votes shy of the top candidate, Republican William Purman. Niblack, running as a Conservative, placed third. Florida Democrats had been using the term "Conservative" to describe themselves to lure formerly loyal Republican voters who were uneasy about casting their ballots for Democrats. Walls returned to Congress when it convened in December 1873, receiving an additional assignment on the Committee on Expenditures in the Navy Department.[7]

Walls spent much of the 42nd and 43rd Congresses advancing the political and economic interests of his Florida constituents. He presented resolutions for statewide internal improvements, including the construction of telegraph lines, railroads, customhouses, courthouses, and post offices. He sought funding to improve Florida's harbors and rivers and to create a land-grant state agricultural college. In an 1872 tariff bill, Walls also fought to protect Florida's orchards from foreign competition. Most of Walls's measures failed to make it out of committee, but he had more success passing private bills. He managed to gain pensions for Seminole War veterans who fought several battles against Native Americans in Florida throughout the early nineteenth century.[8]

Amid fear that the cause of public education would languish if it were left to the states, Walls enthusiastically supported a measure to establish a national education fund financed by the sale of public land during the 42nd Congress. In his first major floor speech on February 3, 1872, Walls discussed the need for a more active federal government in administering schools across the nation. "Education tends to increase the dignity and self-respect of a people, tends to increase their fitness for society and important stations of trust, tends to elevate, and consequently carries with it a great moral responsibility," Walls observed. "This is why the Democratic party in the South so bitterly oppose the education of all classes. They know that no educated people can be enslaved."[9]

During Walls's time in Congress, however, lawmakers largely ignored calls to establish a national education system, and Walls was left further frustrated when the Civil Rights Act of 1875 passed without a clause opening universal access to schools. As the 43rd Congress came to a close, Walls assessed the future of the South in a speech

he inserted into the appendix of the *Congressional Record*. "I reluctantly confess, after so many years of concessions that unless partisan and sectional feeling shall lose more of its rancor in the future than has been experienced in the past, fundamental law will be disregarded, overthrown, and trampled underfoot, and a complete reign of terror and anarchy will rule supreme." He warned that as southern Democrats amassed power in state governments and in Congress they sought to achieve the goals of the Confederacy through more subtle means than armed rebellion. Walls cited the common refrain among White southerners, that it was "their fixed purpose to 'gain,' as they say, 'by the ballot that which we lost by the bayonet.'" Walls urged his colleagues to fully acknowledge what southern reactionaries wanted to achieve. "I hear the answer echoed, by the bayonet we lost our power and our human property, and by the ballot we shall regain what we lost by the bayonet." For Walls, this movement threatened to undermine the legacy of the Union victory in the Civil War and the gains of Reconstruction.[10]

Walls also supported the efforts of Cuban people to overthrow Spain's colonial government, almost twenty-five years before the U.S. military would intervene in the Spanish-American War. He used remarks printed in the *Record* to make a case for the United States to recognize the Cuban revolutionaries as combatants and to open avenues for military aid. Walls placed the Cuban effort in the great tradition of Latin American republican movements resisting colonial powers to achieve independence. He particularly emphasized the Cuban revolutionaries' anti-slavery position, linking Spain's continued control of the island to "the perpetuation of African slavery in the western world." Instead, Walls insisted, the United States should remember its own revolutionary roots and live up to its inspirational past. "For every effort to achieve independence throughout the world, in the century of the existence of this Republic, the nation is measurably responsible by the proud example of July 4, 1776." He concluded with statements of support for the cause of Cuban independence from the governor of Florida and the state legislature.[11]

For the 1874 campaign, Florida was split into two congressional districts, and Walls ran in a district covering the eastern half of the peninsula with a population that was more than 50 percent African American. Nearly the entire population of the new district lived between Walls's home in north-central Florida and Jacksonville on the Atlantic Coast. The state Republican Party remained fractured, and a national economic depression further endangered its grip on the state government. Walls took several steps starting in 1873 to secure the Republican nomination for the 44th Congress (1875–1877). Using his congressional salary, Walls purchased a cotton plantation formerly owned by a Confederate general. That same year, he was admitted to the Florida bar and bought the Gainesville *New Era* newspaper. Walls used the *New Era* to campaign for his renomination. In his first editorial, Walls promised to focus on internal improvements and to address the "wants and interests of the people of color." He also maneuvered to secure support from Republican delegates in the weeks before the district nominating convention in August 1874. He was nominated on the first ballot.[12]

In the general election, Walls faced Conservative candidate Jesse Johnson Finley—a Tennessee native and formerly a member of the antebellum Whig Party. Walls topped Finley by a slim margin of 371 votes out of nearly 17,000 cast, taking 51 percent of the vote.[13]

When the 44th Congress convened in December 1875, Walls was assigned to the Committee on Mileage. He went to work introducing legislation to secure funding for improving Florida waterways, construction of a lighthouse, and purchasing the Jacksonville offices formerly occupied by the Freedman's Bank for federal office space. But, once again, Walls faced a challenge to his seat. Finley contested the election, claiming that ballots from several precincts where Walls resided in Alachua County had been miscounted. Finley supporters also claimed that other Alachua County votes were illegal because the eligibility oath required by Florida law was executed improperly. Finley claimed that Walls's Republican ally in one Columbia County precinct had tampered with the ballot box and accused another local Republican of impersonating a federal marshal to protect and encourage Black voters at one of the polling places. With Democrats in the majority in the House, the Committee on Elections voted 8 to 3 against Walls. As the debate moved to the House Floor, Democratic Speaker Michael C. Kerr of Indiana allocated time to Members during the two-day discussion, with Walls briefly taking the floor in his own defense. On April 19, 1876, the House adopted the committee report, 135 to 84, and seated Finley. Walls returned to Florida a week later and, in August 1876, Republican Horatio Bisbee Jr. defeated his attempt at renomination.[14]

In November 1876, Walls won a seat in the Florida state senate, where he pushed for the committee on education to assess the condition and effectiveness of public schools in the state while also advocating for compulsory public education. He left the senate in February 1879, two weeks before the end of the session, citing an illness in the family.[15]

In 1884, Walls decided to once again pursue a U.S. House seat in the 49th Congress (1885–1887). Walls met with a large conference of African-American leaders in Gainesville, Florida, in February to consider the future role of Black politicians in the state. The consensus among attendees was to mobilize an independent movement, free from the influence of White Republicans seeking to secure patronage positions instead of fighting for Black civil and political rights. Black voters were "shamefully ignored by the leaders of the Republican organization" in Florida, Walls asserted, and the new movement aimed to steer the state in a new direction—away from White supremacy and toward democratic government.[16]

Walls challenged the incumbent Republican Bisbee, who had held the seat since the 45th Congress (1877–1879). Despite early enthusiasm around his campaign, Walls placed last in the 1884 general election as an Independent candidate for his old House seat, recording only 215 votes—less than one percent—as Democrat Charles Dougherty won the seat. In 1890, Walls made an unsuccessful bid for state senate.[17]

By the mid-1880s, Walls was a successful tomato farmer in central Florida, owning 1,800 acres of land. In 1885, his wife, Helen Fergueson Walls, died and Josiah Walls married Ella Angeline Gass. Walls's farm was devastated when his crops froze in February 1895. He subsequently took charge of the farm at Florida Normal College—now Florida A&M University. Lobbying for a federal patronage position in 1897, he visited the White House as a candidate for postmaster of Gainesville, Florida. Walls died on May 15, 1905.[18]

Notes

1 *Congressional Record,* Appendix, 43rd Cong., 2nd sess. (2 March 1875): 166–169.

2 Peter D. Klingman, "Race and Faction in the Public Career of Florida's Josiah T. Walls," in *Southern Black Leaders of the Reconstruction Era*, ed. Howard Rabinowitz (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982): 10–13, 59–60, 121; Peter D. Klingman, *Josiah Walls: Florida's Back Congressman of Reconstruction* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1976): 6–7.

3 Klingman, *Josiah Walls*: 15.

4 Joe M. Richardson, *The Negro in the Reconstruction of Florida, 1865–1877* (Tallahassee: Florida State University Press, 1965): 172; Klingman, *Josiah Walls*: 30–36; Daniel R. Weinfeld, " 'More Courage than Discretion': Charles M. Hamilton in Reconstruction-Era Florida," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 84, no. 4 (Spring 2006): 508.

5 Quotation from Klingman, *Josiah Walls*: 37–38; Michael J. Dubin, *United States Congressional Elections, 1788–1997* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 1998): 217.

6 Klingman, *Josiah Walls*: 46–47; House Committee on Elections, *Silas L. Niblack vs. Josiah T. Walls*, 42nd Cong., 3rd sess., H. Rept. 41 (1873); Chester H. Rowell, *A Historical and Legal Digest of All the Contested Election Cases* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1901): 282–283; *Congressional Globe*, House, 42nd Cong., 3rd sess. (29 January 1873): 949–952.

7 The second seat was added as a result of apportionment after the 1870 Census. Dubin, *United States Congressional Elections, 1788–1997*: 223; Klingman, *Josiah Walls*: 62–63.

8 H.R. 130, 42nd Cong. (1871); H.R. 730, 42nd Cong. (1872); H.R. 731, 42nd Cong. (1872); H.R. 732, 42nd Cong. (1872); H.R. 3210, 42nd Cong. (1873); H.R. 572, 44th Cong. (1876); H.R. 3211, 42nd Cong. (1873); H.R. 3212, 42nd Cong. (1873); H.R. 3213, 42nd Cong. (1873); H.R. 3215, 42nd Cong. (1873); H.R. 383, 43rd Cong. (1874); H.R. 384, 43rd Cong. (1874); H.R. 385, 43rd Cong. (1874); H.R. 703, 43rd Cong. (1874); H.R. 1131, 43rd Cong. (1874); *Congressional Globe*, House, 42nd Cong., 2nd sess. (20 May 1872): 3655; *Congressional Globe*, House, 42nd Cong., 2nd sess., (17 May 1872): 3569; H.R. 3210, 42nd Cong. (1873); H.R. 378, 43rd Cong. (1874).

9 *Congressional Globe*, House, 42nd Cong., 2nd sess. (23 February 1872): 809.

10 An act to protect all citizens in their civil and legal rights, 18 Stat. 335 (1875); *Congressional Record,* Appendix, 43rd Cong., 2nd sess. (2 March 1875): 166–169.

11 *Congressional Record*, Appendix, 43rd Cong., 1st sess. (24 January 1874): 28–29.

12 Stanley B. Parsons et al., *United States Congressional Districts, 1843–1883* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986): 156; Klingman, *Josiah Walls*: 52–58.

13 Klingman, *Josiah Walls*: 62–63; Dubin, *United States Congressional Elections, 1788–1997*: 230.

14 H.R. 571, 44th Cong. (1876); H.R. 573, 44th Cong. (1876); H.R. 575, 44th Cong. (1876); H.R. 977, 44th Cong. (1876); House Committee on Elections, *Finley vs. Walls*, 44th Cong., 1st sess. H. Rept. 295 (1876); *Congressional Record,* House, 44th Cong., 1st sess. (19 April 1876): 2602; Klingman, *Josiah Walls*: 64–69, 70, 113–114.

15 Klingman, *Josiah Walls*: 119; Klingman, "Race and Faction": 74.

16 Klingman, *Josiah Walls*: 129–130; Paul Ortiz, *Emancipation Betrayed: The Hidden History of Black Organizing and White Violence in Florida from Reconstruction to the Bloody Election of 1920* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2006): 42–44; "Gen. Walls on Fusion," 9 February 1884, *New York Globe*: 2.

17 Ortiz, *Emancipation Betrayed*: 41–46; Dubin, *United States Congressional Elections, 1788–1997*: 265; Klingman, *Josiah Walls*: 141.

18 Carl Webber, *The Eden of the South* (New York: Leve & Alden's Publication Department, 1883): 93–94; Klingman, *Josiah Walls*: 141–142; "Colored Men Call," 31 December 1897, *Evening Star* (Washington, DC): 3; "Paragraphic News," 17 June 1905, *Washington Bee*: 1; "Chips," 15 July 1905, *Broad Ax* (Chicago, IL): 2.

Richard H. Cain

1825–1887

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1873–1875; 1877–1879

Republican from South Carolina

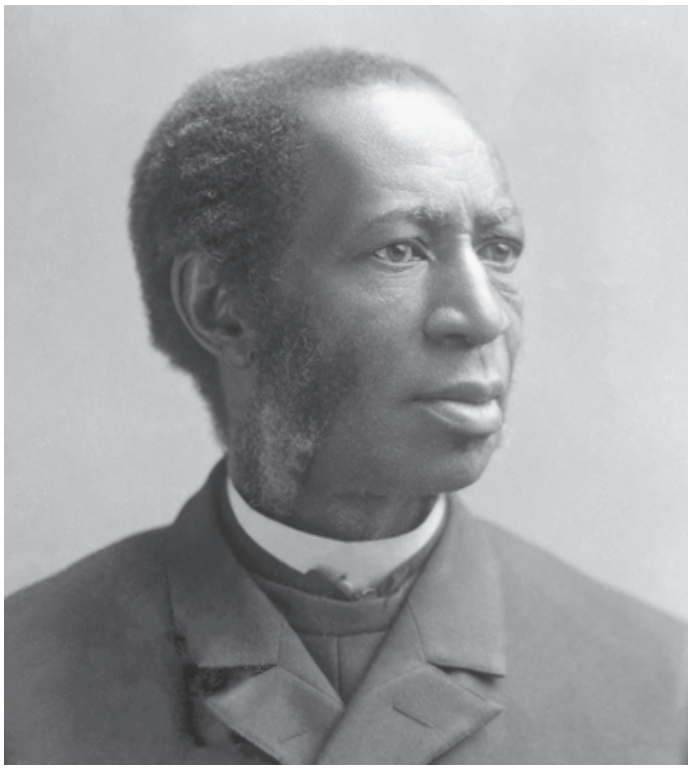

Image courtesy of the Library of Congress

Richard H. Cain was a pastor, a newspaper editor, and an entrepreneur, making his mark as a writer and missionary before being elected to the U.S. House of Representatives from South Carolina. In two nonconsecutive terms, Cain was a staunch advocate for Black civil and political rights who promoted federal investment in public education. During the 43rd Congress (1873–1875), Cain played a prominent role in Republican efforts to pass the Civil Rights Act of 1875. "All we ask of this country," Cain told his House colleagues during one of the final debates on the bill, "is to put no barriers between us, to lay no stumbling blocks in our way; to give us freedom to accomplish our destiny."[1]

Richard Harvey Cain was born to free parents on April 12, 1825, in Greenbrier County, Virginia, in what is now West Virginia. They moved with their son to Gallipolis, Ohio, in 1831. Living in a free state afforded Cain access to an education; he learned to read and write in Sunday school classes. He also worked on steamboats along the Ohio River. In 1844, Cain entered the Methodist ministry; his first assignment was in Hannibal, Missouri. In 1848, frustrated by the Methodists' segregated practices, he transferred to the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church. Cain then served as a pastor in Muscatine, Iowa, where he was elected a deacon in 1859. When the Civil War broke out in 1861, he was studying at Wilberforce University in Ohio, one of the first American colleges founded by Black men. In 1862, Cain married Laura Hazzard of Baltimore, Maryland. He adopted a daughter, Anna J. Cook, who was formerly enslaved in Virginia.[2]

In 1861, Cain was assigned to serve as pastor at the Bridge Street Church in Brooklyn, New York, where he quickly became involved in politics. As a delegate to a national Black convention held in Syracuse, New York, in 1864, he advocated for Black voting rights. After the war, the AME Church assigned Cain to the historic Emanuel Church in Charleston, South Carolina. The state government had dissolved the congregation in 1822 following the revelation that enslaved people in the city were plotting a revolt. But under Cain's leadership Emanuel was rebuilt, becoming the largest Black congregation in the state by 1871. Cain played a prominent role at the 1865 Charleston Colored People's Convention, penning the "Address to the People of South Carolina," which outlined the positions of the convention and appealed to South Carolinians to recognize the civil and political rights of African Americans. An observer praised his skills

as an orator, noting he has "a military way of massing his arguments, and hurling them like an avalanche against the weaker portion of the lines of his opponent."[3]

Cain found multiple outlets through which to channel his public voice. He established the *South Carolina Leader* newspaper in 1866, renaming it the *Missionary Record* in 1868. He hired future South Carolina Black Representatives Robert Brown Elliott and Alonzo J. Ransier as associate editors. The editorial page of the *Missionary Record* helped expand Cain's base of support in Charleston beyond Emanuel's congregation, which he had turned into a formidable political organization in its own right. Cain first served in South Carolina as a delegate to the state constitutional convention in 1868. He was elected to the state senate that same year, heading a commission to investigate South Carolina state senators who voted against the ratification of the Fourteenth Amendment. After an unsuccessful campaign for re-election to the state senate in 1870, Cain was named chair of the party's Charleston branch, and he set his sights on national politics. He was known by both Black and White South Carolinians as "Daddy Cain"—for the former, as a nickname that paid respect to a champion of Black civil rights and social advancement, but for the latter, it was sometimes used derisively.[4]

Land redistribution was one of Cain's core objectives. In 1869, he supported the creation of a state land commission and petitioned Congress to fund it with a $1 million loan from the Freedman's Bank. When the commission proved corrupt and ineffective, Cain purchased large tracts of farmland 20 miles outside Charleston in 1871 and attempted to sell them exclusively to freed people. He established the Ebenezer AME Church on the property, and a new community named Lincolnville grew out of its congregation. When Cain was unable to meet the mortgage payments, however, his financiers foreclosed on the project and the endeavor failed. Cain's participation in Reconstruction-era politics came with extraordinary personal risk; White supremacists harassed him, and his daughter would later recall that the family "lived in constant fear at all times."[5]

The 1872 campaign in South Carolina appeared to be a propitious one for Cain. A new reform movement was gaining strength in state politics, particularly following the revelation of corruption on the part of outgoing Governor Robert K. Scott. An anti-corruption advocate and a cofounder of the Honest Government League, Cain made his activism a key part of his candidacy for elected office. After failing to obtain the nomination for lieutenant governor, Cain sought an At-Large seat in the U.S. House of Representatives. Running on a platform of good government, he won 71 percent of the total vote in a four-way race.[6]

Upon being sworn into the 43rd Congress, Cain became the first Black Representative assigned to the influential Committee on Agriculture. In his first term, he focused the bulk of his effort on a long-awaited civil rights bill. First introduced in 1870, the bill aimed to prohibit discrimination in public transportation, accommodations, and education. Cain welcomed the opportunity to debate the bill on the House Floor in January 1874. Cain identified the civil rights legislation as the final battle of the Civil War, fulfilling "the great mission," as he called it, "of giving all the people equal rights." Cain described the essential contributions made by African Americans to the economic development of the South, contrasting that legacy with the ongoing insult of discrimination. He rejected the Democratic argument that civil rights legislation would somehow fatally damage southern society by instigating conflict between White and Black residents of the region. "Now I am at a loss to see how the friendship of our white friends can be lost to us by simply saying we should be permitted to enjoy the rights enjoyed by other citizens," Cain said on January 10. "I do not ask for any legislation for colored people of this country that is not applied to the white people. All that we ask is equal laws, equal legislation, and equal rights throughout the length and breadth of this land." A diminished version of the civil rights legislation passed on February 4, 1875. Cain voted for the bill, despite limitations, including a last-minute amendment striking the clause that would have integrated public schools.[7]

Before the 1874 election, Cain's At-Large seat was replaced by a new Fifth District in South Carolina. Cain, however, pursued the nomination in the Third District, which had been represented by Robert Elliott in the 43rd Congress. Elliott had resigned to return to South Carolina and run for a seat in the state legislature. Cain allied with the Independent Republican faction that was opposed to the Republican candidate for governor, Daniel Chamberlain, and his supporters in the regular Republican Party. Cain and the Independent Republicans wanted to reform the Republican Party in South Carolina by eliminating corruption. To do so, they nominated their

own gubernatorial candidate, John T. Green, and engaged in a campaign against Chamberlain. The movement was ultimately unsuccessful in diverting Republican votes from the Chamberlain ticket, and, while newspaper accounts described him as an Independent Republican candidate, Cain did not appear in the election results for the Third District, and it is unclear if he ever was on the general election ballot. The Republican nominee, Solomon Lafayette Hoge, won the seat and Cain returned to his Charleston ministry.[8]

In 1876, Cain accepted the Republican nomination for a seat in a new Second District mapped by the Republican state legislature. South Carolina's Second District, which was more than 65 percent Black, swept from low-country Charleston to neighboring inland Orangeburg County. Cain defeated his Democratic opponent, Michael Patrick O'Connor, taking 62 percent of the vote. But that Election Day was one of the most tumultuous and violent in South Carolina history. The chaos drew national attention when South Carolina's outgoing Republican administration and its incoming Democratic administration both sent separate sets of electoral votes for each of the presidential candidates, Republican Rutherford B. Hayes and Democrat Samuel J. Tilden. Two other states also sent competing electoral votes to Congress.[9]

O'Connor contested Cain's victory when the 45th Congress (1877–1879) convened on October 15, 1877. He challenged Cain's credentials, signed by South Carolina secretary of state Henry E. Hayne, who served under the outgoing Republican governor. O'Connor argued that the number of votes in three counties exceeded the number of legally qualified voters and that voters were threatened by crowds of Black men at the polls. He also questioned the integrity of the state canvassers who tallied the final votes because they had appeared as candidates on the Republican ticket along with Cain. The following day, Cain defended himself, noting that the state secretary who had signed his credentials also had signed those of four other South Carolina Representatives, including White candidates as well as both Republicans and Democrats. That same day the House voted 181 to 89 to seat Cain, and he was assigned to the Committee on Private Claims. On May 8, 1878, the chair of the Committee on Elections, John Thomas Harris of Virginia, reaffirmed Cain's 1876 election, noting that the committee had unanimously supported his claim to the seat; the House upheld his election in a voice vote.[10]

During his second term, Cain introduced a bill requiring the federal government to set aside proceeds from the sale of public lands to fund public education. The money would be apportioned to the states based on population. Cain framed his argument in support of the bill as a national issue that affected both Black and White communities. Cain provided federal census statistics showing that school attendance was low among the poor in all regions. Declaring that "the education of the nation is paramount," he called upon the House to "recognize the absolute necessity of elevating our citizens of whatever class or condition from ignorance, from degradation, from superstition, from pauperism, from crime." For Cain, "the more intelligent the citizen is the better citizen he is." Although he gained the support of several of his colleagues, including fellow South Carolina Representative Joseph H. Rainey, Cain's proposal never made it out of the Committee on Education and Labor.[11]

Cain's frustration with the collapse of Reconstruction following the election of 1876 shaped his agenda during his second term. He defended South Carolina Governor Daniel Chamberlain's decision to employ military protection for voters in the 1876 election and argued against cutting military budgets that he believed were needed to ensure domestic peace and to protect western settlers. On the House Floor Cain praised the prospect of westward expansion—and the role of the federal government in this process. "We must give such strength and such power to protect the country as is necessary for its advancement." But Cain also seized the opportunity to connect this call for military intervention in the West to the responsibility of the government to protect citizens throughout the nation. Cain called for continued federal intervention in South Carolina where violence against his African-American constituents only worsened in the late 1870s.[12]

Concerned about the attacks on Black civil and political rights in South Carolina and elsewhere in the South, Cain also reconsidered his initial reluctance to support Black emigration to Liberia. In the *Missionary Record*, Cain described how many of his Black constituents had grown disillusioned with life in the South. With the goals of Reconstruction imperiled in 1877, he became involved in the Liberian Exodus Joint Stock Steamship Company, which was founded that same year. In the spring of 1878, Cain submitted a bill to establish routes for mail and passenger ships to the west African republic, though that proposal never left the Committee on Commerce.[13]

In 1878, Cain was not nominated for re-election. Instead, the party chose Edmund William McGregor Mackey, a lawyer who went on to lose a close election to Cain's former opponent Michael O'Connor. At the South Carolina Republican convention in October, Cain called the party's decision to omit him from the ticket a "gross insult to me, offered without cause and without reason." Several attendees accused him of not doing enough for his constituents and questioned his decision to offer federal appointments to certain individuals. Although he was disappointed, Cain made clear to the convention that he would not "bolt" and make a run against Mackey.[14]

After leaving Congress, Cain became more active in the affairs of the AME Church. In 1880, Cain was elected to serve as bishop in the Texas-Louisiana Conference. He cofounded Paul Quinn College, an all-Black Christian institution in Waco, Texas, and served as its president until July 1884. Cain then returned to Washington, DC, to serve as bishop of the AME Conference with jurisdiction in the mid-Atlantic and New England states, overseeing his new post from the nation's capital until he died on January 18, 1887.[15]

Notes

1 *Congressional Record,* House, 43rd Cong., 1st sess. (3 February 1875): 957.

2 Federal Writers' Project of the Works Progress Administration, *A Folk History of Slavery in the United States From Interviews with Former Slaves, 1936–1938*, vols. 1–17, pages 10–14, Library of Congress, Washington, DC, https://www.ancestrylibrary.com/.

3 Bernard E. Powers Jr., "'I Go To Set the Captives Free': The Activism of Richard Harvey Cain, Nationalist Churchman and Reconstruction-Era Leader," in *Southern Elites and Social Change: Essays in Honor of Willard B. Gatewood*, ed. Randy Finley and Tom DeBlack (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991; Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2000): 43–44; *Proceedings of the Colored People's Convention of the State of South Carolina, Held in Zion Church, Charleston, November, 1865* (Charleston: South Carolina Leader Office, 1865): 14, 23–26; William C. Hine, "Cain, Richard Harvey," *American National Biography* 4 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999): 188.

4 Joel Williamson, *After Slavery: The Negro in South Carolina During Reconstruction, 1861–1877* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1965): 206–207; Kenneth Eugene Mann, "Richard Harvey Cain, Congressman, Minister and Champion for Civil Rights," *Negro History Bulletin* 35, no. 3 (March 1972): 65.

5 Thomas C. Holt, *Black Over White: Negro Political Leadership in South Carolina During Reconstruction* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977): 131; Bo Peterson, "Lincolnville: Church Remains Town's Cornerstone," 22 February 2003, *Charleston Post and Courier*: 1A; Reginald F. Hildebrand, *The Times Were Strange and Stirring: Methodist Preachers and the Crisis of Emancipation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995): 66; Federal Writers' Project of the Works Progress Administration, *A Folk History of Slavery in the United States From Interviews with Former Slaves, 1936–1938*: 11.

6 Williamson, *After Slavery*: 393, 399; C.G.W., "Cain, Richard Harvey," *Dictionary of American Biography* (New York: American Council of Learned Societies, 1973): 404; "The Curse of Cain," 19 March 1872, *Charleston Daily News*: 2; Michael J. Dubin, *United States Congressional Elections, 1788–1997* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 1998): 226.

7 *Congressional Record*, House, 43rd Cong., 1st sess. (10 January 1874): 565–567; *Congressional Record*, House, 43rd Cong., 1st sess. (3 February 1875): 982.

8 "A Warm Endorsement of the Green Movement From New England," 21 October 1874, *Newberry Weekly Herald* (SC): 2; "Daybreak at Last!," 5 October 1874, *Charleston News and Courier*: 1; "The Ball Rolls On?," 30 September 1874, *Fairfield Herald* (SC): 2; "Darlington to the Front," 2 November 1874, *Charleston New and Courier*: 1; "The South Carolina Canvass," 22 October 1874, *New-York Tribune*: 2; Dubin, *United States Congressional Elections, 1788–1997*: 233; Mann, "Richard Harvey Cain, Congressman, Minister and Champion for Civil Rights": 66.

9 Stanley B. Parsons et al., *United States Congressional Districts, 1843–1883*: 213; Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863–1877* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1988): 573–575.

10 *Papers in the Case of O'Connor vs. Cain, Second District, South Carolina*, 45th Cong., 2nd sess., H. Misc. Doc. 45 (1878): 1–6; *Congressional Record*, House, 45th Cong., 1st sess. (16 October 1877): 68–69; *Congressional Record*, House, 45th Cong., 2nd sess. (8 May 1878): 3274.

11 H.R. 3809, 45th Cong. (1878); *Congressional Record*, House, 45th Cong., 3rd sess. (23 January 1879): 684.

12 *Congressional Record*, House, 45th Cong., 2nd sess. (22 May 1878): 3683.

13 *Congressional Record*, House, 43rd Cong., 1st sess. (24 January 1874): 901–903; George B. Tindall, "The Liberian Exodus of 1878," *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 53 (1952): 133–145; H.R. 3808, 45th Cong. (1878); "Regular Proceedings: Senate," 12 March 1878, *Washington Post*: 3.

14 Dubin, *United States Congressional Elections, 1788–1997*: 247; "The Radical Convention," 26 October 1878, *Charleston News and Courier*: 1.

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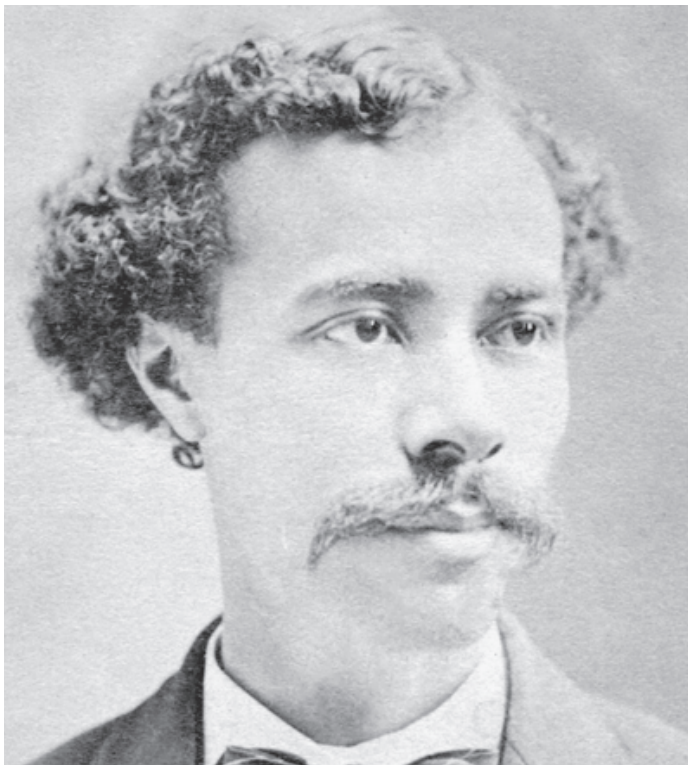
John R. Lynch

1847–1939

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1873–1877; 1882–1883

Republican from Mississippi



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Only 26 years old when he took his seat in the U.S. House of Representatives, John R. Lynch of Mississippi was a tireless champion of civil and political equality in America. The youngest Black Member ever elected to Congress, Lynch fought to sustain the Republican Party in his state in the face of violent Democratic opposition. An outspoken advocate of the bill that became the Civil Rights Act of 1875, Lynch stressed that Congress needed to act to ensure the rights of all its citizens, or else "our boasted civilization is a fraud; our republican institutions a failure; our social system a disgrace; and our religion a complete hypocrisy." Lynch remained active in Republican politics throughout his long life. He was also a prolific author who challenged the emerging historical consensus disparaging the role of Black Americans in Reconstruction.[1]

John Roy Lynch was born into slavery near Vidalia, Louisiana, on September 10, 1847. His immigrant father, Patrick Lynch, was a native of Dublin, Ireland, and had moved to Louisiana where he found work managing the Tacony Plantation. His mother, Catherine White, was enslaved. He had two older brothers, William and Edward. Patrick Lynch purchased Catherine White and her children just before his death in April 1849 and willed them to William Deal, who promised to care for them and look out for their interests. Instead, Deal sold the Lynches to Alfred W. Davis of Natchez, Mississippi.[2]

Lynch initially worked in the Davis home but was forced to engage in plantation labor when Davis left to serve in the Confederate army in 1862. After his emancipation at the end of the war, Lynch worked as a cook for an Illinois regiment in the U.S. Army stationed in the South. He found other jobs where he could, eventually managing a photographer's studio.[3]

Lynch embraced the possibilities of Mississippi politics during Reconstruction. He began his political career in 1868 by speaking at the local Republican club in favor of a new Mississippi constitution. The following year, he served as an assistant secretary at the Republican state convention. In April 1869, the local party selected Lynch to advise Reconstruction Governor Adelbert Ames on various candidates for political positions in Natchez, Mississippi, which led to Lynch being appointed justice of the peace. In November 1869, Lynch won a seat in the Mississippi state house of representatives, his first elected office. In January 1871, Lynch's colleagues selected the 24-year-old as speaker.[4]

The following year, Lynch sought a U.S. House seat representing a district that he had been instrumental in

creating as presiding officer in the Mississippi house of representatives. The district encompassed the southern quarter of the state, including his Natchez home, and had a population that was 55 percent African American. In the party primary, Lynch defeated the incumbent Representative, Republican Legrand Winfield Perce, for the nomination, noting that Perce, a native of Buffalo, New York, was vulnerable to Democratic charges that he was a carpetbagger. Lynch faced Democratic Judge Hiram Cassidy in the general election. Both candidates canvassed the state and engaged in a series of debates before Lynch defeated Cassidy with 65 percent of the vote. When the 43rd Congress (1873–1875) convened, 26-year-old Lynch was its youngest Member. He remains the youngest Black Member ever elected to Congress. He received appointments to the Committee on Mines and the Committee on Expenditures in the Interior Department.[5]

Like other African Americans in Congress, Lynch enthusiastically backed the civil rights bill championed by Senator Charles Sumner of Massachusetts, which outlawed discrimination on public transportation and in public accommodations and guaranteed equal access to education. Even as a Member of Congress, Lynch knew firsthand the sting and insult of segregation. On a trip to St. Louis, he was denied accommodation at several hotels. When Lynch eventually found a room, the hotel refused to allow him to eat in the main dining room and forced him to take his meals elsewhere. He told his colleagues on the House Floor that these were not isolated incidents. When traveling to Washington, Lynch said, "I am treated not as an American citizen, but as a brute," forced to move into segregated rail cars "simply because I happen to be of a darker complexion." Lynch used his personal experience to advocate for the civil rights bill, connecting these individual instances of discrimination to the need for a broad law.[6]

On the House Floor, Lynch argued that civil rights legislation would help Black Americans fully enjoy their rights as citizens and achieve political independence. On February 3, 1875, just before the civil rights bill came to a vote, Lynch rebuffed Democratic arguments meant to distract from the legislation's main point: which was that any form of discrimination violated the Constitution's guarantee of equal treatment. "It is not social rights that we desire. We have enough of that already. What we ask for is protection in the enjoyment of public rights—rights that are or should be accorded to every citizen alike," Lynch said.[7]

For Lynch, the federal government had the responsibility and the power to act to protect Black Americans from discrimination. He dismissed those who asserted that the bill violated the rights of the states by pointing to the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments to the Constitution, which fundamentally expanded the federal government's role in protecting civil and political liberties. Opponents of the bill, Lynch said, "seem to forget that the Constitution as it is is not in every respect the Constitution as it was." The Civil Rights Act came to a final vote on February 4, 1875, but numerous amendments had weakened it severely. Nevertheless, Lynch was among the majority that ushered in its passage.[8]

In the House, Lynch also worked on a local election issue which had major ramifications back home. In 1874, he sponsored a bill to sanction a decision by the Mississippi state government to move its congressional elections from the fall of 1874 to 1875. In the nineteenth century, most Congresses convened in December of every odd-numbered year, meaning that for many states the House opened 13 months following an election in the previous November. Because the 44th Congress was not going to begin until December 1875, the Mississippi state government decided to push its elections to 1875 to save on administrative costs. Lynch introduced a bill in the House to give the state federal backing.[9]

This change in the election calendar proved consequential when Lynch returned home to a crisis in Mississippi in the spring of 1875. The passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1875 sparked a vicious backlash by Mississippi Democrats who sought to seize power using economic coercion and violence to intimidate Black voters and other Republicans in the state. As a result, many White Republicans left the party by 1875, with some even defecting to the Democrats. Governor Ames asked for federal troops to keep the peace but was rebuffed by the administration of President Ulysses S. Grant. Lynch opened his re-election campaign doubtful he could retain his seat in the face of such vicious Democratic opposition but campaigned throughout his district, despite the constant threat of attack by White supremacists. In a violent campaign, Lynch narrowly defeated Democrat Roderick Seal to retain his seat, taking 51 percent of the vote. Lynch's re-election was all that prevented a Democratic sweep of the Mississippi House delegation. When Lynch took his seat in the 44th Congress (1875–1877), he kept his seat on the Committee on Mines and Mining.[10]

Although eight African-American Members (including Senator Blanche K. Bruce of Mississippi) took the oath of office in December 1875—a record number at the time—the Democratic Party controlled the House for the first time since before the Civil War. With Republicans out of power, Lynch spent his second term defending Reconstruction in the South. Throughout 1876, he tried to turn the attention of his colleagues on Capitol Hill toward the violence plaguing his state, including the rise of White supremacist vigilante groups like the White League. Lynch directly connected White League attacks on African Americans and their allies with the Democratic Party's efforts to strengthen its hold on the state. He called the White League "an organization which has been brought into existence by the bad men of the Democratic Party for the purpose of securing position by the power of the bullet and not by the power of the ballot." For Lynch, the nation as a whole had to "crush out mobocracy at the South," and preserve individual freedoms by eliminating the prevailing violence and intimidation from organizations like the White League. "Otherwise," he warned, "you will lay the foundation for the dissolution of this Republic." Lynch's pleas were ignored in the months prior to the 1876 election.[11]

Traveling home to Mississippi to seek re-election, Lynch faced a hostile campaign against Democrat James R. Chalmers, a former Confederate general. Having recaptured a majority in the state legislature, Democrats reconfigured Lynch's district to their advantage, gerrymandering the majority of the state's GOP voters into one "shoestring district" that narrowly hugged the Mississippi River. Having secured the Republican nomination without opposition, Lynch made his trademark canvass of the new district. Although he and his supporters did not face the violence prevalent in other parts of the state, opponents often interrupted his stump speeches. Lynch characterized this activity as "harmless" compared with the "riot and bloodshed which had been contemplated." Initial results showed Chalmers having defeated Lynch with 56 percent of the vote. But Lynch contested the election, claiming that local Democrats had tampered with the ballots and manipulated the final tallies to aid their candidate. Ultimately, the House Committee on Elections, controlled by the Democratic majority, ruled against Lynch without issuing a formal report.[12]

After leaving Congress, Lynch remained active in the Mississippi Republican Party, working to maintain party unity in the face of dwindling federal support during the administration of President Rutherford B. Hayes. Along with Senator Blanche K. Bruce and Mississippi secretary of state James Hill, Lynch encouraged the Hayes administration to appoint White and Black allies of the state Republican Party to federal offices.[13]

Lynch declined to run in 1878, but he renewed his interest in national politics in 1880 when his former House colleague James A. Garfield of Ohio ran for President on the Republican ticket. Lynch once again activated his extensive network of allies in Mississippi, including Senator Bruce, as he sought the nomination in the Sixth District. Lynch emerged victorious in a tight, four-way race. But the statewide strength of the Democratic Party carried the incumbent Chalmers to victory with 63 percent of the vote in the general election.[14]

Again, Lynch contested his election defeat. This time, however, Republicans had won control of the House for the 47th Congress (1881–1883) and Lynch's case was referred to the Committee on Elections. After reviewing evidence submitted by both parties, the committee issued a report on April 6, 1882. The Republican majority recommended the House remove Chalmers from office and swear in Lynch. Three weeks later, Lynch presented his case on the House Floor. He argued that in five counties, more than 5,000 of his votes had been counted for Chalmers. He further asserted that several thousand Republican ballots had been thrown out after a secret hearing because of technicalities such as a clerical failure to send a list of names with the returns, and the presence of unusual marks on the ballots. Lynch cited an interview in which Chalmers admitted that Lynch's votes had been thrown out and declared that he was "in favor of using every means short of violence to preserve the intelligent white people of Mississippi [in] supreme control of political affairs." On April 29, 1882, the House voted 125 to 83 to seat Lynch. He received positions on the Committee on Education and Labor and the Committee on the Militia.[15]

The legislative agenda of the Republican Party during the 47th Congress focused on internal improvements and tariff legislation, devoting comparatively little attention to conditions in the South and the deterioration of civil and political rights for African Americans. Arriving late in the first session, Lynch concentrated on economic legislation favoring his Mississippi constituents; he requested funds to reimburse an orphanage in Natchez that was damaged in the Civil War and sought appropriations to improve the

shoreline of the Mississippi River and to create two judicial districts in the state. Lynch also submitted legislation to reimburse depositors who lost money when the Freedman's Savings and Trust Company failed. His colleagues on the Education and Labor Committee reported favorably on the bill, but it died in the House Rules Committee. He also sought appropriations for a National Board of Health, citing the devastating toll of the 1878 yellow fever epidemic in the South. Based on personal experience, Lynch also appealed to the House to revise the statute limiting reimbursement for losses incurred contesting an election, believing a $2,000 cap would deter all but wealthy candidates.[16]

In 1882, Lynch faced Democrat Henry Smith Van Eaton, a local judge, for re-election. In a district redrawn the previous year to include more reliably Democratic counties, Van Eaton defeated Lynch with 53 percent of the vote. Lynch made two more unsuccessful bids for Congress. In 1884, Van Eaton again defeated Lynch, this time with 60 percent of the vote. Two years later, Lynch lost to Democrat Thomas Ringland Stockdale, polling less than a third of the vote.[17]

After departing Capitol Hill, Lynch returned to Mississippi to oversee his real estate investments but remained active in politics. He served as a Mississippi member of the Republican National Committee from 1884 to 1889. In 1884, he was a delegate to the Republican National Convention. Lynch served as a temporary chairman after future President Theodore Roosevelt spoke in favor of his selection. Lynch also delivered a keynote address, making him the only African American accorded such an honor at a national political convention until 1968. He returned to the Republican convention in 1900 to serve on the committee on platform and resolutions.[18]

On December 18, 1884, Lynch married Ella Wickham Somerville, an Alabama native who was a Washington, DC, teacher. The couple had one daughter: Alice. President Benjamin Harrison appointed Lynch an auditor of the Treasury Department in 1889, a position he held for four years.[19]

Lynch was admitted to the Mississippi bar and opened a Washington, DC, law office in 1897, practicing for one year. In 1898, President William McKinley's administration appointed him a major in the U.S. Army and paymaster of volunteers, and he served in the Spanish-American War. Lynch was one of the first Black paymasters in the U.S. Army and despite his rank endured protests by White soldiers who refused to be paid by a Black officer.[20]

After divorcing his wife in 1900, Lynch spent three years stationed in Cuba. His military career subsequently took him to Omaha, Nebraska; San Francisco, California; and the Philippines. In 1911, Lynch retired as a major and married Cora Williamson. They moved to Chicago, Illinois, where Lynch practiced law.[21]

Lynch remained committed to the goals of Reconstruction throughout his life. By the early twentieth century, a group of historians led by Columbia professor William Dunning established an interpretation of Reconstruction as a period of misrule imposed on the South, one in which corrupt and incompetent Black officials were given undeserved license to govern Whites. By claiming to show that African Americans had proven themselves unfit to partake in the democratic experiment, this school of historical thought served as justification for the ongoing disenfranchisement and segregation of Black people in the South. In response, Lynch published *The Facts of Reconstruction* in 1913 and several articles in the *Journal of Negro History* challenging these claims and defending the merits of postwar Republican governments.[22]

During the 1930s, Lynch was able to reflect on his life in politics and meet with Oscar De Priest of Illinois, the first Black Member of Congress elected in the twentieth century. He wrote an autobiography, *Reminiscences of an Active Life*, which was edited and published by the historian John Hope Franklin in 1970. Lynch was editing the manuscript when he died at age 92 on November 2, 1939, in Chicago. Lynch was buried in Arlington National Cemetery in Virginia.[23]

Manuscript Collection

Mississippi Department of Archives and History (Jackson, MS). *Papers*: 1873–1877, five items. The papers of John R. Lynch include a manuscript autobiography, a photograph, and three letters.

Notes

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4 Kenneth Eugene Mann, "John Roy Lynch, U.S. Congressman from Mississippi," *Negro History Bulletin* 37, no. 3 (April/May 1974): 238; John Hope Franklin, "John Roy Lynch: Republican Stalwart from Mississippi," in *Southern Black Leaders of the Reconstruction Era*, ed. Howard Rabinowitz (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982): 42–43.

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Congressional Elections, 1788–1997 (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 1998): 224.

6 Franklin, "John Roy Lynch: Republican Stalwart From Mississippi": 46; *Congressional Record*, House, 43rd Cong., 2nd sess. (3 February 1875): 945.

7 *Congressional Record*, House, 43rd Cong., 2nd sess. (3 February 1875): 943–947.

8 Lynch, *Reminiscences of an Active Life*: 107–111; *Congressional Record*, House, 43rd Cong., 2nd sess. (3 February 1875): 943.

9 H.R. 3332, 43rd Cong. (1874); An act to fix the time for the election of Representatives in the Forty-fourth Congress from the State of Mississippi, 18 Stat. 116 (1874); Lynch, *Reminiscences of an Active Life*: 165.

10 Franklin, "John Roy Lynch: Republican Stalwart From Mississippi": 46–47; Dubin, *United States. Congressional Elections, 1788–1997*: 234.

11 *Congressional Record*, House, 44th Cong., 1st sess. (15 June 1876): 3824–3825.

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13 Harris, "Blanche K. Bruce of Mississippi: Conservative Assimilationist": 17–19.

14 Lynch, *Reminiscences of an Active Life*: 209, 217–219, 223; Dubin, *United States Congressional Elections, 1788–1997*: 252.

15 *Testimony in the Contested Election Case of John R. Lynch vs. James R. Chalmers*, 47th Cong., 1st sess. H. Misc. Doc. 12 (1881); House Committee on Elections, *Contested-Election Case of Lynch vs. Chalmers*, 47th Cong., 1st sess., H. Rept. 931 (1882); *Congressional Record*, House, 47th Cong., 1st sess. (27 April 1882): 3384–3387; *Congressional Record*, House, 47th Cong., 1st sess. (29 April 1882): 3451–3452.

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17 Lynch, *Reminiscences of an Active Life*: 265; Dubin, *United States Congressional Elections, 1788–1997*: 259, 267, 274.

18 Franklin, "John Roy Lynch: Republican Stalwart From Mississippi": 51–52; "No Negro Member of the Fifty-Seventh Congress," 8 December 1901, *Courier-Journal* (Louisville, KY): 7; "The Chicago Convention," 4 June 1884, *New York Tribune*: 1; John R. Lynch, *The Facts of Reconstruction* (1913; repr., New York: Arno Press, 1969): 282. Mississippi Senator Blanche K. Bruce was the first African American to preside over a national political convention at the 1880 Republican Convention. See Thura Mack, "John Roy Lynch," in *Notable Black American Men*, ed. Jessie Carney Smith (Farmington Hills, MI: Gale Research, Inc., 1999): 145.

19 Lynch, *Reminiscences of an Active Life*: 301; "Major John R. Lynch Buried at Arlington," 11 November 1939, *Chicago Defender*: 1; Franklin, "John Roy Lynch: Republican Stalwart From Mississippi": 51; "The Day's Appointments," 18 May 1889, *St. Louis Republic*: 7; "Washington," 18 May 1889, *Daily Picayune* (New Orleans, LA): 1.

20 "Paymaster Lynch," 24 September 1898, *Washington Bee*: 4.

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22 Lynch, *The Facts of Reconstruction*; John R. Lynch, "Some Historical Errors of James Ford Rhodes," *Journal of Negro History* 2, no. 4 (Oct. 1917): 345–368; "More About the Historical Errors of James Ford Rhodes," *Journal of Negro History* 3, no. 2 (Apr. 1918): 139–157.

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Alonzo J. Ransier

1834–1882

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1873–1875

Republican from South Carolina



Image courtesy of the Library of Congress

South Carolina's first Black lieutenant governor, Alonzo J. Ransier had a reputation for fighting corruption that helped him win a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives in the 43rd Congress (1873–1875). Sent to Washington at a critical moment in Reconstruction, he called on the federal government to act in defense of Black civil and political rights. "All these people ask is an equal chance in the race of life, and the same privileges and protection meted out to other classes of people in our land," he implored his colleagues on the House Floor. "We cannot engage in the industrial pursuits, educate our children, defend our lives and property in the courts, receive the comforts provided in our common conveyances necessary to our wives and little ones if not essentially so to us, and, in short, engage in the 'pursuit of happiness' as rational beings, when we are circumscribed within the narrowest possible limits on every hand, disowned, spit upon, and outraged in a thousand ways."[1]

Alonzo Jacob Ransier was born to free parents on January 3, 1834, in Charleston, South Carolina. He received a limited education before beginning work as a shipping clerk at age 16. In 1856, Ransier married Louisa Ann Carroll, with whom he had 11 children; Louisa died in 1875, and he married Mary Louisa McKinlay in 1876.[2]

Ransier's prewar freedom enabled him to achieve the financial security and prominence to establish himself quickly in postwar South Carolina politics. He attended the 1865 Colored People's Convention in Charleston, which called upon South Carolina leaders to enfranchise formerly enslaved men and to do away with laws that aimed to keep emancipated Black workers in a condition resembling servitude. He was part of a delegation that traveled to Washington, DC, in 1865 to serve as an "outside Congress," lobbying lawmakers to back legislation in the interest of Black civil and political rights. Ransier was one of several influential Black Americans in the delegation, including Frederick Douglass and Black activist and restaurateur George T. Downing. The delegation met with President Andrew Johnson, who received them in a contentious meeting in the White House. While in the capital, they also presented a petition to the U.S. Congress.[3]

In January 1868, Ransier served as a delegate from Charleston to the South Carolina constitutional convention. The following October, he took over the post of Republican state central committee chairman. The following November, he was elected to the state house of representatives where he served one term.[4]

In 1870, Ransier was part of a group of state legislators who tried to investigate whether businesses in Charleston were in compliance with state laws prohibiting discrimination. Later that year he defeated ex-Confederate general Matthew Calbraith Butler to become South Carolina's first Black lieutenant governor serving under Governor Robert K. Scott.[5]

In August 1872, after Representative Robert C. De Large declined renomination for his coastal South Carolina seat in the U.S. House, local Republicans selected Ransier to represent the majority-Black Second District. He was part of the "Moses State ticket," the state's first party ticket in which Black candidates constituted a majority. Ransier defeated Independent Republican candidate General William Gurney with 75 percent of the vote in the general election.[6]

When he was sworn in to the 43rd Congress, Ransier received an assignment to the Committee on Manufactures. He introduced legislation that focused on the interests of his coastal South Carolina constituents, including measures to erect a public building in Beaufort, South Carolina, and to rebuild the war-damaged west wing of the Citadel Academy in Charleston. Ransier also argued for appropriating $20,000 to improve Charleston Harbor. However, none of these bills passed.[7]

Representative Ransier spoke on several occasions in 1874 during House Floor debate on civil rights legislation. Allotted 20 minutes on the subject on January 5, 1874, Ransier described the need for a comprehensive set of legal protections for Black Americans in hotels and schools, on public transportation and jury service. "Five millions of people, citizens of our country, who bode you no evil, suffer to-day the most humiliating discrimination, in the matter of the ordinary privileges attaching to them as human beings, because of their color and previous condition of imposed servitude," he observed. Ransier also called attention to the limitations of the civil rights bill, criticizing Congress for having excluded the rights of women from the debate, even though they deserved the same opportunities as other citizens, he said. Ransier hoped that soon "American citizenship in civil and political rights and public privileges shall cover not only those of our sex, but those of the opposite one also."[8]

On February 7, Ransier delivered a floor speech explaining the desire among Black Americans in the South for racial harmony and he outlined how it could best be achieved. He praised the Black soldiers who fought for the Union in the Civil War, stressed the freed people's overwhelming loyalty to the Republican Party, and stated that such fidelity should be rewarded by the passage of the bill. Ransier also focused his remarks on the bill's support for equal educational opportunities, discussing the advantages of integrated education, and citing successful programs at Oberlin College and at Wilberforce, Harvard, and Yale Universities. Ransier believed that equal educational opportunities would allow talented Black men to achieve leadership roles in their communities, ultimately curbing discrimination. "Let the doors of the public school house be thrown open to us alike," he declared, "if you mean to give these people equal rights at all, or to protect them in the exercise of the rights and privileges attaching to all free men and citizens of our country."[9]

On June 9, Ransier pleaded with opponents not to make the existence of corruption in Republican state governments in the former Confederacy an excuse to defeat the bill. "Because some officials in these States have abused the public confidence and prostituted their office should violence be done to a great principle of justice and a whole race denied therein equal rights in a government like ours? It cannot be." When the civil rights bill came to a vote in February 1875, the education clause which Ransier had championed had been eliminated. Ransier himself did not vote for the final bill; Representative James Beverley Sener of Virginia announced that Ransier had to leave because of a sudden illness in his family and declared the South Carolinian would have voted "aye."[10]

Upon returning to South Carolina in 1874, Ransier was outspoken about his disenchantment with the corruption in Governor Franklin Moses's administration. Having paid off some of his personal debt with public funds and sold executive pardons to prisoners, Moses resisted arrest by calling the South Carolina militia to defend him. His well-paid allies in the state legislature saved him from impeachment, and Moses carefully placed his friends in key patronage positions to maintain his political control. Ransier aligned himself with a faction of Independent Republicans in South Carolina who called for statewide reform after the Moses administration. Independent Republicans mobilized a slate of candidates for 1874 and Edmund William McGregor Mackey was chosen as the nominee for the Second District seat held by Ransier. Representative Ransier considered running for re-election as an Independent but decided against it. The Republicans nominated a White candidate named Charles W. Buttz,

who went on to lose the election to Mackey. The House declared the seat vacant in July 1876 after Buttz contested the election.[11]

Soon after Ransier left Congress he secured appointment as a collector of internal revenue in Charleston. He later appealed to Governor Daniel Chamberlain for a position in the South Carolina state government when his tenure as a tax collector came to an end. Ransier did not receive a nomination but worked instead as a night watchman in a customs house and as a municipal street sweeper. Struggling financially at the end of his life, Ransier died on August 17, 1882, at age 48.[12]

Notes

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3 Hine, "Ransier, Alonzo Jacob," *American National Biography*: 151; "Summary of News," 13 December 1865, *Boston Investigator*: 6; "An Outside Congress," 13 December 1865, *New-York Tribune*: 4; "Important Expression of Views by the President," 7 February 1866, *Evening Star* (Washington, DC): 2; David W. Blight, *Frederick Douglass: Prophet of Freedom* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2018): 474–475; *Memorial of A Delegation Representing the Colored People of the Several States*, 39th Cong., 1st sess., S. Misc. Doc. 56 (1866); *Congressional Globe*, Senate, 39th Cong., 1st sess. (23 February 1866): 984; *Congressional Globe*, Senate, 39th Cong., 1st sess. (9 March 1866): 1289; Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863–1877* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1988): 253.

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8 *Congressional Record,* House, 43rd Cong., 1st sess. (5 January 1874): 382.

9 *Congressional Record*, House, 43rd Cong., 1st sess. (7 February 1874): 1314.

10 *Congressional Record*, House, 43rd Cong., 1st sess. (9 June 1874): 4786; *Congressional Record*, House, 43rd Cong., 2nd sess. (4 February 1875): 1011.

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James T. Rapier

1837–1883

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1873–1875

Republican from Alabama



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Born in Alabama and educated in Canada, James T. Rapier returned to the United States following the Civil War and became an advocate for Black civil, political, and labor rights. He navigated the violent politics of his home state in the early 1870s to win election to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1872. In the 43rd Congress (1873–1875), Rapier was one of seven Black Representatives who fought for the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1875.

James Thomas Rapier was born in Florence, Alabama, on November 13, 1837, to John H. and Susan Rapier. He had three older brothers: Richard, John Jr., and Henry. The Rapiers were wealthy and well-established in Florence. John Rapier Sr. was born enslaved but was emancipated in 1829. He had prospered running a lucrative business as a barber for 40 years. Susan Rapier, a free Black woman from Baltimore, Maryland, died in 1841 during childbirth. Five-year-old James Rapier and his brother, John Jr., went to live with their paternal grandmother, Sally Thomas, in Nashville, Tennessee. James Rapier attended a school for Black children in the 1840s, but by the 1850s he was working and gambling on river boats.[1]

In 1856, Rapier decided to attend school, and his father sent him to live with another family member in Buxton, a community in Ontario, Canada, established by self-emancipated slaves. While living in Buxton, Rapier attended school with other Black students before enrolling in a normal school in Toronto, where he earned a teaching certificate in 1863. He then returned to Buxton as an instructor. Rapier followed the events of the Civil War from Canada and returned to Nashville in late 1864. There he worked briefly as a reporter for a northern newspaper. With his father's help, he purchased 200 acres of land in Maury County, Tennessee, and became a successful cotton planter. He never married.[2]

In Tennessee, Rapier embraced political activism. He gave a keynote address at a Black voting rights convention in Nashville in 1865. But the following year Rapier returned to Florence, Alabama, to contribute to the Republican efforts to win control of state and local governments. He rented 550 acres along the Tennessee River and again found success as a planter. He hired Black tenant farmers and financed sharecroppers with low-interest loans. In March 1867, Black voters found few restrictions accessing the ballot, and Rapier played a role in calling a local meeting to elect a Black registrar. His father won the election, and James Rapier was unanimously chosen to represent the county at

the Alabama Republican convention. James Rapier served as the convention's vice chairman and directed the platform committee. Rapier opposed the total disenfranchisement of former Confederates and the redistribution of seized land. He pushed for a political alliance between White and Black Republicans in the interests of the party in Alabama. In November 1867, he served as a delegate to the Alabama constitutional convention, where he advanced the Republican platform as the only Black man representing his district.[3]

In 1868, as Rapier campaigned for President Ulysses S. Grant and other Republican candidates in Alabama, he faced repeated threats of violence. He fled Florence and took up residence in Montgomery, before returning in the spring of 1870. Rapier traveled to Washington, DC, in 1869 to attend the founding convention of the National Negro Labor Union (NNLU). He joined several delegates in meeting with President Grant to encourage the creation of a federal land bureau. The NNLU chose Rapier as its vice president, and he opened an Alabama branch in 1871.[4]

Rapier's increasing prominence in Alabama Republican politics led him to pursue the Republican nomination for secretary of state in 1870. He was the first Black candidate to run for statewide office in Alabama. Rapier ultimately lost the election, as violence against Black voters drove down turnout and factionalism within the Republican Party undermined the campaign. Many White Republicans rejected the notion of a Black statewide officeholder in 1870, and William Hugh Smith, the party's gubernatorial candidate, outpaced Rapier at the polls by thousands of votes. In fact, before Election Day, a group of White Republicans offered Rapier $10,000 to exit the race, but he declined.[5]

Undeterred, Rapier remained an avid organizer for the Republican cause in the state and advocate for a strong and biracial Republican Party that worked in the interest of Black Alabamians. In 1871, he was appointed as a federal internal revenue assessor with the assistance of Representative Benjamin Sterling Turner, the first African-American Member of Congress from Alabama. In a June 1872 interview, Rapier described how his new position intersected with his role in Alabama Republican politics. "No colored man in the State has a more extensive acquaintance with colored men than myself," he said. "I have traveled in all the counties of the cotton belt on business, and my office is headquarters for Republicans from all quarters."[6]

By the early 1870s, Rapier had become one of the most influential Black politicians in Alabama. When he decided to run for the Second District seat in the House, however, he found that the Alabama Republican Party remained unconvinced that White voters would back a Black candidate in the upcoming election. Incumbent Representative Charles Waldron Buckley, originally from New York, maintained a strong base of support in the southeastern Alabama district where African Americans were 44 percent of the population. Defying party leaders, Rapier sought the district's Republican nomination. He had recently founded a newspaper, the Montgomery *Republican Sentinel*—the state's first Black-owned and Black-operated newspaper—to crusade for the Republican Party, the rights of freed people, and the re-election of President Grant. In the months before the election, Rapier used the newspaper to build his campaign for office, producing 1,000 copies a week and distributing them for free. He criticized Democrats and those White Republicans such as Buckley, who he said had done little for Black residents of the district. At a late-summer convention, Rapier easily gained the Republican nomination, receiving 25 delegate votes to Buckley's five.[7]

In the general election, Rapier faced Democratic and Liberal Republican candidate William C. Oates, a former Confederate soldier. Rapier tirelessly traversed the district, speaking in 36 towns in as many days. He promised to support national legislation providing land for tenant farmers. Unlike previous election cycles, the Enforcement Acts had temporarily quelled the violence in Alabama by disrupting the Ku Klux Klan, making for a relatively peaceful election. Rapier defeated Oates with 55 percent of the vote, becoming Alabama's second Black Representative in Congress.[8]

Before the 43rd Congress convened in late 1873, Rapier traveled to Europe for several months. In July, he served as a commissioner to the Fifth International Exposition in Vienna, Austria, where he helped create a display for his home state. Rapier later noted that "the moment I put my foot upon the deck of a ship that unfurled a foreign flag from its mast-head, distinctions on account of my color ceased." He remained in Europe for several months, visiting Germany, France, and England.[9]

In the 43rd Congress, Rapier was assigned to the Committee on Education and Labor. One of his first acts as a Representative, on January 5, 1874, was to introduce legislation designating Montgomery, Alabama, a federal

customs collection site. The measure provided federal funding for a customs collector in the city and was designed to regulate and facilitate the economic activity at the city's inland port on the Alabama River. President Grant signed the bill into law on June 20, 1874.[10]

Rapier's subsequent attempts to gain federal funding for Alabama were less successful. He proposed a bill to construct a public building in Montgomery and another to fund the improvement of two Alabama rivers that emptied into the Gulf of Mexico. Rapier also voted in favor of railroad regulation and called for increased currency circulation, promoting economic conditions that typically divided the House along sectional lines as they were considered favorable to the agrarian South and West.[11]

Rapier was also at the center of the struggle to pass a landmark civil rights bill in the 43rd Congress, which sought equal access to education and accommodations on public accommodations, schools, and even cemeteries. He hosted strategy meetings in his Washington home and on June 9, 1874, Rapier spoke on the House Floor in favor of the bill, largely recounting his personal experiences with discrimination. For Rapier, Congress could not afford even the slightest amount of ambiguity in the law. "Either I am a man or I am not a man," he said, adamant that constitutional protections needed to be extended to all. "If one, I am entitled to all the rights, privileges, and immunities common to any other class in this country; if not a man, I have no right to vote, no right to a seat here upon this floor; or if I am tolerated here, it is in violation of the Constitution of our country."[12]

Rapier also addressed those who claimed that civil rights legislation would somehow force White and Black southerners to form personal relationships and other "associations," arguing those relationships were a matter of individual preference. Rapier expected the bill to do little to solve racial prejudice at the personal level, but the point was to ensure Black Americans had equal access to civil and political rights as citizens. Rapier was adamant that federal legislation was necessary to guarantee Black civil rights and that it could not be left to the individual states to resolve. Were it not for the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments, alongside the Reconstruction Acts, "when would public opinion in the South have suggested the propriety of giving me the ballot?" he asked.[13]

The civil rights bill had not yet come to a vote in July 1874 when Rapier returned to Alabama in anticipation of a close re-election contest. Divisions among southeastern Alabama Republicans threatened his candidacy. At the time, two prominent Republican factions disagreed over whether to back the impeachment of a federal judge credited with enforcing laws against the Ku Klux Klan. When Rapier refused to weigh in on the controversy, he lost support from both sides of the intraparty dispute. Meanwhile, White supremacists, emboldened by state and federal ambivalence, renewed their violent attacks on Black voters in Alabama as part of a coordinated effort by Democratic candidates to return White Alabamians to power. Physical intimidation was coupled with a campaign of economic coercion, as plantation owners refused to hire Black job seekers or anyone who swore allegiance to the Republican Party.[14]

Amid much more dangerous conditions than he had faced in 1872, Rapier campaigned across the district even as threats from the Ku Klux Klan disrupted his itinerary. He tried in vain to convince Alabama voters that the civil rights bill was not designed to force social interactions between White and Black citizens, and that it did not require integrated schools but merely allocated funding for Black schools. He also called on the federal government to ensure a peaceful election, sending a personal telegram to U.S. Attorney General George H. Williams that went unanswered. Despite his plea, the election turned extraordinarily violent. In the chaos that ensued, more than 100 people were killed and scores of Black voters stayed away from the polls. Democrats swept the elections, taking two-thirds of the state offices. Rapier ultimately lost to attorney and former Confederate army major Jeremiah Norman Williams by just over 1,000 votes. Rapier considered contesting the election but declined as the Democratic Party won control of the House for the 44th Congress (1875–1877). Before the end of the 43rd Congress, the Republican majority in the House conducted an investigation into election violence in Alabama, compiling extensive evidence of violence and intimidation against Black voters in the state.[15]

The civil rights bill was once again before the House in early 1875. Rapier's Republican Alabama colleague, Representative Alexander White, offered an amended version of the bill as a substitute on the House Floor and claimed that the state Republican Party endorsed it based on support from Black Alabamians. Rapier challenged White's assertion. "That class of people commissioned me to speak for them upon this subject in the House,"

he declared, adding he was well acquainted with the goals and aspirations of the Black population in Alabama. They were not in favor of any deviation from the original civil rights bill, Rapier clarified, adding that they were determined to have equal rights. Though the education provisions and other aspects of the bill were removed before the final vote, Rapier voted in favor of the Civil Rights Act.[16]

In 1876, Rapier once again ran for a House seat, this time in the Fourth District, one of two Black-majority districts in the state that had been gerrymandered by the Democratic state legislature. The Fourth District was represented by Republican Jeremiah Haralson, one of seven Black Members of the House in the 44th Congress. Rapier defeated Haralson in the Republican primary, but Haralson subsequently ran in the general election as an Independent. In a three-way race, neither Haralson nor Rapier amassed enough votes. With Haralson garnering 34 percent of the vote and Rapier 28 percent, Democrat Charles Miller Shelley—a former Confederate general and the Selma sheriff—won with only 38 percent of the vote.[17]

Rapier returned to Lowndes County, where he secured loans to develop a real estate business in which he rented out seven plantations and hired Black farmers to work the land. In July 1878, U.S. Treasury Secretary John Sherman of Ohio recommended Rapier for appointment as a collector of internal revenue. The *Atlanta Constitution* claimed he was the "first of his color" to hold such a position. Prior to the 1878 election, Rapier started publishing the *Republican Sentinel and Hayneville Times* in Lowndes County, mobilizing support for Republican candidates including former rival Jeremiah Haralson, who unsuccessfully challenged Shelley in 1878.[18]

By the end of the 1870s, Rapier became a proponent of Black emigration to the West. He offered financial support to families to move and testified in support of the migration before a Senate committee. Rapier's testimony chronicled the economic distress experienced by many Black farmers in the South. He outlined the exploitative system of sharecropping for the committee, illuminating the way White landowners took advantage of Black farmers seeking work by trapping them in debt. He noted that he offered Black farmers more favorable rates of interest for food and supplies. Rapier also traveled to Kansas at least a dozen times, meeting with Black leaders in several counties and purchasing land in the state in 1880.[19]

In 1880, Rapier traveled to Chicago, Illinois, for the Republican National Convention. He was denied credentials, however, as the Alabama delegation called on the convention not to seat Rapier because he would not pledge to back former President Grant as the nominee.[20]

In 1882 and 1883, Rapier fended off attempts by political opponents to remove him from his post as a collector, but failing health nonetheless forced him to resign. He was appointed a disbursing officer for a federal building in Montgomery just before he died on May 31, 1883.[21]

Manuscript Collection

Howard University, Moorland–Spingarn Research Center (Washington, DC)
Papers: In the Rapier Family papers, 1836–1883, two linear feet. Correspondence of James T. Rapier and other members of his family, including John Rapier Sr.; John Rapier Jr.; Richard Rapier; Henry R. Thomas; James P. Thomas; and Sarah Thomas; a diary from 1857 of John H. Rapier, journalist, surgeon, and world traveler, containing cash accounts, clippings, and indications of letters written and received; and an autobiography.

Notes

1 Loren Schweninger, *James T. Rapier and Reconstruction* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978): 16–18, 29–31; John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger, *In Search of the Promised Land: A Slave Family in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006): 23.

2 Schweninger, *James T. Rapier and Reconstruction*: 30, 35; Loren Schweninger, "Rapier, James Thomas," *American National Biography* 18 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999): 167–168.

3 Schweninger, *James T. Rapier and Reconstruction*: 38–39, 54–57; "Proceedings of the State Convention," 12 August 1865, *Colored Tennessean* (Nashville): 1; Loren Schweninger, "Rapier, James Thomas," in *Dictionary of American Negro Biography*, eds. Rayford Logan and Michael Winston (New York: Norton, 1982): 514.

4 Schweninger, *James T. Rapier and Reconstruction*: 68–71, 90–91; Loren Schweninger, "James Rapier and the Negro Labor Movement, 1869–1872," *Alabama Review* 28 (July 1975): 185–201.

5 Schweninger, *James T. Rapier and Reconstruction*: 79–81; "Smith & Co. Swindling the Negro," 1 November 1870, *Mobile Register*: 2.

6 Loren Schweninger, "James T. Rapier of Alabama and the Noble Cause of Reconstruction," in *Southern Black Leaders of the Reconstruction Era*, ed. Howard Rabinowitz (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982): 80; "The Negroes Solid For Grant," 20 June 1872, *New National Era* (Washington, DC): 2.

7 Schweninger, *James T. Rapier and Reconstruction*: 106, 107–108, 112; Schweninger, "James T. Rapier of Alabama and the Noble Cause of Reconstruction": 81–82; Stanley B. Parsons et al., *United States Congressional Districts, 1843–1883* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986): 146.

8 Schweninger, "James T. Rapier of Alabama and the Noble Cause of Reconstruction": 81; Schweninger, *James T. Rapier and Reconstruction*: 104–105; Michael J. Dubin, *United States Congressional Elections, 1788–1997* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 1998): 223.

9 "Hon. James T. Rapier," 9 October 1873, *New National Era*: 2; *Congressional Record,* House, 43rd Cong., 1st sess. (9 June 1874): 4784; Schweninger, *James T. Rapier and Reconstruction*: 117–118.

10 H.R. 899, 43rd Cong. (1874); *Congressional Record*, House, 43rd Cong., 1st sess. (5 January 1874): 370; An act to constitute Montgomery, in the State of Alabama, a port of delivery, 18 Stat. 196 (1874).

11 H.R. 300, 43rd Cong. (1873); H.R. 1818, 43rd Cong. (1874); Schweninger, *James T. Rapier and Reconstruction*: 123–125.

12 Schweninger, *James T. Rapier and Reconstruction*: 148–149; S. 916, 41st Cong. (1870); *Congressional Record*, House, 43rd Cong., 1st sess. (9 June 1874): 4782–4785.

13 *Congressional Record*, House, 43rd Cong., 1st sess. (9 June 1874): 4785.

14 Schweninger, "James T. Rapier of Alabama and the Noble Cause of Reconstruction": 84; Schweninger, *James T. Rapier and Reconstruction*: 136.

15 Schweninger, *James T. Rapier and Reconstruction*: 142–144; Schweninger, "James T. Rapier of Alabama and the Noble Cause of Reconstruction": 85–86; House Select Committee on Affairs in Alabama, *Affairs in Alabama*, 43rd Cong., 2nd sess., H. Rept. 262 (1875): 1241; Dubin, *United States Congressional Elections, 1788–1997*: 230.

16 *Congressional Record*, House, 43rd Cong., 2nd sess. (4 February 1875): 1001, 1011.

17 Schweninger, "James T. Rapier of Alabama and the Noble Cause of Reconstruction": 86; Parsons et al., *United States Congressional Districts, 1843–1883*: 148–149. Parsons notes that a southwestern district also had a Black majority with (53 percent). See also Schweninger, *James T. Rapier and Reconstruction*: 153; Dubin, *United States Congressional Elections, 1788–1997*: 236.

18 Schweninger, "James T. Rapier of Alabama and the Noble Cause of Reconstruction": 89; Schweninger, *James T. Rapier and Reconstruction*: 158–159; "Revenue Collector Rapier's Bond," 15 August 1878, *New York Times*: 5; "The Federal Focus," 1 June 1878, *Atlanta Constitution*: 1.

19 Senate Select Committee to Investigate the Causes of the Removal of the Negroes from the Southern States to the Northern States, *Report and Testimony of the Select Committee of the United States Senate*, 46th Cong., 2nd sess., S. Rept. 693, part 2 (1880): 464–482; Schweninger, "James T. Rapier of Alabama and the Noble Cause of Reconstruction": 91.

20 "Chicago," 5 June 1880, *Sacramento Daily Record-Union*: 1; "The Convention," 5 June 1880, *Cleveland Leader*: 2.

21 Schweninger, *James T. Rapier and Reconstruction*: 177–178; "Federal Happenings," 1 June 1883, *Atlanta Constitution*: 1; "Death of Hon. Jas. T. Rapier," 9 June 1883, *Huntsville Gazette* (AL): 3.

Blanche K. Bruce

1841–1898

UNITED STATES SENATOR

1875–1881

Republican from Mississippi



Image courtesy of the U.S. Senate Collection

Blanche K. Bruce was the second African American to serve in the U.S. Senate and the first to serve a full six-year term. Born enslaved, Bruce rose quickly in Mississippi politics during Reconstruction. He later became a successful planter and was well-connected in politics and society in Washington, DC. In the Senate, Bruce was an advocate for Black civil and political rights as well as federal investment in the economic development of Mississippi. He was also the first Black Member of Congress to preside over the Senate and the first appointed to chair a congressional committee.

Blanche Bruce was born near Farmville, Virginia, on March 1, 1841. He was the son of an enslaved woman named Polly Bruce and the man who enslaved her, Pettus Perkinson. Polly Bruce had formerly been enslaved by Perkinson's father-in-law, Lemuel Bruce. Blanche Bruce's first name was originally "Branch," but he changed it to "Blanche" as a teenager. He later chose the middle name "Kelso." Bruce's father kept him enslaved for the entirety of his childhood and young adulthood. In the decades leading up to the Civil War, Perkinson moved Bruce and his family west to Chariton County, Missouri, in 1844, before relocating to Mississippi in 1849. There, Bruce was forced to work in the cotton fields for a year before Perkinson decided to return to Missouri. Bruce lived for the next 12 years in the town of Brunswick, where he was hired out by Perkinson and did a range of jobs from carpentry to farm labor.[1]

When the war began, Bruce escaped to Lawrence, Kansas—a haven for abolitionists before the war. Bruce had been accorded a range of privileges by his father while enslaved, including access to education, and in Lawrence he taught at a local school in the small free Black community. In 1863, he narrowly escaped a Confederate guerrilla attack on Lawrence that killed more than 140 residents. Near the end of the war, he moved to Hannibal, Missouri, and organized the state's first school for Black students in 1864. Determined to get a formal education, Bruce attended Oberlin College in Ohio in 1866. By 1867, he lacked the funds to continue studying and decided to return to Missouri, where he worked as a steamboat porter out of St. Louis on the Mississippi River.[2]

After visiting Mississippi and witnessing a stump speech by Republican gubernatorial candidate James Lusk Alcorn, Bruce was inspired to enter politics and moved to the state in 1869. He quickly became part of the Republican campaign operation that year, speaking to large crowds in

Black communities. Bruce was appointed registrar of voters in Tallahatchie County by the district military commander, General Adelbert Ames, a Republican who was elected to represent Mississippi in the U.S. Senate in 1870. Bruce was elected sergeant at arms of the state senate when the reconstituted Mississippi state legislature convened for the first time in late 1870. The following year, he was elected to the joint office of sheriff and tax collector of Bolivar County, and by 1872 the Republican state board of education appointed him county superintendent of education. Bruce's attention to costs, employment of local Black teachers rather than northern emigrants, and efficient administration of the system won wide support, even from White planters. Bruce invested in land and property in Floreyville, Mississippi, becoming a successful planter by the late 1870s. In 1872, he was named to the board of levee commissioners for a district containing three counties. The commissioners were empowered to raise revenue and build embankments in the Mississippi Delta region.[3]

By the mid-1870s, Blanche Bruce was among the most renowned Republican politicians in the state. The 1873 gubernatorial contest pitted then-Senator Ames against Alcorn, who had been elected to the U.S. Senate in 1871. During the campaign, Ames offered Bruce the position of lieutenant governor. Bruce refused, instead maneuvering for the Senate seat to be vacated by the victor. When Ames won and resigned in January 1874, the state legislature decided to choose two candidates for the Senate—one for Ames's unexpired term ending on March 3, 1875, and another for a full six-year term beginning in the 44th Congress (1875–1877). Henry Roberts Pease was chosen for the short term, while Bruce was nominated to serve the full term primarily because of the backing of Black Republicans, who were a majority in the party caucus and preferred Bruce to Representative George Colin McKee and U.S. district attorney Guilford Wiley Wells. The full legislature elected Bruce nearly unanimously on February 4, 1874.[4]

When Bruce arrived in the U.S. Senate Chamber on March 5, 1875, tradition called for the senior Senator from his home state to escort him to the podium. Senator Alcorn snubbed the Senator-elect because of Bruce's support for Governor Ames. Bruce walked up the aisle alone until Republican Senator Roscoe Conkling of New York offered to escort him. Thereafter Bruce had a powerful ally in Conkling, who helped the new Senator secure desirable committee assignments, including the Committee on Education and Labor, the Committee on Manufactures, and the Committee on Pensions.[5]

Bruce was only 34 when he joined the Senate, which made him the second-youngest Senator behind 33-year-old Stephen Wallace Dorsey of Arkansas. Four years later, when Dorsey's term expired, Bruce was the youngest Senator in the 46th Congress (1879–1881). Arriving in the Senate without the experience of serving in the state legislature, Bruce astutely determined that "success depended to some extent on personal conduct," and he took a diplomatic approach to building relationships with his colleagues, "to cultivate and exhibit my honorable associates a courtesy that would inspire reciprocal courtesy."[6]

On March 3, 1876, Bruce delivered his maiden speech in the Senate. The Senator from Mississippi petitioned his colleagues to seat P.B.S. Pinchback, the African-American Senator-elect from Louisiana—and a personal friend. The Senate had refused to seat Pinchback because of ongoing claims that the Republican-led legislature that took office in January 1873 was the product of a disputed election in 1872. Bruce noted that if Congress had not acted to settle this dispute in the ensuing three years—and had welcomed other Members elected during this period—how could the Senate deny Pinchback his seat? Despite the backing of Bruce and other Republicans, the Senate ultimately rejected Pinchback's claim to the seat.[7]

On March 31, Bruce spoke in favor of a proposed investigation into election violence in Mississippi in 1875. He described the "flagrant wrongs" perpetrated against Black voters in the state as undermining representative government and denying the civil and political rights of African Americans. Bruce denounced the violence in Mississippi as "an attack by an aggressive, intelligent, white political organization upon inoffensive, law-abiding fellow-citizens; a violent method for political supremacy, that seeks not the protection of the rights of the aggressors, but the destruction of the rights of the party assailed." While Black Mississippians had become influential in state politics, he added, they could not be accused of using "our newly acquired power as a sword of attack and not as a shield of defense." He included in his remarks statistics demonstrating the "hopeful progress" of African Americans in his home state, highlighting the increase in marriages, property ownership, population, and the establishment of businesses. For Bruce, these model citizens deserved the enforcement of existing law to protect their individual rights. Ultimately,

a Senate select committee produced a two-volume report on the 1875 Mississippi elections that chronicled violence, intimidation, and a coordinated Democratic effort to stop Black voters from casting their ballots.[8]

Bruce skillfully used his platform as a U.S. Senator to bolster his influence in Republican politics. He chaired the Mississippi delegation to the 1876 Republican National Convention and campaigned for the nominee, Rutherford B. Hayes, in Mississippi and Louisiana. During the administration of President Hayes, Bruce worked closely with two Black Mississippi Republicans, former Representative John R. Lynch and secretary of state James Hill, to garner federal appointments for White and Black allies of the state Republican Party.[9]

Bruce was also an advocate for African Americans in the U.S. military and the interests of Black war veterans. On April 11, 1878, he spoke in favor of a bill to end discrimination in the military enlistment process, opening all branches of the service to Black soldiers. Two years later, Bruce urged the Senate to pass a resolution calling for the Secretary of War to investigate the brutal hazing of Black West Point cadet Johnson C. Whittaker.[10]

Throughout his term in office Bruce fought to ensure the government issued long overdue backpay to Black soldiers and sailors for their service in the Civil War. The first bill he introduced in the Senate mandated the immediate payment of "all sums due" to Black soldiers for their service to the Union. Many Black soldiers who enlisted while still technically enslaved had not received the promised "bounties," or cash bonuses, for their service, so Bruce introduced legislation designed to force the government to distribute these funds. In 1879, he submitted a bill to distribute money that had not been claimed by Black Civil War soldiers to schools and colleges serving African-American students. Bruce's proposal was widely reported in the press, causing more veterans to submit claims and significantly deplete the fund. In 1881, he again supported legislation that prevented discrimination against Black soldiers who had been denied wartime bounties and pensions.[11]

On February 14, 1879, Bruce became the first Black Senator to preside over a Senate session. Senator George Frisbie Hoar of Massachusetts called on Bruce to lead proceedings during debate on a bill restricting immigration from China. Following his time in the chair, Bruce interjected with a short statement of opposition to the proposed legislation. Before voting, he urged his colleagues to consider his position as the lone representative of "a people who but a few years ago were considered essentially disqualified from enjoying the privileges and immunities of American citizenship, and who have since been so successfully introduced into the body-politic." Bruce praised "the strength and the assimilative power of our institutions," which he expected would mold immigrants from China into American citizens.[12]

Bruce also discussed the need to improve relations between the U.S. government and Native American tribes in the West. In an April 7, 1880, speech in the Senate Chamber, he criticized federal policy toward Native Americans, emphasizing that repeated "aggressions" by the U.S. military along with constant revisions to existing treaties had created distrust and animosity between both parties. The actions of the U.S. government, Bruce said, appeared to target Native Americans for "expulsion and extinction from the continent." In his own comments on the issue, Bruce used patronizing terms to describe a path to assimilation, which he considered the best outcome for Native Americans. This involved exposure to what Bruce called the "attractive side of our civilization," including property ownership, representative government, and individual rights. As a result, he said, the "savage life will lose its attractions." While Bruce embraced contemporary ideas contrasting "civilization" and "savagery," he also recognized the humanity of Native Americans and called on the U.S. government to apply "the wise and equitable principles that regulate the conduct of public affairs relative to every other race in the Republic."[13]

Bruce supported many internal improvements to benefit Mississippi. In the 45th Congress (1877–1879), he became the first Black Member of Congress to chair a congressional committee when he led the Select Committee on the Levees of the Mississippi River. In this position, he pushed for federal funding to mold the river in the interests of trade and agriculture. Bruce backed a measure in 1879 to create and fund the Mississippi River Improvement Commission, a panel charged with surveying the river for levee construction and other enhancements to improve navigation and protect waterfront property. A revised version of the bill passed in the 46th Congress. In 1880, Bruce introduced a bill to grant a Mississippi railroad company the right to construct a new railroad and telegraph line through public lands in the state.[14]

In April 1879, Bruce introduced a resolution to create the Select Committee to Investigate the Freedman's Savings

and Trust Company. The Freedman's Bank, as it was commonly known, was chartered by Congress in 1865 to offer banking services to newly liberated African Americans. The bank failed in 1874 and depositors lost their savings. The Democratic Party had just regained control of the U.S. Senate for the first time since the Civil War. Before formally introducing the resolution, Bruce inquired with Democratic leadership about the prospects of establishing a select panel to determine the cause of the bank's failure and the status of its assets. In an unusual move, the Democratic majority in the Senate not only approved his request but appointed Bruce the committee chair. He was joined on the panel by three Democrats and one Republican. In addition to conducting several hearings, the committee reviewed documents from branch offices and compiled an extensive report on the demise of the bank. Bruce introduced a bill to reimburse depositors, which was not brought up for a vote. Two other bills recommended by the committee did become law. The first eliminated the roles of three commissioners charged with administering the bank's remaining assets and appointed a lone commissioner. The second authorized the federal government to purchase the bank's former Washington, DC, headquarters.[15]

Bruce opposed the emigration of Black Americans who departed the South in search of opportunities in western states such as Kansas. He did argue in favor of a bill to distribute duty-free British cotton clothing to impoverished Black emigrants, which ultimately became law. Bruce compared these charitable donations to the effort to raise money in the United States to send to poor communities in Ireland.[16]

During his time in the Senate, Bruce became a fixture in Washington, DC, politics and society. He welcomed influential White and Black elected officials and advocates into his home. In June 1878, he married Josephine Beall Wilson of Ohio—the first Black teacher in the Cleveland public schools and the daughter of a prominent dentist. Josephine Bruce also became prominent in Washington society and was active in local and national Black women's civic organizations. They had one son, Roscoe Conkling Bruce—born in 1879 and named after Bruce's Senate colleague—who was an educator in Washington, DC. After Bruce's death in 1898, Josephine was hired by Booker T. Washington to serve as "lady principal" of Tuskegee Institute in Alabama.[17]

By the end of the decade, Mississippi Democrats had secured control of the state legislature, leaving Bruce with little chance of being elected to another six-year term. In January 1880, the legislature chose Democrat James Zachariah George to succeed him. After leaving the Senate, Bruce remained active in the Mississippi and national Republican parties. He briefly served as presiding officer at the 1880 Republican National Convention in Chicago, where he received eight votes for the nomination for Vice President. When the convention returned to Chicago in 1888, Bruce received 11 such votes.[18]

In 1881, Bruce was rumored as a nominee for a Cabinet position in the administration of President James A. Garfield. He rejected an offer to be U.S. minister to Brazil, citing the climate and his apprehension that "a colored man will not be well received" there. Instead, Bruce obtained a prime position as register of the U.S. Treasury. In 1884, Bruce was appointed head of the "Colored Department" at the World's Industrial and Cotton Centennial Exposition, a World's Fair held in New Orleans, Louisiana, from December 1884 to June 1885. He traveled throughout the country to collect items such as books, art, tools, and machinery created by Black Americans. The goal of the exhibit, Bruce said, was to demonstrate to "the world" what African Americans "have been able to do in less than twenty years of freedom."[19]

In 1885, the inauguration of Democratic President Grover Cleveland meant that Bruce had to resign his Treasury position. He focused on his agricultural investments and engaged in a popular nationwide lecture tour. From 1886 to 1890, Bruce and his family spent significant time in Indianapolis, Indiana. They returned to the capital in 1890, when President Benjamin Harrison appointed Bruce recorder of deeds for the District of Columbia. When President Cleveland returned for a second term in 1893, Bruce left that office and joined the board of trustees at Howard University, which also granted him an honorary doctor of laws. Bruce was again touted in the press as a possible Cabinet appointee at the beginning of President William McKinley's administration in 1897. Instead, he returned to the Treasury post. He continued to reside in Washington until he died after a prolonged illness on March 17, 1898.[20]

Manuscript Collection

Howard University, Moorland–Spingarn Research Center (Washington, DC). *Papers*: 1841–1898, amount unspecified. Contains correspondence, documents, newspaper clippings, family papers, and other material. Most of the correspondence relates to Blanche K. Bruce's service as Senator and reflects the political, economic,

and social conditions in Mississippi and the South during Reconstruction. Correspondents represented include James Hill (secretary of state for Mississippi, 1874–1878), John R. Lynch, P.B.S. Pinchback, and J.J. Spellman. Other persons represented include Booker T. Washington, the Plummer family, and Sadie Daniel St. Clair. Topics represented include the Republican Party in Mississippi. *Additional Papers*: In Roscoe Conkling Bruce papers, 1897–1924, son of Senator Blanche K. Bruce. A finding aid is available in the repository and online.

Notes

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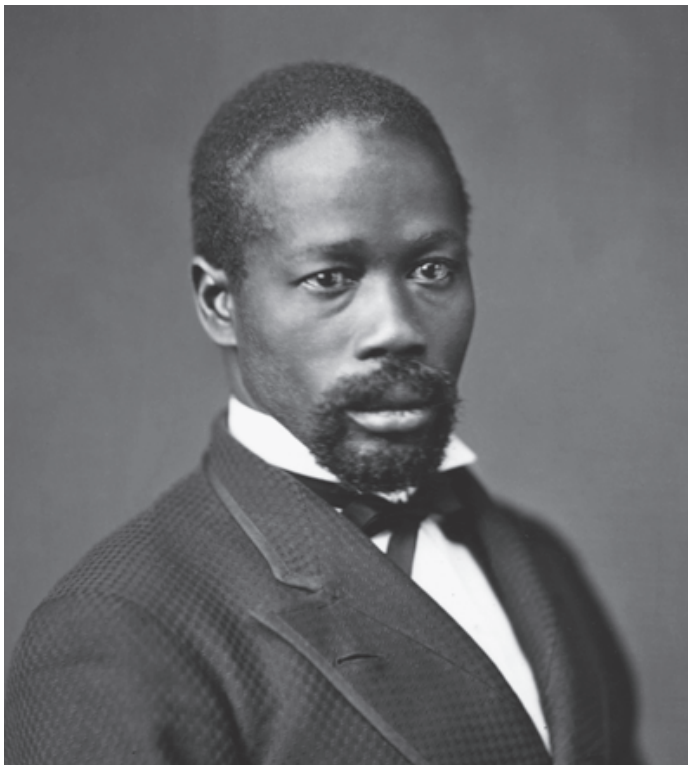
Jeremiah Haralson

1846–unknown

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1875–1877

Republican from Alabama



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Jeremiah Haralson, a powerful orator and adroit debater, rose quickly in Alabama state politics before serving one term in the U.S. House of Representatives during the 44th Congress (1875–1877). In the contentious politics of Reconstruction Alabama, Haralson battled the resurgent Democratic Party to preserve Black civil and political rights before violence and election fraud undermined his re-election campaigns in 1876 and 1878. He was both principled and pragmatic, willing to challenge those in his own party who prioritized their personal and political interests over building a lasting and just peace in the South. "Is it not better that the leading colored men take this thing in hand and build up our race, build up our party, upon the true principles of right and justice of Republicanism," Haralson wrote in 1876, "and drive those who are striving to ride into office on prejudice into the blackest political hell?"[1]

Jeremiah Haralson was born enslaved near Columbus, Georgia, on April 1, 1846. His early life is not well documented. He was sold twice as a child before John Haralson, a lawyer from Selma, Alabama, purchased him in 1859. One observer, noting the brutal physical toll Jeremiah Haralson's early experiences had on his body, recorded, "Every square inch on his back shows the scars of the whip of his slavery days."[2]

After he was emancipated at the end of the Civil War in 1865, Haralson taught himself to read and write. He made his living as a farmer and married Ellen Norwood in 1870. They had one son: Henry. In the contemporary press Haralson was often referred to as "Jere," which was also how his name appeared in the *Congressional Directory* for the 44th Congress.[3]

Haralson's skills as a politician were often commended by colleagues and the press during his career. He was described as "a born wit," who punctuated his speeches with sarcasm and humor. "He is a ready and shrewd debater," a colleague noted in 1872, with a "ringing voice." During his time presiding over the Alabama state senate, observers praised him as "well versed in parliamentary usages." After hearing Haralson speak at the National Convention of Colored Men in New Orleans, Louisiana, in April 1872, Frederick Douglass called him "one of the most amusing, ready, witted and gifted debaters" at the gathering. "While he has humor enough in him to supply a half dozen circus clowns; he is a man of real solid sense." Douglass went on to note that Haralson may be "in danger of letting his immeasurable

love of drollery get the better of the more serious side of his nature, and preferring to make men laugh to making them think, for it is in his power to do the latter as well as the former."[4]

While most Black Alabamians supported the Republican Party—which championed the civil and political rights of formerly enslaved people after the Civil War—Haralson made the unconventional decision to enter political life as a Democrat. In 1868, he made several speeches in support of Democratic presidential candidate Horatio Seymour and his running mate, Francis P. Blair. Haralson also served as secretary of the local "Seymour and Blair Club," an all-Black organization which supported the Democratic ticket in 1868 and which, it was said, denounced "the efforts of the carpet baggers to ruin both races." In August 1868, Haralson narrowly escaped a violent attack by a group of Black Republicans described as "Radicals" by a local paper.[5]

It is difficult to reconcile Haralson's early Democratic activism with the balance of his career. In both state and national office, Haralson demonstrated a stark aversion to the Democratic Party's agenda while upholding the principles of the Republican Party. While some sources attributed his Democratic affiliation to a sincere political decision on Haralson's part, a contemporary source close to Haralson relayed a story the Alabama Representative often told about his speeches for the Democratic ticket. Haralson later claimed that he was more interested in backing the Republican candidates, Ulysses S. Grant for President and Schuyler Colfax for Vice President. "While he made Seymour and Blair speeches for money, he talked Grant and Colfax for nothing."[6]

By 1870, Haralson had become more direct in his association with Republican politics. In 1869, he served as an election inspector in a Dallas County, Alabama, voting precinct for the congressional election held in August. A year later, he successfully ran as an Independent for the state house of representatives. In September 1870, Haralson presided over the Republican Party's district convention, at which Benjamin Sterling Turner—the first African American from Alabama to serve in Congress—was nominated for the House. By 1872, when he was elected to the Alabama state senate, Haralson was a staunch and vocal Republican. He successfully navigated a civil rights bill through the state senate, though its progress stalled in the house. Only a few years into his legislative career, Haralson's skills in debate made him, as one observer wrote, "feared, perhaps, more than any colored man in the legislature of Alabama." He was also president of the Alabama Laborers' Union for most of the 1870s.[7]

By the time he addressed the 1872 National Convention of Colored Men, Haralson had fully embraced the Republican Party as a vehicle for national change. During the presidential election later that year, a Liberal Republican faction had mobilized to challenge the Republican Party's standard bearer, the incumbent President Grant. Haralson was adamant that Black Americans recognize the urgency of the moment and back Grant. When one attendee suggested they wait to see if Liberal Republicans nominated Senator Charles Sumner of Massachusetts for President, Haralson warned, "We have waited too much, and if we do not look out we will keep on a waiting."[8]

Even though Haralson stressed the importance of Republican solidarity, he remained skeptical of many White Republicans in Alabama who he believed had entered politics strictly for personal gain. For Haralson, they were "office hunters" more interested in dividing Alabamians to maintain their control over the Republican Party than they were in building a durable and prosperous peace in the South. This perspective shaped his relationship with the party for years to come.[9]

In 1874, Haralson won the Republican nomination in Alabama's First Congressional District, which stretched over a swath of western Alabama, including Haralson's hometown of Selma and a large chunk of the central Alabama Black Belt. Representative Turner had held the same seat in the 42nd Congress (1871–1873). The district's population was about 50 percent African American. Haralson campaigned on a strong civil rights platform, appealing to the district's freed people. Both White Republicans and Democrats rallied behind the incumbent, Liberal Republican Frederick George Bromberg, who had defeated Turner and another Black candidate two years earlier. But Haralson ultimately captured 54 percent of the vote to win his seat in Congress.[10]

When the House convened for the 44th Congress in December 1875, Haralson was sworn in and assigned to the Committee on Public Expenditures. Bromberg contested Haralson's victory, however. The Committee on Elections did not report on the case until April 18, 1876, when it decided unanimously to reject Bromberg's challenge. The Democratically-controlled committee declared some of Haralson's votes invalid, but he retained a winning margin.

In announcing the decision on the House Floor, Democrat John Thomas Harris of Virginia, the committee chair, accused Republicans in Haralson's district of manipulating and intimidating Black voters and claimed the committee's investigation had uncovered "frauds as flagrant and abuses as violent as ever have been committed in this country upon the elective franchise." Republican Martin Ingham Townsend of New York defended the panel's unanimous decision and Haralson's right to be seated, stating that after 43 years as a lawyer, "I have never seen such infamous, such glaring, such self-confuted perjury as was attempted in opposition to the sitting member." The House ultimately approved the resolution reported by the committee, confirming Haralson's hold on the seat.[11]

During his single term in office, Haralson never addressed the House in an extended speech on the floor. His only brief remarks came at the end of a debate on a bill amending an 1871 measure providing pensions to surviving veterans of the War of 1812 and their wives and children. Haralson asked that lawmakers extend these benefits to "the surviving colored soldiers" of the conflict as well. Haralson's other legislative proposals focused largely on the needs of his state and those of African Americans throughout the nation. He drafted two bills to use the proceeds from the sale of public land to fund educational initiatives as well as a bill to revise the list of counties included in three Alabama judicial districts. He also presented a petition from citizens in Mobile, Alabama, requesting compensation for the use of a medical college and supplies by officers of the Freedmen's Bureau. None of Haralson's proposals passed the House.[12]

In January 1876, Haralson voted for a bill to lift the remaining political restrictions on all former Confederates. Although the bill did not pass, Haralson recognized that his support had been controversial among Republicans. In a letter to a friend later that month, he tried to justify his vote by pointing out that President Grant favored amnesty and that the 1874 Republican platform guaranteed equal protection of the law. He also mentioned the need for change born out of cooperation between the White and Black residents of Alabama. Haralson stressed that the "office-hunters" of the Republican Party had made the amnesty bill a divisive issue by not thinking about what he called the long-term interests of the region. "We must drive out these hell hounds and go in for peace between the two races in the South," he declared.[13]

Haralson anticipated a violent 1876 election across the southern states. But he was wary of using federal soldiers to police polls and ensure orderly voting. "Every 'blue-jacket' sent to the South makes democratic votes," Haralson warned. He did, however, welcome federal election supervisors at the polls, particularly during his difficult re-election campaign.[14]

By 1876, the Alabama state legislature had gerrymandered Haralson's district, cutting it nearly in half so that it encompassed only the west-central Alabama Black Belt. The new Fourth District had by far the largest Black electorate—65 percent—of any district in the state. In the Republican primary, Haralson faced former Representative James T. Rapier, who had previously held the Second District seat in the 43rd Congress (1873–1875).[15]

Haralson and Rapier belonged to different factions within the Alabama Republican Party. Rapier allied with Alabama Senator George Eliphaz Spencer and Haralson with former governor William Hugh Smith. At the district convention, Rapier appeared to receive the votes necessary to win the nomination. Haralson, however, left the convention and mobilized his supporters in another building nearby, where he was subsequently nominated. By the end of the night, both men claimed to be the Republican standard-bearer in the Fourth District. "That was a difference of opinion between Mr. Rapier's friends and me," Haralson later recalled. "I thought I was a regular nominee, and he thought he was a regular nominee." Because both Haralson and Rapier appeared on the ballot, they split the substantial Republican ticket, emerging with 34 and 28 percent of the vote, respectively. Democrat Charles Miller Shelley—a former Confederate general and the Selma sheriff—won the election with a 38 percent plurality.[16]

Haralson contested the election, claiming Shelley had unfairly selected the inspectors at the polling places. As sheriff, Shelley had the power to appoint the three inspectors at each site. He always appointed two Democrats and one Black Republican who could not read or write, thereby enabling his Democratic allies to manipulate the election. After inspectors threw out many of Haralson's votes, he protested that there had been plenty of Black Republicans available to work as inspectors who could read and write, and understood the election process.[17]

In February 1877, with his case pending before the Committee on Elections, Haralson provided detailed testimony before a subcommittee of the Senate Committee

on Privileges and Elections investigating Alabama's recent elections in 1874, 1875, and 1876. Haralson responded to questions related to polling sites, political factions, and the violence and intimidation Black voters faced in his district. He spoke specifically about his own difficulties in the 1876 election, and how local election officials threw out the crucial votes that would have guaranteed his victory.[18]

Haralson's testimony outlined the process by which Democrats used widespread election fraud to disenfranchise Black Americans in the late nineteenth century. He described how local Democratic officials commandeered the vote certification process, throwing out ballots and manipulating tallies to manufacture sizeable winning majorities. "If they wanted to make it one hundred thousand," he said, "they could do it." He also discussed the ways White and Black Republicans faced economic reprisals, threats to their homes and family, and violent attacks from Democrats. Haralson told the panel of several threats against his life, including from his opponent Shelley, who threatened him at gunpoint during the campaign. If Democrats regained control of the state government, he warned, they "would inaugurate slavery in a new form; not such as it was, but by depriving us of our right to vote; and the gentlemen who used to own us would represent us, and get up in the American Congress and say that we voted for them and sent them there, when we did not."[19]

Haralson acknowledged the difficulty he faced in unseating Shelley. "I know that it is a novel and hazardous thing for a negro to contest before a Democratic House a white man's claim to a seat," he said in an April 1878 letter to the editor of the *Washington Post*. But Haralson insisted that he had won. "Mr. Shelley is no more entitled to the seat in the Forty-fifth Congress than the Sultan of Turkey, and is only here by taking advantage of his own wrong." Haralson submitted papers to the Committee on Elections and took additional testimony in the summer of 1878, but the committee never issued a formal report on his challenge and the House opted not to consider the case before the term expired in March 1879.[20]

While battling to unseat Shelley in the 45th Congress, Haralson won the Republican nomination for 1878 election. The campaign between the formerly enslaved Haralson and the ex-Confederate Shelley was again fraught with violence and intimidation by White Democrats against Black voters. Officials reported that Shelley had captured 55 percent of the vote to win a seat in the 46th Congress (1879–1881), but Haralson suspected that Democratic election supervisors had manipulated ballot boxes throughout the district, costing him votes. Haralson began to collect evidence, but several local judges refused to take affidavits from witnesses. When he was finally able to solicit the aid of Republican judge George Craig, Shelley supporters jailed his witnesses and attempted to have Haralson and his lawyer imprisoned under false charges. While traveling between Montgomery and Selma, Haralson was attacked by an armed mob and ordered to leave the state. Fearing for his life, he fled to Washington, DC.[21]

Haralson persevered and submitted evidence to the Committee on Elections to contest Shelley's victory. In April 1879, Haralson sent a memorial to the committee stating his claim to the seat. The committee finally responded to Haralson in January 1880, and requested additional evidence, threatening to dismiss the case if he did not provide the documentation. Haralson criticized the committee's delay and requested a "proper hearing." He also demanded the removal of Harris, the chair, and another Democrat, Ezekiel John Ellis of Louisiana, before he agreed to appear before the committee. Ultimately, the committee never ruled on Haralson's claim.[22]

In May 1880, Haralson traveled to Chicago, Illinois, to attend the Republican National Convention. The election that fall carried high stakes, he told the *Chicago Tribune*. "If we are beaten this time," Haralson declared, "white men can live in the South, but not negroes." He predicted a Democratic administration would tilt the balance of power—that Democrats would use the Supreme Court to sanction their states' rights doctrine and "undo everything" Republicans had passed during Reconstruction. Haralson also speculated that Democrats would "increase the Supreme Court bench" to get their desired results. Haralson also questioned the candidacy of President Grant, whom he had supported in the past but was now in pursuit of an unprecedented third term in office. Haralson predicted Grant had no chance in the South. "How could he carry a Southern State when we couldn't hold them with all the power of his Administration at our back?" he asked. "He has no power now, and power is greater than his name. All the election machinery is in the hands of the Democrats."[23]

In 1884, Haralson revived his campaign for Alabama's Fourth District, where African Americans were 80 percent of the population. He had spent the intervening years in patronage positions, first as a clerk at Baltimore's federal

customs house and later as a clerk at the U.S. Department of the Interior. He also worked for the Pension Bureau in Washington, DC, from 1882 to 1884. At the September 1884 Republican nominating convention, Haralson faced George Craig—the judge who had helped him in 1878. After a disputed vote, both candidates claimed to be the nominee and ran as Republicans. In the general election, Haralson received just 683 votes in a four-way contest. Democrat Alexander Caldwell Davidson won easily with 64 percent of the vote, garnering twice as many votes as Craig who finished second.[24]

Haralson remained active in Alabama Republican politics, but by 1891 he had settled in Pine Bluff, Arkansas. He worked in what was known as the pension business, helping potential applicants—soldiers, widows, and children—compile information and follow the strict guidelines to secure federal pensions. An 1894 article in the *Washington Post* noted that Haralson did "the largest pension business in the State." In December 1894, he was convicted of forgery in federal court and sentenced to two years in prison. Haralson served his sentence in Albany, New York.[25]

The circumstances of Haralson's death have been subject to much speculation. In the 1920s, a congressional aide tasked with compiling and updating the *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress* received and published information that Haralson had been "killed by wild beasts" near Denver, Colorado, in 1916. This mysterious end to Haralson's life, however, cannot be verified, and recent research makes clear that the individual in that account was most likely not former Representative Jeremiah Haralson of Alabama. Ultimately, the date and manner of Haralson's death remain unknown.[26]

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John Adams Hyman

1840–1891

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1875–1877

Republican from North Carolina

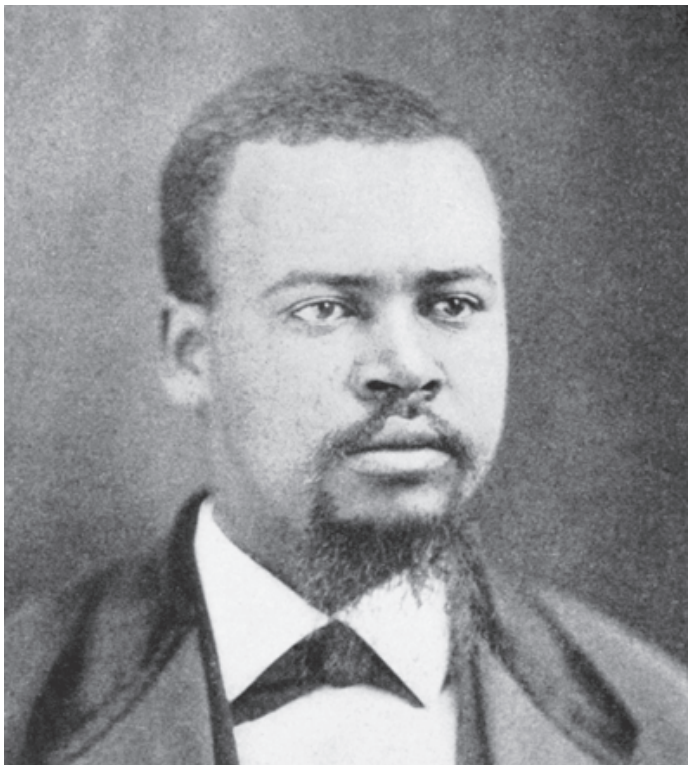

Image courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration

While enslaved, John Adams Hyman undertook great personal risk to learn to read and write, repeatedly breaking laws across the South that prohibited his education, and as a result, was sold at least seven times. After his emancipation, Hyman sought with equal determination to become the first Black U.S. Representative from North Carolina. Although he made no speeches on the House Floor, he worked to ensure the civil and political rights of African Americans. "No man can say that all men were not created equal; that they are not endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights," Hyman asserted in an 1872 letter to Senator Charles Sumner of Massachusetts. "There can be no grades of citizenship under the American flag."[1]

John Adams Hyman was born enslaved near Warrenton, North Carolina, on July 23, 1840. Hyman later recalled that he was treated like "chattel, bought and sold as a brute." As a young man, Hyman rebelled against the institution of slavery, and eagerly pursued an education. "Early in life he was seized with an intense desire to improve himself," reads an 1876 profile in the *Congressional Directory*. Hyman was often "caught with a spelling-book during the hours of night, among his fellow-slaves, trying to learn," before being "sold and sent to Alabama, where he suffered like persecution on account of his desire for self-improvement." When he gained his freedom in March 1865, Hyman returned from Alabama to Warrenton, where he became a farmer and opened a country store. He also became a trustee of the first public school in the area. Hyman married and had four children.[2]

Hyman quickly became active in the movement to secure political rights for African Americans in North Carolina. At age 26, he served on two committees at the state's Freedmen's Convention, including the committee on invitations, an important panel whose purpose was to encourage the attendance of influential politicians and to raise awareness about the convention. Hyman also served as a delegate to the March 1867 Republican State Convention and recruited Black voters in his role as registrar for northern Warren County. In November 1867, Hyman was elected to the Warren County delegation to the North Carolina constitutional convention. The convention met in Raleigh the following January, and produced a state constitution that guaranteed male voting rights and declared that all North Carolinians had the basic "right to the privilege of education."[3]

In 1868, Hyman won election to the state senate, where he served for six years. At the state level, he backed a variety of policies to safeguard Black freedoms while keeping abreast of efforts to do the same in Congress. In January 1872, he wrote to Charles Sumner in support of the Massachusetts Senator's civil rights bill. Hyman shared Sumner's ideas about human rights and rooted his understanding of Black equality in the Declaration of Independence. He also described his personal journey since emancipation, in which he became "raised to the dignity of man and of an American citizen."[4]

Hyman opposed President Andrew Johnson's leniency toward ex-Confederates and strongly advocated requiring states to ratify the Fourteenth Amendment before being readmitted to the Union. In 1872, Hyman supported the decision by North Carolina's Republican Governor William Holden to order the arrest of Ku Klux Klan members suspected of lynching and terrorizing the state's Black population.[5]

Hyman's hometown of Warrenton was in the northern section of the "Black Second" congressional district. By 1872, it was the only remaining safe Republican district after Democrats in North Carolina's legislature gerrymandered the state to their advantage. The "Black Second" stretched from Warren County, adjacent to the Virginia border, and hooked around to coastal Craven County. By 1880, African Americans made up more than two-thirds of the population in three of the district's 10 counties. In all but two of the counties in the district, African Americans were more than 50 percent of the population—and in those two, the Black population was at least 45 percent. In 1872, White Republican Representative Charles Randolph Thomas sought a third term in the reapportioned district, but several African-American politicians in the "Black Second" demanded that a Black candidate serve as the Republican nominee. Hyman challenged Thomas for the nomination—embittering many White Republicans—but lost at the May 1872 district convention. Thomas went on to handily defeated his Democratic opponent in the general election.[6]

Yet, Thomas's term in the 43rd Congress (1873–1875) went poorly; he introduced few bills and made the political blunder of voting to retroactively raise congressional salaries, an unpopular issue in his district. Seven candidates, including Hyman and African-American state representative James E. O'Hara—who would win election to the House in 1882 from the same seat—challenged the weakened incumbent at the 1874 district convention. The early ballots taken at the convention saw the votes split evenly among the candidates, but after a series of negotiations, Hyman prevailed on the twenty-ninth ballot.[7]

In the general election, Hyman faced Democrat George W. Blount, a local lawyer, who entered the race at the last minute and who hoped to take advantage of a growing rift among Black and White Republicans, as well as another Black candidate, Garland N. White, who ran as an Independent Republican. Hyman ultimately won in a rout, taking 62 percent of the vote against his two opponents. Blount complained that the phrase "Republican Congressional Ticket" printed at the top of Hyman's ballots persuaded many voters who could not read to vote for the eventual victor. But it was the Independent Republican Garland White, who had only earned a little more than 1,000 votes, who attempted to contest Hyman's election on Capitol Hill. The Committee on Elections did not issue a formal report on Hyman's 1874 election, though it did report favorably on his right to his seat and dismissed the contestant's complaint on August 1, 1876.[8]

Upon his arrival for the 44th Congress (1875–1877), Hyman was assigned to the Committee on Manufactures. For the first time in nearly two decades, House Republicans found themselves in the minority, and Hyman's committee assignment had little significance for his agricultural district. Hyman made no speeches on the House Floor, but he was an active lawmaker, offering private bills and petitions on behalf of poor constituents in his district and state. He sponsored a bill authorizing the Treasury Department to build a lighthouse at Gull Rock on North Carolina's Pamlico Sound and introduced legislation to compensate constituents for financial losses incurred during the Civil War. He joined others from the North Carolina delegation in seeking relief for members of the Cherokee nation who had been forcibly expelled to the West. He cast a noteworthy "nay" vote against restricting President Ulysses S. Grant to two terms. Though a formal term limit for Presidents did not yet exist, the resolution sought to solidify the custom that a chief executive would step down after two terms based on the precedent established by President George Washington. Hyman was one of only 18 Members—including nearly all of the Black Representatives in the 44th Congress—to back a third term for Grant as most Republicans voted against the proposal.[9]

By the spring of 1876, Hyman faced growing hurdles to his re-election. Back home, North Carolina Governor Curtis Hooks Brogden began mustering support to defeat Hyman for the Republican nomination. Brogden, whose hometown was in the Second District, had taken office in 1874 following the death of Governor Tod Robinson Caldwell but expected to be passed over for the gubernatorial nomination in 1876. By the summer, Brogden's supporters had convinced some of Hyman's White and Black allies that the sitting governor was well-positioned to win Republican nomination in the Second District, and at the party convention Brogden captured the ticket on the ninth and deciding ballot. Deflecting rumors he would run as a third-party candidate, Hyman threw his support behind his erstwhile rival, allowing Brogden to win the general election by a wide margin. Brogden then took his place as the only Republican in the state's new congressional delegation.[10]

After leaving the House, Hyman returned to his farm in Warrenton, where he also ran a grocery and liquor store. He briefly served as a special deputy internal revenue collector for the Rutherford B. Hayes administration, but political pressure from the North Carolina Republican Party kept him from fully assuming his post. In 1878, he again ran for Congress, losing the nomination to James O'Hara. Despite being out of office, Hyman searched for ways to secure political appointments for African Americans in Warrenton County, including a scheme to encourage Black voters in the district to support local Democratic candidates in exchange for patronage positions.[11]

In his later years, Hyman, who remained politically-connected, was employed in a variety of public jobs. He accepted work as a postal clerk in Richmond, Virginia, before taking a position as a watchman in the Government Printing Office, in Washington, DC, from 1883 to 1886. In 1887, he returned to Warrenton hoping to again secure the congressional nomination in the Second District in 1888. Unsuccessful, Hyman moved back to Washington, DC, in 1889, where he took a position in the U.S. Department of Agriculture's seed dispensary. In 1890, his sons opened a wholesale store in the District of Columbia that was hailed in the press as "managed and controlled entirely by Afro-Americans." On September 15, 1891, John Hyman died at home following a stroke. He was 51 years old.[12]

Manuscript Collection

University of North Carolina, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, Southern Historical Collection (Chapel Hill, NC). *Papers*: 1876, three letters. The John Adams Hyman Letters include correspondence recommending that Republican F.D. Schlachter be appointed as Superintendent of the National Cemetery in New Bern, North Carolina.

Notes

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Charles E. Nash

1844–1913

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1875–1877

Republican from Louisiana



Image courtesy of the Library of Congress

Charles E. Nash was the first Black Member of Congress elected from Louisiana. A wounded veteran of the Civil War, he served one term in the U.S. House of Representatives, in the 44th Congress (1875–1877). Unable to find legislative success in a House controlled by Democrats, this Republican lawmaker nonetheless made an impassioned plea for reconciliation and recovery following the devastation of war.

Charles Edmund Nash was born to free parents, Richard and Masie Cecile Nash, in Opelousas, St. Landry Parish, Louisiana, on May 23, 1844. Nash attended public schools before becoming a bricklayer in New Orleans. He married and had five children. During the Civil War, Union troops occupied New Orleans in 1862, and in July 1863, Nash enlisted as a private in Company A of the 82nd Regiment, United States Volunteers, known as the Chasseurs d'Afrique. He was eventually promoted to sergeant major. Nash was severely wounded and lost part of his right leg in April 1865, in the battle of Fort Blakely, Alabama, only days before the end of the Civil War. In 1869, Nash was hired for a federal patronage position as a night inspector in the New Orleans custom house. He also became politically active, joining the Workingmen's Republican Club of Washington, Louisiana, and running unsuccessfully for a seat in the state legislature from St. Landry Parish in 1872.[1]

Beginning in 1868, Louisiana Republicans faced a precarious situation after the state was readmitted to the Union and federal military occupation ended. Clashes between Democrats and Republicans grew more common and were compounded by a number of intraparty rivalries that had split the Republican Party in the state. In 1872, the election of Republican William Pitt Kellogg as governor was challenged by Democrat John McEnery. During the next two years, violence plagued the state. McEnery established his own militia and tried to seize police stations in New Orleans in the spring of 1873. In April, the Black community in Colfax, concerned that Democrats were going to seize control of the local government, mobilized an armed defense of the courthouse. But a White mob murdered more than 150 Black residents in what came to be known as the Colfax massacre. In 1874, the White League, a vigilante organization set on using violence to re-establish White supremacy in the state, openly attacked Republican officials and African Americans.[2]

During this period of violence and instability, the Republican Party convened in New Orleans on August 8

in preparation for the 1874 election. Nash was nominated for a House seat in the Sixth District surrounding Baton Rouge. By September, Governor Kellogg was able to secure military assistance from President Ulysses S. Grant to stop a White League uprising in New Orleans that tried to install his rival, McEnery, as governor. Only the arrival of the U.S. military stopped the insurrection. Nash's election to Congress in 1874 was smooth by comparison. He defeated Democrat Joseph B. Moore by a little more than 1,000 votes.[3]

Nash was the first Black lawmaker from Louisiana to serve in Congress. His experience contrasted sharply with that of three Black candidates from the state who preceded him. John Willis Menard of New Orleans was elected to the House in 1868 but was never seated after his opponent contested the election. In 1872, Samuel Peters of Shreveport had won election to the 43rd Congress (1873–1875) but died before he was sworn into office. And in 1873, lieutenant governor P.B.S. Pinchback—one of Louisiana's most influential Black politicians—claimed a seat in the House and the Senate only to be denied both through the contested election process.[4]

Nash joined a then-record eight Black Members—including Mississippi Republican Blanche K. Bruce in the Senate—in the 44th Congress. Upon his swearing-in, Nash was assigned to the Committee on Education and Labor. In the House, Nash focused on constituent services, introducing private bills to provide petitioners monetary compensation and pension requests for former soldiers. He also introduced a bill requesting federal funding for a survey of Bayou Cortebleau with the intention of improving navigation of the waterway in his district.[5]

Nash eagerly participated in debate, particularly on matters related to his home state. For example, on May 31, 1876, Louisiana Republican Frank Morey spoke for 90 minutes during a debate on a disputed election in a district just north of Nash's Sixth District. When Morey went over his allotted time, he was granted an additional 30 minutes. As Morey's speech concluded, Nash rose to speak, claiming that Morey had promised him time to offer his own assessment of the controversial election. Denied a chance to speak by Democrats, and encouraged by Morey to print his remarks in the *Congressional Record* instead, Nash refused, declaring "I do not desire leave to print."[6]

Eight days later, on the evening of June 7, Nash delivered a speech on the House Floor on the political conditions in the South. He chastised those in the Democratic Party who claimed the Republican Party had not attempted to aid the freed people. "I may be no historian, but this much of history do I know, because I have been an actor in its scenes," Nash declared. He reminded his colleagues that the Democratic Party had opposed measures to protect Black civil and political rights. Nash also warned that Democrats had determined to maintain "a continual warfare upon the advancement, peace, and prosperity of our people." He called for strict enforcement of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments and other federal legislation passed during Reconstruction, to safeguard "personal liberty and individual security." Finally, he warned that "a government which cannot protect its humblest citizens from outrage and injury is unworthy of the name and ought not to command the support of a free people."[7]

Nash also praised former Confederate general James Longstreet, who after the Civil War settled in New Orleans and supported Republican-led Reconstruction efforts. Responding to criticism of Longstreet from former Confederates, Nash defended Longstreet's postwar actions, holding him up as an example for former rebels in Louisiana and across the South to follow toward a better future.[8]

Even in 1876, amid the twilight of Reconstruction, Nash called upon the federal government to take an active role in local matters. For instance, he argued that support for public education in the South would be critical to bolstering its citizens' democratic capacities, and thus to achieving the long-term goals of Reconstruction. "Designing demagogues can influence the uneducated and thus compass their ends; whereas if intelligence were universal, any combination of vice and ignorance would be impossible." Nash ended on an optimistic note, reaffirming his faith that the United States could overcome its racial and political divisions and find reconciliation between the once warring sections. "For we are not enemies, but brethren," he declared, adding that "this country is our joint inheritance."[9]

In 1876, Nash lost his seat to Democrat Edward White Robertson, who won with 58 percent of the vote to Nash's 42 percent. Nash's re-election campaign was overshadowed by the crisis that followed the inconclusive presidential election. Louisiana was one of three states with disputed election results, leaving the presidential contest unresolved for months. Ultimately, Congress established a commission that awarded the disputed Electoral College votes to Republican Rutherford B. Hayes.[10]

After another violent election throughout the state in 1876, Louisiana became central to the debate on the electoral crisis. On December 15, 1876, Louisiana Democrat William Brainerd Spencer, who had unseated the Republican Frank Morey through a contested election six months earlier, spoke on the House Floor to dispute allegations that the Democratic Party was at fault for the violence. Spencer claimed to "know the colored people of the state" and said he had heard that many of them wanted to vote Democratic but could not for fear of violent reprisals. Nash tried to intervene in the debate by asking a question, but he was ignored. It was the final time he attempted to speak on the House Floor during his short time in office. He submitted several private bills in early 1877 as time expired on the 44th Congress, including one for Mohammed Khan, a veteran of Civil War from the 43rd New York Volunteers, for a pension.[11]

Nash's 1876 defeat became a partisan point of contention on the House Floor when the 45th Congress (1877–1879) convened in October 1877. Nash claimed he had been re-elected and furnished credentials provided by Governor Kellogg to prove his victory. Republican William Pierce Frye of Maine offered a resolution to swear in Nash. Representatives Harry White of Pennsylvania and Charles Grandison Williams of Wisconsin spoke in defense of Nash's right to the seat, citing the Kellogg document. Democrat Ezekiel John Ellis of Louisiana rejected Nash's credentials, noting they did not conform to the required legal specifications. Ultimately, Ellis moved to seat Robertson and the Democratic majority voted in favor of the measure.[12] Nash never formally contested Robertson's election.

In June 1878, a congressional investigation into the 1876 presidential election uncovered a story of attempted election fraud that involved Nash's quest for re-election. The Select Committee on the Alleged Frauds in the Presidential Election of 1876, also known as the Potter committee for its Democratic chair, Clarkson Nott Potter of New York, interviewed witnesses to determine how the disputed electoral votes from several states were allocated to President Hayes. Philadelphia newspaper editor James E. Anderson appeared as a witness before the committee on June 1. In 1876, he had been a clerk in the New Orleans custom house and supervisor of registration in the East Feliciana Parish, which was part of Nash's Sixth District. Anderson claimed he had convinced Kellogg to disregard the vote tally and issue Nash a certificate stating that he was duly elected and should be seated. Anderson told the committee that he threatened to expose Kellogg's role in Republican efforts to manipulate the vote in favor of Hayes. Before taking any action, Anderson testified that he made a signed pact with Nash that stipulated Anderson would receive a job at the port of New Orleans if Nash was able to return to the House. Anderson produced copies of signed papers for the investigating panel, including the agreement and correspondence. Though Nash never testified before the Potter committee, pages of witness testimony compiled in 1879 placed him at the center of a series of convoluted conspiracies to manipulate the vote tallies in his district.[13]

Abandoning his political career after his term in the 44th Congress, Nash returned to Louisiana to work as a custom house inspector in New Orleans. He served briefly as postmaster of Washington, Louisiana, in 1882. By 1900, Nash was working as a bricklayer. He also worked as a cigar maker before he died in New Orleans on June 21, 1913.[14]

Notes

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Robert Smalls

1839–1915

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1875–1879; 1882–1883; 1884–1887

Republican from South Carolina



Image courtesy of the Library of Congress

A Civil War hero who had led a dramatic escape from slavery in 1862, Robert Smalls served part of five terms in the U.S. House of Representatives from a district along South Carolina's seaboard. Smalls often endured violent elections to represent his staunchly Republican, majority-Black district. On Capitol Hill, he fought to authorize and fund internal improvements for coastal South Carolina and was an advocate for his Black constituents in the face of Democratic disenfranchisement efforts. "My race needs no special defense, for the past history of them in this country proves them to be equal of any people anywhere," Smalls asserted in 1895. "All they need is an equal chance in the battle of life."[1]

Robert Smalls was born enslaved on April 5, 1839, in Beaufort, South Carolina. His mother, Lydia Polite, was enslaved and worked in the house of her and her son's enslaver, John McKee. The identity of his father is not known, though it may have been John McKee. Smalls worked in the McKee home in Beaufort throughout his youth and, in 1851, moved to McKee's Charleston home. He was hired out on the waterfront as a lamplighter, stevedore foreman, sail maker, rigger, and sailor and became an expert navigator of the South Carolina and Georgia coasts. In 1856, he married Hannah Jones, who was also enslaved and was hired out to work in hotels in Charleston. They had two daughters: Elizabeth and Sarah. A third child, Robert Jr., died as a toddler. Smalls and his family lived away from their enslavers, but were forced to give them most of their wages.[2]

During the Civil War, the Confederate army forced Robert Smalls into service aboard the *Planter,* an ammunitions transport ship that had once been a cotton steamer. On May 13, 1862, Smalls led his crew of eight enslaved men as they hijacked the well-stocked ship and turned it over to the U.S. Navy, earning their freedom at the same time. Smalls's wife and child were also on board as well as four other women and another child. Smalls became a celebrity in the North and his escape became a symbol of the Union cause—and effective propaganda against the South. For the remainder of the war, Smalls served in the U.S. Navy. Piloting both the *Planter*, which was re-outfitted as a troop transport, and later the ironclad *Keokuk*, Smalls used his intimate maritime knowledge of the South Carolina Sea Islands to advance the Union military in at least 12 engagements. On April 14, 1865, Smalls piloted the *Planter* to Fort Sumter in Charleston Harbor, bringing

visitors to attend the raising of the U.S. flag above the site where the Civil War began.[3]

Even as Smalls fought the Confederacy, he worked to advance the cause of civil rights in the North too. In 1864, he joined free Black delegates to the Republican National Convention; over the course of his career, he attended seven of the next 10 party conventions as a delegate. On December 30, 1864, Smalls was staying in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, awaiting repairs to the *Planter* when he was removed from an all-White streetcar while trying to traverse the city. In the following months, he participated in one of America's first mass boycotts of segregated public transportation. A city law finally permitted integrated streetcars in 1867.[4]

At the war's conclusion, Smalls received a commission as brigadier general of the South Carolina militia. He then purchased his former enslaver's house in Beaufort. Smalls had received some instruction from private tutors in Philadelphia during the war, and after the war he continued his studies in Beaufort. He embarked on business ventures, opening a store and a school for Black students in 1867. He also published a newspaper, the Beaufort *Southern Standard*, starting in 1872. Smalls's extensive résumé and his ability to speak the sea island Gullah dialect enhanced his local popularity and opened doors in South Carolina politics. He was a delegate to the 1868 South Carolina constitutional convention and later that year won his first elective office: a term in the state house of representatives. From 1870 to 1874, he served in the state senate, where he chaired the printing committee.[5]

In 1874, the creation of a new southeast South Carolina district, where 68 percent of the population was African-American, gave Smalls the opportunity to run for a seat in the U.S. House. In an uneventful campaign, Smalls defeated Independent nominee J.P.M. Epping—a White candidate who ran against the Radical Republican state government—with nearly 80 percent of the vote. He received a position on the Agriculture Committee, a key assignment for his farming constituency.[6]

Despite the Democratic majority in the 44th Congress (1875–1877), Smalls's first term was one of his most productive. For his coastal constituents, he obtained appropriations to improve the Port Royal Harbor; his bill passed with little debate, owing to a letter from the Secretary of War supporting the project. Smalls also sought other internal improvements in his district, including compensation from the federal government for its use of Charleston's military academy, the Citadel, since 1865.[7]

In June 1876, Smalls attempted unsuccessfully to add an antidiscrimination amendment to a U.S. Army reorganization bill desegregating Army regiments. The following month, Smalls addressed a bill to redeploy federal troops in the South to patrol the Texas border with Mexico. He argued against transferring federal troops stationed in South Carolina, warning that without the military's presence, private Red Shirt militias—all-White paramilitaries who backed the Democratic Party's effort to win control of the state—would make war on both the state government and the state's freed people. Smalls considered the presence of federal troops essential, which he called the only way to "cut off that rotten part all round South Carolina so as to let the core stand. It is those rotten parts which are troubling us. We are getting along all right ourselves."[8]

While touring the state with Republican Governor Daniel Chamberlain during the 1876 campaign, Smalls attended a rally in Edgefield, South Carolina, where Red Shirt leader, former Confederate general, and soon-to-be U.S. Senator Matthew Calbraith Butler overran the meeting and threatened Smalls's life. Though Smalls's Republican entourage escaped unharmed, a correspondent for the *New York Times* noted the ease with which Butler and his Red Shirts moved through the town and the support they had in the state. The correspondent described Smalls's opponent, George D. Tillman—brother of future Senator Benjamin Ryan Tillman—as a "Democratic tiger, violent in his treatment of Republicans, incendiary in his language, and advising all sorts of illegal measures to restrain Republicans from voting." During the campaign, Smalls called Tillman "the personification of red-shirt Democracy" and the "arch enemy of my race." Smalls survived the Democratic sweep of South Carolina elections, barely defeating Tillman with 52 percent of the vote. Polling places in his district were spared much of the Red Shirt violence, primarily because Governor Chamberlain requested federal troops to stand guard. Tillman later contested the election, appealing to the House Democratic majority to unseat Smalls because of the U.S. military presence during the election. Before the end of the 44th Congress, Smalls used 13 pages in the appendix of the *Congressional Record* to print evidence from congressional inquiries and press reports concerning the rising incidents of violence and voter suppression in his home state. Smalls

called Election Day in South Carolina "a carnival of bloodshed and violence."[9]

When Smalls arrived in Washington for the 45th Congress (1877–1879), he received a seat on the Committee on the Militia and prepared to face Tillman's challenge to his election. But a situation at home prevented him from getting to work. Three months earlier, the Democratic South Carolina state government charged Smalls with accepting a $5,000 bribe while chairing the printing committee in the state senate. Smalls was arrested in Beaufort and taken to Columbia on October 6, 1877. Released on bail two days later, he briefly attended the opening of the 45th Congress on October 15 before returning to Columbia after his indictment on October 22. After a trial that ran from November 7 to 11, Smalls was convicted and sentenced on November 26 to a three-year prison term. Republican newspapers cried foul, accusing Democrats of targeting the "hero of the *Planter*" because of his success as a Black Representative. After three days in jail, Smalls was released pending his appeal with the state supreme court. He returned to Washington to face Tillman's contested election challenge before the Democratically-controlled Committee on Elections. Although the committee ruled in Tillman's favor just before the end of the second session on June 20, 1878, Smalls retained his seat because the whole House never voted on the case.[10]

By Smalls's next election in 1878, the White supremacist-controlled state government posed a deadly threat to South Carolina's Black politicians. "Political times are simply frightful. Men are shot at, hounded down, trapped and held till certain meetings are over, and intimidated in every possible way," observed Laura Towne, a Pennsylvania native who had moved to the South Carolina Sea Islands to teach after the war. Smalls also had to contend with his unresolved conviction, which Tillman—who returned as his opponent—made into a campaign issue. Though Smalls received a majority of the Black votes in the district, those who braved the fierce intimidation were unable to prevent the Democratic sweep. Tillman won with 71 percent of the vote.[11]

On April 29, 1879, South Carolina's Democratic governor, William Simpson, pardoned Smalls for his earlier bribery conviction. Small's pardon was part of a larger deal between Simpson and the U.S. District Attorney that also included an agreement that the federal government would drop charges against South Carolina Democrats accused of violating election laws in 1876.[12]

By 1880, Smalls resolved to take back his House seat from Tillman. At the time, however, the internal disputes among Beaufort Republicans meant Smalls faced a fractured party going into the election. That fall, Smalls failed to defeat Tillman in another violent campaign, garnering 40 percent of the vote. But because Republicans held a slim majority in the House for the 47th Congress (1881–1883), Smalls hoped that a contested election appeal would go his way. His case came before the House Committee on Elections in June 1882. Smalls ultimately won the support of the committee by testifying that his supporters had been frightened away from the polls in communities like Edgefield, South Carolina, across his district. The committee reported in favor of Smalls on June 29. In an attempt to prevent Smalls from taking the seat, House Democrats deserted the House Chamber to avoid a quorum when his case came to a vote on July 19, 1882. Their plan backfired, however, as the House voted to seat him, 141 to 5 with 144 abstentions. Smalls returned to his appointments on the Agriculture and Militia Committees. During his short term in the 47th Congress, Smalls became the second Black Representative to preside over debate in the House when Speaker J. Warren Keifer of Ohio called him to the rostrum on January 11, 1883, during debate on a bill regulating American shipping.[13]

By 1882, South Carolina Democrats had gerrymandered the state so that only one district retained any hope of electing a Black candidate. The new district cut across county lines and contained one-quarter of the state's substantial Black population; Black voters made up 82 percent of the district's population. Smalls sought the nomination but was opposed at the Republican convention by longtime Black politician Samuel Lee and Smalls's congressional friend and ally Representative Edmund William McGregor Mackey. On the 257th ballot, Smalls—fearing the toll that the long nomination process would have on Republican strength in the general election—withdrew his candidacy and threw his support behind Mackey. When Mackey died suddenly on January 28, 1884, after defeating Lee—who ran as an Independent candidate—in the general election, Smalls ran unopposed in a special election on March 10 to take his seat in the House. (By that point, Lee had taken a federal patronage position in Alabama and no longer lived in the state.) Smalls was sworn in on March 31, 1884, and resumed his position on the Committee on the Militia and received an appointment to the Committee on Manufactures.[14]

Smalls continued his earlier efforts to secure federal debt relief for South Carolinians who lost property due to nonpayment of wartime taxes, justifying the relief by pointing to the free services and the welcome federal soldiers had received in places like Port Royal. The House, however, rejected the proposal. Smalls was more successful addressing discrimination in the District of Columbia by offering an amendment to a bill regulating the manufacture and sale of liquor in the city. His amendment prohibited the denial of service on the basis of "race or color" in the District's restaurants and other eating facilities. Although the House approved his amendment, the bill died in the Senate Committee on the District of Columbia.[15]

In the 1884 election, Smalls defeated Democrat William Elliott with ease. Although both candidates expected a violent campaign, the election was relatively quiet, with Black voters from Sea Island coming out to support their favorite son. Smalls was appointed to the Committee on War Claims in the 49th Congress (1885–1887). Encouraged by his recent victory, Black state senators nominated Smalls for an open seat in the U.S. Senate in December 1884. In an era when state legislatures chose their U.S. Senators, Smalls lost to Democratic Governor Wade Hampton, 31 to 3.[16]

In his first full term since 1875, Smalls gave an impassioned speech calling on Congress to approve a $50-per-month pension for Maria Hunter, the widow of General David Hunter. Hunter was one of the first White Union commanders to raise African-American regiments in the Civil War and was known for issuing an order to emancipate enslaved people in Florida, Georgia, and South Carolina. Smalls recalled that Hunter asked him to personally relay a message to President Abraham Lincoln and Secretary of War Edwin Stanton regarding the need to mobilize Black troops in the South for the Union cause. When Democrats opposed the pension, Smalls questioned their motives and admonished his colleagues: "Can it be that this is your revenge for all his patriotic conduct?" Though the private bill passed both the House and Senate, President Grover Cleveland vetoed the measure, claiming that Maria Hunter's case was best handled by the Pensions Bureau. She died in February 1887.[17]

In the 49th Congress, Smalls also steered through the House a bill that allowed for the sale of school farmlands outside Beaufort that had been owned by the federal government since the Civil War. He also submitted a resolution requesting relief funds after a flood in 1886 destroyed crops and homes in his district. The House refused to appropriate funds, despite Smalls's appeal that the state government would not furnish relief money until late in the year. Smalls also introduced a bill to make Port Royal a coaling station for the U.S. Navy and another bill to restore a library in Beaufort.[18]

Smalls faced competition from within his own party for re-election in 1886, as several Black candidates challenged him during the Republican primary. Smalls won the nomination but Democrat William Elliott returned to defeat him with 56 percent of the vote in a general election in which Black disenfranchisement was routine. "Elections," Smalls lamented to the *Washington Post*, "are all in the hands of Democrats."[19]

Smalls contested his loss, but the House Committee on Elections recommended Elliott retain his seat. Smalls spoke on the House Floor in protest on February 12, 1889, after Democratic Members had questioned his character and dredged up his 1878 conviction. Smalls reminded his colleagues of his service during the war and suggested that his case was not being judged fairly because of his heroism years earlier having "taken a steam-boat out of Charleston under the guns of Forts Sumter and Moultrie and surrendered her with all her ammunition to the Federal Government." The Democratically-controlled House declined to seat Smalls, with a vote of 142 to 127 on February 13, 1889.[20]

In 1888, Smalls had stepped aside to allow Thomas E. Miller to run for his seat. But Smalls remained an active and popular politician, managing to win the chairmanship of the Republican state convention in 1890. Although he was favored for the post of sheriff in Beaufort County, Smalls made another bid for the U.S. Senate, but received only one vote from the state legislature. After his wife Hannah died in 1883, Smalls married Annie Wigg on April 9, 1890. They had one son, William Robert, in 1892, before Annie's death in 1895. Smalls also had two stepdaughters: Clara and Charlotte Jones.[21]

Smalls attempted to return to the House in 1892 but lost a four-way race for the Republican nomination, which Representative George Washington Murray secured en route to a general election victory. In the 1890s, Smalls joined Murray and Miller as part of a small group of Black former and current legislators working to oppose the efforts of Governor and later Senator Benjamin Tillman to eliminate

Black political participation in South Carolina. At the South Carolina state constitutional convention in 1895, Smalls was one of six Black delegates in attendance. He spoke out against the proposed changes to the state constitution designed to eliminate Black South Carolinians from the voter rolls and limit Black civil and political rights.[22]

Smalls's personal story of liberation—and his contribution to the Union cause when he captured the *Planter* in Charleston Harbor in 1862—inspired repeated attempts in Congress to compensate him for his efforts. Lawmakers introduced nearly a dozen bills seeking compensation for Smalls for the value of the *Planter*. Representative James E. O'Hara was the first of many Black Congressmen to work on Smalls's behalf when he submitted such a bill in the 49th Congress. In 1897, Smalls visited the House Floor in pursuit of a monetary reward for the ship. The House finally approved a measure submitted by North Carolina Representative George Henry White on January 12, 1900, during the 56th Congress (1899–1901). White originally requested that Smalls receive $20,000, but the Committee on War Claims reduced the amount to $5,000. President William McKinley approved the reward on June 5, 1900.[23]

After leaving Congress, Smalls received a series of Republican patronage jobs in South Carolina. In 1889, President Benjamin Harrison appointed him the collector at the port of Beaufort. He held the post until Republicans lost the White House in 1892. Smalls regained the appointment in 1898 from President McKinley. Over time, his duties as collector became more onerous in the face of racism and segregation in Beaufort. He was forced to step down in 1913 after the White House again transferred to a Democrat. Smalls died in his Beaufort home on February 23, 1915.[24]

Manuscript Collection

University of South Carolina, South Caroliniana Library (Columbia, SC). *Papers*: 1865–1894, four items. The collection contains correspondence from Robert Smalls, contracts, and an autograph book.

Notes

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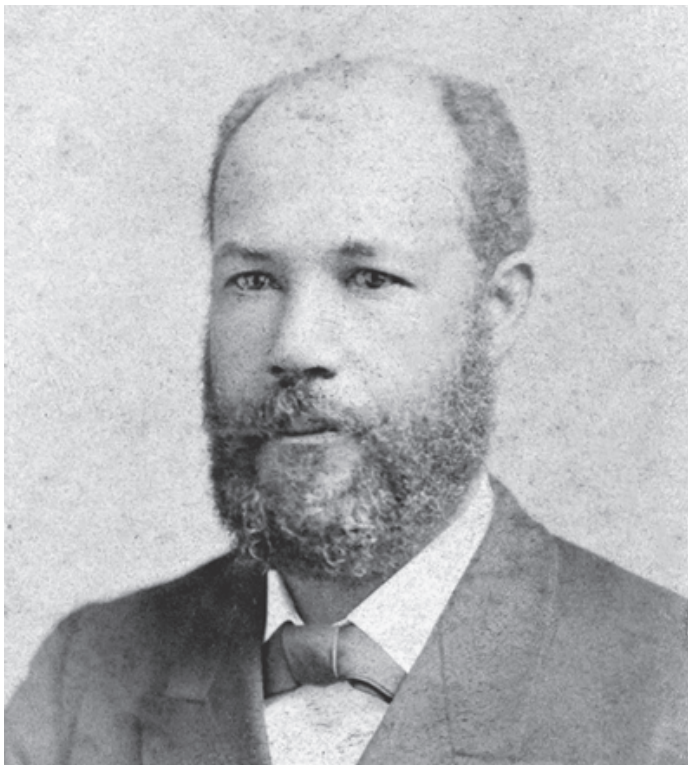
James E. O'Hara

1844–1905

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1883–1887

Republican from North Carolina



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James E. O'Hara was the only Black Member on the first day of the 48th Congress (1883–1885), having succeeded on his fourth attempt to win a seat representing North Carolina's "Black Second" district. A resolute legislator, he worked to restore the civil rights that had been stripped from African Americans since the end of Reconstruction in 1877. "I for one, sir, hold that we are all Americans," he told his congressional colleagues. "That no matter whether a man is white or black he is an American citizen, and that the aegis of this great Republic should be held over him regardless of his color."[1]

James Edward O'Hara was born February 26, 1844, in New York City. His father was from Ireland, and his mother had roots in the Caribbean. O'Hara spent time in his youth in what was then known as the Danish West Indies—now the U.S. Virgin Islands. By 1862, O'Hara had arrived in Union-occupied eastern North Carolina with a group of New York-based missionaries. Well-educated, he taught primary school to free Black children in New Bern and Goldsboro, North Carolina. In 1864, O'Hara married Ann Maria Harris; the couple separated two years later and eventually divorced. They had one son. O'Hara married Elizabeth Eleanor Harris in 1869, and they had a son, Raphael.[2]

O'Hara began making a name for himself in Republican Party circles soon after the Civil War. He served as a secretary at the North Carolina freedmen's convention in 1866 and at Republican Party meetings in 1867. At the 1868 North Carolina constitutional convention, he was a delegate and an engrossing clerk. His party activism paved the way for O'Hara to receive valuable patronage positions. From 1868 to 1869, O'Hara was an engrossing clerk in the state house of representatives. He also worked for the U.S. Treasury Department in Washington, DC, as a clerk for about two years. During this time, he studied law at Howard University in Washington, DC, but there is no record of his graduation. The first African American admitted to the North Carolina bar in 1873, he established a private practice in Enfield, North Carolina. That same year, he was elected chairman of the Halifax County board of commissioners.[3]

O'Hara began his long quest for a seat in the U.S. Congress in 1874, when he made a bid to represent North Carolina's northeastern "Black Second" district. Centered in the cotton-growing region of the state, the district acquired its nickname because 58 percent of the population was African American—the largest portion

of any congressional district in the state. O'Hara lost the Republican nomination to John Adams Hyman, who became the first Black lawmaker to represent North Carolina in the Congress. With Democrats having regained control of the state government and a patronage position unlikely to be forthcoming, O'Hara sought to keep his political career alive amid narrowing opportunities. In part as a result, he remained committed to winning the congressional seat.[4]

While not a candidate for Congress in 1876, O'Hara nonetheless faced great difficulty in that year's tumultuous election season. He was forced to resign his post as a presidential elector in the face of threats to his life from local Democrats and prejudice from White Republicans. "I may have to a certain extent yielded to a case of prejudice," he said justifying his resignation to local newspapers, "but by whom is this prejudice fostered, kept alive and used?"[5]

Despite that experience, O'Hara remained politically active and made another attempt at the "Black Second" nomination in 1878. He obtained the Republican endorsement over Hyman, another former Representative, Curtis Hooks Brogden, and three other candidates. The fight for the nomination lasted 29 ballots at the contentious party district convention. In the general election, O'Hara's opponents accused him of corruption during his tenure on the board of commissioners and even charged him with bigamy amid questions as to whether he was legally divorced from his first wife. O'Hara's American citizenship was also debated by those who claimed he was born in the Caribbean, not New York. O'Hara had been in the process of applying for naturalization when he discovered evidence of his New York birth. Dissatisfied with his defenses, state Republican leaders gathered three weeks before Election Day to try to nominate another Black candidate, James H. Harris, to take O'Hara's place. But O'Hara refused to step down, and despite the attacks and the loss of party support, he won the three-way race between the two Republican candidates and Democrat William Hodges Kitchin, a member of a politically powerful family in North Carolina. Citing technicalities, however, election canvassers subsequently eliminated enough of O'Hara's votes in three counties to hand Kitchin the victory. O'Hara made a failed attempt to demand a recount at the state level before he formally contested the election in the House.[6]

While the House Committee on Elections considered his case in 1879, O'Hara appeared before a Senate Select Committee investigating the causes of Black emigration from the South. He testified to the relative prosperity of Black landowners near his home in Halifax County, North Carolina, and shared his view that Black laborers fared better in the absence of competition from White immigrant labor. O'Hara stated that he opposed Black emigration from the South; he expected prejudice in all parts of the country and distrusted advertising by "agents that are going around through the country making glowing representations and distributing highly-wrought descriptive circulars, telling how easily houses and lands can be obtained in the North." When asked about the political pressures put upon Black North Carolinians, O'Hara first condemned members of his own party. "I say that the colored Republicans of the South have more to fear from the white Republicans than from the Democrats," he observed. "And there is always a combination between the white Republicans against any intelligent colored Republican who seeks to aspire to office." O'Hara also testified that racial prejudice and discrimination were not only a problem for southern states, such as North Carolina; for O'Hara, bigotry was a national problem. "I suppose if a colored man should attempt to take a principal seat in a theater in North Carolina he would have the same difficulty as in New York."[7]

A member of O'Hara's own party, Senator Henry William Blair of New Hampshire called him a "carpetbagger from New York" and implied that his motives for testifying were cynical: attempting to keep the support of Black Republicans in his district—his most dependable voters—and currying favor with the Democratic majority in the 46th Congress (1879–1881) to win his pending contested election contest. O'Hara responded calmly to Blair's accusations and focused on conveying the difficult situation faced by Black Americans who felt that they needed greater independence from Republican power brokers but who also feared the designs of the openly racist Democratic party. "I am one of those who think the American negro ought to be left to work out his own destiny, and that he has been a foundling and a ward too long already," O'Hara stated. "At the same time, I believe that no man ought to be made discontented in his condition simply in order that he may be cheated out of that which he has."[8]

The Committee on Elections did not report on O'Hara's case until February 17, 1881, well into the third session of the 46th Congress. The committee accused O'Hara of not submitting his contest within the legal time window and rejected his complaint. Meanwhile, O'Hara again sought

the congressional seat in the 1880 election but lost the Republican nomination to Orlando Hubbs, a New York native who had moved to North Carolina in 1865.[9]

Between congressional bids, O'Hara was active in local and national politics. By 1881, he had aligned himself with a statewide anti-Prohibition campaign. That same year, he made his fourth attempt to gain the "Black Second" seat, bolstered by discontented local Black politicians who believed they were being marginalized within the party. At the state Republican convention, two other candidates opposed him: the incumbent Hubbs and Lotte W. Humphrey. None of the candidates controlled the convention's first ballot, and all three ruthlessly attacked their opponents while promising patronage for their potential supporters. Humphrey eventually bowed to O'Hara, giving him the majority of the delegates. An O'Hara delegate called for his nomination by voice vote. Though the crowd roared in O'Hara's favor, the convention chairman declared the vote to have gone for Hubbs and quickly adjourned.[10]

Both sides claimed victory. In the following months, Hubbs and O'Hara demanded their opponent's withdrawal from the race. Shortly before the election, Hubbs capitulated to pressure from O'Hara's forces, who spoke for the majority-Black district electorate when they threatened to abandon the state Republican ticket if their candidate was not on the ballot. O'Hara was unopposed in the general election. Reapportionment in 1883 changed the borders of O'Hara's district in his favor, increasing the Black population with the addition of Bertie County. In 1884, he was easily re-elected over Democrat Frederick Augustus Woodard, taking 59 percent of the total return.[11]

As part of the Republican minority in the House, O'Hara received appointments to the Committee on Mines and Mining and the Committee on Expenditures on Public Buildings when he took his place in the 48th Congress (1883–1885) in December 1883. He later traded his Mines and Mining position for a spot on the Invalid Pensions Committee in the 49th Congress (1885–1887). O'Hara was active on this committee, referring more than 100 individual pension cases to the House for consideration. He also held a leadership role on an ad hoc subcommittee charged with reporting on a pension benefit bill for individuals with eye injuries.[12]

On Capitol Hill, O'Hara delivered concise speeches and introduced legislation designed to protect Black Americans from discrimination. On January 8, 1884, O'Hara boldly proposed a constitutional amendment to ensure equal accommodations for African Americans on public transportation. The Civil Rights Act of 1875 had nominally guaranteed that right, but a series of Supreme Court decisions rendered in 1883 had struck down the law, denying Congress the authority to prohibit discrimination by private individuals. The House refused to consider O'Hara's measure. The following December, O'Hara proposed an amendment to regulate interstate travel and commerce, calling for equal accommodations for all railroad passengers, regardless of color. Under existing state laws, when a railroad passed into some southern states, first-class Black passengers were typically forced to move to a second-class car. "It is not a race question, nor is it a political action. It rises far above all these," he said while introducing the amendment. "It is plain, healthy legislation, strictly in keeping with the enlightened sentiment and spirit of the age in which we live; it is legislation looking to and guarding the rights of every citizen of this great Republic, however humble may be his station in our social scale." O'Hara capitalized on contemporary arguments favoring federal regulation of interstate commerce, maintaining that if Congress had authority over freight passing between states, it could regulate how railroads served their customers. O'Hara's amendment passed on the first vote, but Democratic opponents quickly countered with their own amendment allowing railroads to classify passengers at their own discretion. The final bill passed—without O'Hara's vote—in the 48th Congress with language so vague that the railroads easily continued their discriminatory practices.[13]

On January 12, 1885, O'Hara offered a bill that required restaurants in the nation's capital to charge customers equally without discriminating on the basis of race or risk fines up to $100. Referred to the Committee on the District of Columbia, the bill was never reported back. He reiterated his request at the opening of the 49th Congress, but the bill met the same fate.[14]

On March 17, a White mob stormed a Carrollton, Mississippi, courthouse where a White man was being charged with the attempted murder of two Black men. The mob opened fire on all the Black men in attendance, killing as many as ten. Afterward, O'Hara introduced a resolution requesting that Speaker John G. Carlisle of Kentucky appoint a five-member committee to investigate the incident and issue a report. His original request

was rejected before it could be submitted to the Rules Committee, and a renewed request submitted the following month was referred to the committee but never reported.[15]

As the Representative of a coastal district, O'Hara sought river and harbor appropriations for North Carolina in nearly every session of his congressional service. He pursued funding for waterway improvements to support his district's cotton-growing industry. Although most of O'Hara's requests were rejected, he obtained funding to remove obstructions from one North Carolina stream and to expand another.[16]

Recognizing that a great number of his constituents were laborers, he opposed the passage of a labor arbitration bill that allowed a third party to settle disputes between employers and employees. Although he favored arbitration in the abstract, O'Hara wanted to concentrate on organizing unions to defend labor interests.[17]

O'Hara led the way in pursuit of legislation recognizing the wartime contributions of his Black colleague Robert Smalls of South Carolina. During the Civil War, while still enslaved, Smalls commandeered a Confederate transport ship, the *Planter*, sailed it out of Charleston harbor under the cloak of darkness, and turned it over to the Union naval blockade. Smalls's Black House colleagues repeatedly sought compensation for him equal to the value of the ship as a reward for his actions more than 20 years earlier. O'Hara was the first of many Black Congressmen to submit such a bill in the 49th Congress; Smalls eventually received a sum of $5,000 in 1900.[18]

Internal feuds among "Black Second" Republicans ended O'Hara's congressional career. Although O'Hara won 75 percent of the 1886 nominating convention's vote, he faced stinging accusations that he was unable to meet the needs of his constituents, that he did not distribute available patronage positions to worthy Black aspirants, and that he preferred to associate with White colleagues and only congregated with the Black community in the district when he needed its votes. Another Black Republican, Israel B. Abbott, opposed O'Hara in the 1886 race, running as an Independent Republican. Abbott had one term in the state legislature to his credit, had served as a delegate to the Republican National Convention in 1880, and emphasized that he had roots in the district—in contrast with O'Hara's New York origins. Nevertheless, O'Hara won most of the Black vote, taking 40 percent to Abbott's 15 percent. However, Democrat Furnifold McLendel Simmons capitalized on the Republican fissure, capturing 45 percent of the vote, which was enough for victory. Two years later, O'Hara again sought congressional nomination, but lost to Henry Plummer Cheatham, who would reclaim the Second District by defeating Simmons in 1888.[19]

O'Hara returned to his law practice, partnering with his son, Raphael. He began publishing a newspaper, the *Enfield Progress*, shortly before his death in New Bern, North Carolina, on September 15, 1905.[20]

Manuscript Collection

University of Chicago Library, Special Collections Research Center (Chicago, IL). *Papers*: 1866–1970, three linear feet. The James E. O'Hara Papers consist of miscellaneous materials that document his life and career in Congress. There are several letters from family and from constituents in North Carolina. In addition, three folders are devoted to photographs of Representative O'Hara, his wife and son, and associates. A biographical sketch of Representative O'Hara and his family written by his granddaughter, Vera Jean O'Hara Rivers, and entitled "A Thespian Must Play His Role," offers detailed information on family genealogy and the social history of the late nineteenth-century South. The collection also includes ephemeral material, such as a handbill announcing the establishment of a Canadian newspaper for fugitive slaves, an autograph book and "Register of Documents sent" owned by Representative O'Hara, and a twentieth-century booklet of biographical sketches that includes him. An inventory is available in the repository and online.

Notes

1 *Congressional Record*, House, 48th Cong., 2nd sess. (17 December 1884): 317.

2 George W. Reid, "Four in Black: North Carolina's Black Congressmen, 1874–1901," *Journal of Negro History* 64, no. 3 (Summer 1979): 229–243; Eric Anderson, *Race and Politics in North Carolina, 1872–1901: The Black Second* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981): 62, 68, 70–71; Eric Anderson, "James O'Hara of North Carolina: Black Leadership and Local Government," in *Southern Black Leaders of the Reconstruction Era*, ed. Howard N. Rabinowitz (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982): 102, 114; 1880 United States Federal Census, Enfield, Halifax, North Carolina, T9, roll 966, page 663A, National Archives and Records Administration, https://www.ancestrylibrary.com/; Raphael O'Hara Boyd, "Service in the Midst of the Storm: James Edward O'Hara and Reconstruction in North Carolina," *Journal of Negro History* 86, no. 3 (Summer 2001): 322.

3 Anderson, *Race and Politics in North Carolina*: 62–63; Boyd, "Service in the Midst of the Storm": 322.

4 Stanley B. Parsons et al., *United States Congressional Districts, 1843–1883* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986): 200; Anderson, "James O'Hara of North Carolina: Black Leadership and Local Government": 103, 106–107; Boyd, "Service in the Midst of the Storm": 323.

5 Anderson, "James O'Hara of North Carolina: Black Leadership and Local Government": 104–106.

6 Anderson, "James O'Hara of North Carolina: Black Leadership and Local Government": 107–115; Anderson, *Race and Politics in North Carolina*: 67–74; Michael J. Dubin, *United States Congressional Elections, 1788–1997* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 1998): 246; Boyd, "Service in the Midst of the Storm": 324; Benjamin R. Justesen, "'The Class of '83': Black Watershed in the North Carolina General Assembly," *North Carolina Historical Review* 86, no. 3 (July 2009): 282–284.

7 Senate Select Committee to Investigate the Causes of the Removal of the Negroes from the Southern States to the Northern States, *Report and Testimony of the Select Committee of the United States Senate*, 46th Cong., 2nd sess., S. Rept. 693, part 1 (1880): 49–71.

8 Senate Select Committee to Investigate the Causes of the Removal of the Negroes from the Southern States to the Northern States, *Report and Testimony of the Select Committee of the United States Senate*: 65–66.

9 House Committee on Elections, *O'Hara vs. Kitchin*, 46th Cong., 3rd sess., H. Rept. 263 (1881): 1–6; Anderson, *Race and Politics in North Carolina*: 63–68.

10 Anderson, *Race and Politics in North Carolina*: 98; Anderson, "James O'Hara of North Carolina: Black Leadership and Local Government": 117.

11 Anderson, "James O'Hara of North Carolina: Black Leadership and Local Government": 117–118; Boyd, "Service in the Midst of the Storm": 324; Anderson, *Race and Politics in North Carolina*: 118, 141; Kenneth C. Martis, *The Historical Atlas of Political Parties in the United States Congress*: *1789–1989* (New York: MacMillan, 1989): 139; Stanley B. Parsons et al., *United States Congressional Districts, 1883–1913* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990): 97–99; Dubin, *United States Congressional Elections, 1788–1997*: 268.

12 Anderson, *Race and Politics in North Carolina*: 124. There were no official subcommittees for the Invalid Pensions Committee, but Members were often assigned leadership roles to consider specific bills or were charged with organizing petitions from specific states. See the Minutes of the Committee on Invalid Pensions, 49th Congress, Records of the United States House of Representatives (RG 233), National Archives and Record Administration, Washington, DC.

13 H.J. Res. 92, 48th Cong. (1884); *Congressional Record*, House, 48th Cong., 1st sess. (10 January 1884): 347; H.R. 1561, 48th Cong. (1883); *Congressional Record*, House, 48th Cong., 2nd sess. (16 December 1884): 296–297, 317–318; *Congressional Record*, House, 48th Cong., 2nd sess. (8 January 1885): 554.

14 H.R. 7939, 48th Cong. (1885); *Congressional Record*, House, 48th Cong., 2nd sess. (12 January 1885): 632; H.R. 1690, 49th Cong. (1886); *Congressional Record*, House, 49th Cong., 1st sess. (5 January 1886): 438.

15 Rick Ward, "The Carroll County Courthouse Massacre, 1886: A Cold Case File," *Mississippi History Now*, accessed 1 June 2022, https://www.mshistorynow.mdah.ms.gov/issue/the-carroll-county-courthouse-massacre-1886-a-cold-case-file; "Ten Negroes Murdered," 18 March 1886, *New York Times*: 1; *Congressional Record*, House, 49th Cong., 1st sess. (29 March 1886): 2897; *Congressional Record*, House, 49th Cong., 1st sess. (2 April 1886): 3123; *Alleged Homicides, Carrollton, Miss.*, 49th Cong., 1st sess., H. Misc. Doc. 203 (1886).

16 H.R. 3531, 48th Cong. (1884); *Congressional Record*, House, 48th Cong., 1st sess. (10 June 1884): 4980–4982; *Congressional Record*, House, 48th Cong., 1st sess. (12 June 1884): 5069; H.R. 8130, 48th Cong. (1885); *Congressional Record*, House, 48th Cong., 2nd sess. (18 February 1885): 1857; H.R. 7489, 49th Cong. (1886); *Congressional Record*, House, 49th Cong., 1st sess. (12 February 1886): 1404; *Congressional Record*, House, 49th Cong., 1st sess. (22 April 1886): 3748.

17 *Congressional Record*, House, 49th Cong., 1st sess. (2 April 1886): 3049.

18 H.R. 1696, 49th Cong. (1886); *Congressional Record*, House, 56th Cong., 1st sess. (18 May 1900): 5715.

19 Anderson, *Race and Politics in North Carolina*: 133–136; Dubin, *United States Congressional Elections, 1788–1997*: 275, 282.

20 Boyd, "Service in the Midst of the Storm": 330; "Death of James E. O'Hara," 17 September 1905, *Daily Journal* (New Bern, NC): 1.

Henry Plummer Cheatham

1857–1935

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1889–1893

Republican from North Carolina



Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

In 1888, Henry Plummer Cheatham won election to the U.S. House of Representatives from the "Black Second" district of eastern North Carolina, recapturing a seat formerly held by Black Representatives John Adams Hyman and James E. O'Hara. During two terms in office, Cheatham was a proponent of federal appropriations for education and advocated for the economic interests of farmers in his home state.

Henry Plummer Cheatham was born enslaved in Henderson, North Carolina, on December 27, 1857. His mother was enslaved, and his father was Isham Cheatham, a wealthy farmer and slaveholder. At age eight, Cheatham was emancipated at the end of the Civil War. With antebellum laws prohibiting the education of Black children now obsolete, Cheatham attended Henderson Public School. In 1882, he graduated with a bachelor's degree from historically Black Shaw University in Raleigh, North Carolina, the oldest college for African Americans in the state. In 1887, Shaw awarded him an honorary master's degree. Cheatham also studied law but never completed a degree. He married Louise Cherry, and they had three children. After she died in 1899, Henry Cheatham married Laura Joyner with whom he also had three children.[1]

A year after he graduated from college, Cheatham was named principal of a teacher-training school in Plymouth, North Carolina, and in 1884, he was elected register of deeds for Vance County. Cheatham made valuable political connections during his two terms as register. In 1887, he was part of a group that founded and incorporated an orphanage for Black children in Oxford, North Carolina, and in 1888, he made his first bid for Congress.[2]

Two years earlier, Furnifold McLendel Simmons, a White Democrat, had defeated Representative O'Hara, who was seeking a third term in the House representing the "Black Second" congressional district, where 60 percent of the population was African American. The district snaked along coastal and inland sections of the northeastern part of the state. Even though the Republican Party had a strong showing in North Carolina that fall—gaining victories in local offices and the state legislature—another Black Republican candidate, Israel B. Abbott, had entered the race. Abbott drew enough votes in two counties to undermine O'Hara's re-election bid.[3]

The early stages of the 1888 campaign initially pointed to a similar outcome—with Simmons set to face the winner of a fractious Republican primary. At a tumultuous Republican

district convention, Cheatham topped 10 other candidates, including former Congressmen Hyman and O'Hara, to win the nomination. But the disarray continued. George Allen Mebane, a Black candidate who had sought the nomination at the district convention, decided to run against Cheatham in the general election, claiming he had the backing of the Republican executive committee. Cheatham rejected Mebane's calls for a new nomination process, and each candidate spent the summer of 1888 blaming the other for sustained Republican divisions. The rivalry continued unabated until October when Mebane suddenly withdrew and asked his supporters to back Cheatham. Though Republicans praised him for acting for the sake of party unity, Democrats spread rumors that Cheatham supporters had bought off Mebane. The result meant that although Simmons retained support in the district, Democrats faced a more unified Republican Party than they had two years earlier. Unable to depend on the divided vote that aided Simmons in 1886, district Democrats cast a Cheatham victory as a direct threat to White voters. Cheatham fought back, warning Black voters that Democrats wanted to return them to slavery. On Election Day, Cheatham defeated Simmons by a little more than 600 votes, a narrow 1 percent margin. Republicans had their best showing across the state since 1872 and claimed three of the state's nine congressional seats.[4]

In an era when a new Congress typically did not organize for more than a year after the fall elections, Cheatham traveled to Washington, DC, in December 1888 to observe the legislative process. Accompanied by North Carolina Representative John Nichols, Cheatham visited the House Floor to study the daily proceedings of Congress. When the House organized itself in December 1889, he was the only Black Member in the 51st Congress (1889–1891)—Thomas E. Miller of South Carolina and John M. Langston of Virginia would join him in September 1890 after winning their contested elections. Newspapers emphasized Cheatham's background as a school principal, which earned him an assignment on the Committee on Education. Cheatham also served on the Committee on Expenditures on Public Buildings during his first term.[5]

At the time of his swearing in, Cheatham's Black constituents faced a series of economic and political crises in North Carolina. During his first term, the economy in eastern North Carolina plunged into depression. The prices of two staple crops, cotton and corn, dropped dramatically, which squeezed small farmers. Facing poor economic prospects, many Black residents in Cheatham's district left North Carolina in search of opportunities in Arkansas, Texas, and Mississippi. In an attempt to stem the flight, Cheatham returned to his district in the first month of the 51st Congress and appealed to his constituents. Those who remained were disenfranchised by new voting laws including rigid requirements for proving birthplace and residence—all enforced by local election officials who were likely to be Democrats. African Americans urged Cheatham and his Republican colleagues from North Carolina, Representatives John Morehead Brower and Hamilton Glover Ewart, to withdraw from the House Republican Conference to protest the party's perceived indifference to their plight. Black Republican voters insisted Republican leaders should be reminded of their dependence on Black voters in the South, but Cheatham and his colleagues declined.[6]

In one of his first acts in the House in December 1889, Cheatham introduced an education bill that provided funds for separate schools. Largely modeled on a Senate bill introduced by Senator Henry William Blair of New Hampshire, Cheatham's bill proposed eight years of federal funding to "secure the benefits of common-school education to all the children of the school-age" population in the United States. The bill further required that the money should be apportioned based on local literacy rates and divided proportionally among schools segregated by race. Although the Committee on Education reported favorably on Cheatham's bill the following July, the House never acted on it.[7]

In Cheatham's first speech on the House Floor, which he delivered in August 1890, he came out in opposition to a tax on compound lard made from pig fat and cottonseed oil produced by farmers in his district. Cheatham explained that destitute farmers in his community began producing the hybrid lard after a fully animal-based product became too expensive due to an epidemic that decimated North Carolina's hog population. "That which most oppresses the laboring classes of the South," Cheatham explained, "and which hinders their advancement more than any other cause, is the price they are compelled to pay for their foodsupplies." Cheatham stressed that the economic interests of farmers were also undermined by the "mortgage and lien system," which had indebted many farmers and caused "suffering and even crime" in the South. Cheatham's plea in the interest of southern farmers did not stop the bill from clearing the House, but it died in the Senate.[8]

Cheatham was a consistent vote for Republicans on Capitol Hill, and supported the administration of Republican President Benjamin Harrison, who also took office in 1889. "I was elected to Congress by the Republican party and upon Republican principles," he told the *Washington Post*, "and there is no question about my not cheerfully supporting the party." His loyalty to the party was advantageous—it enabled him to distribute patronage positions, particularly in the post office, to constituents. Cheatham also supported some of the primary Republican protectionist policies of the early 1890s. He supported tariff legislation proposed by Representative William McKinley of Ohio, which raised duties an average of 45 percent in the hope of protecting domestic manufacturers from foreign competitors. In remarks printed in the *Congressional Record*, Cheatham noted that "the leading incentive of the great tariff system of America has always been to stimulate and protect home industries, and this has become the spirit of the age." But Cheatham broke with party doctrine on issues favored by his rural constituents, including support for new monetary policy that prioritized the coinage of silver in an effort to create a more flexible economy for depressed agriculture markets in the 1890s.[9]

Cheatham also argued in favor of policies to prevent the practice of "short selling" agricultural products, in which the financial industry bet against the growth in certain rural markets. Cheatham called for new regulations and taxes to protect rural communities from crop devaluation before their products went up for sale. For Cheatham, market speculation directly damaged the interests of southern farmers, "for this debars the farmer and planter of that voice and right in fixing the price to be received for the product of his labor." He presented evidence from the Agriculture Committee's report demonstrating that speculation destabilized his district's economy. The proposed regulatory bill, Cheatham said, "will do justice to all and injustice to none."[10]

During the 1890 election, Cheatham faced Democrat James M. Mewboorne, a business agent for the powerful North Carolina Farmers' Alliance, which had connections to the national Populist Party. Seeking to attract the support of White voters, Cheatham vowed to aid depressed farmers. And he appealed to Black voters by citing his efforts to distribute patronage positions. He also reiterated his commitment to securing federal funding for education. Cheatham won re-election by roughly 1,000 votes, with 52 percent of the total. He was the only Republican in the North Carolina delegation and the only Black Member of the 52nd Congress (1891–1893). Though the Democrats held an overwhelmingly majority, Cheatham won a plum assignment to the Committee on Agriculture.[11]

In the 51st Congress, Cheatham introduced a proposal to fund an exhibit at the upcoming World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, Illinois, about the contributions Black Americans had made to society since emancipation. But debate on the measure was quickly hijacked by lawmakers who disparaged the merits of Reconstruction and questioned election integrity in the former Confederacy. In one of his few floor speeches, Cheatham rose in favor of the appropriation and openly lamented the direction of the debate. "It seems to me that whenever the colored people of this country ask for anything," he lamented, "something unfortunate intervenes to hinder their getting what they asked." He further emphasized the importance of sharing the accomplishments of Black Americans. The appropriation—a proposed amendment to the 1890 law establishing the exhibition—was rejected on procedural grounds, but Cheatham introduced the same request in a stand-alone bill a few hours later. The following day, Cheatham proposed a study to quantify the successes of Black Americans by "collection, preparing, and publishing facts and statistics." Both measures died in committee. When the House debated the funding for the Columbian Exposition again the following July, Cheatham attempted to appropriate $50,000 to highlight the accomplishments of Black Americans. His efforts were once again thwarted on procedural grounds.[12]

By 1892, North Carolina's Democratic state legislature had carved up the "Black Second" district, virtually destroying its traditional voting base by removing the district's three southeastern counties—including Craven County that was 65 percent Black. By then, state election laws also severely restricted the voting rights of African Americans in North Carolina. An uneasy alliance between North Carolina Populists and Republicans had also dissolved; heading into the elections that fall, Populists nominated their own candidate for Congress, Edward Alston Thorne, who had strong connections to the Farmers' Alliance. Democrats selected Frederick Woodard, who had lost to former Representative O'Hara in 1884. Cheatham, meanwhile, easily gained the support of the district's Republican convention. But the three-way race pulled voters away from the Republican Party. The Populists announced

Black candidates for local offices, particularly in Black-majority counties, and promised patronage positions for African-American residents. Several White Republican officials also left the party and publicly announced they were backing Democratic candidates. Woodard won with 45 percent of the vote. Cheatham took 38 percent of the vote, and Thorne drew 17 percent.[13]

Two years later, in 1894, Cheatham ran for the House again and won the Republican nomination after a bitter campaign against his brother-in-law, George Henry White. Later that fall, however, he lost to Woodard in the general election. Cheatham contested the election—claiming some of the ballots cast for him were credited to Woodard—but the House Committee on Elections, No. 2, rejected his claim. The Democratic majority on the committee concluded that Cheatham had lost Black voters following the bruising GOP primary, and that the Populist candidate, H.W. Freeman, had siphoned off former Republican voters. Two years later, Cheatham lost the GOP nomination to George Henry White.[14]

In 1897, Cheatham returned to Washington when President William McKinley, a Republican and a former colleague in the House, appointed him recorder of deeds for the District of Columbia. The U.S. Senate confirmed Cheatham for the post. Cheatham also was named a trustee and an honorary doctor of laws by Shaw University, his alma mater. In 1907, Cheatham became the superintendent of the Oxford, North Carolina, orphanage he had founded two decades earlier. For the next 28 years, he managed the facility until his death in Oxford, on November 29, 1935.[15]

Manuscript Collection

The New York Public Library, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture (New York, NY). *Papers*: 1912–1941, three file folders. The Henry Plummer Cheatham collection contains personal correspondence regarding Cheatham's military experience, World War I, and funeral arrangements. Items also include programs, Representative Cheatham's obituary, a speech, and announcements and flyers for an event that featured him.

Notes

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2 Eric Anderson, *Race and Politics in North Carolina, 1872–1901: The Black Second* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981): 167; Kate Fleming Brummit, "Orphanage Is Monument to Negro Congressman," 3 January 1937, *Greensboro Daily News* (NC): 21.

3 Stanley B. Parsons et al., *United States Congressional Districts, 1883–1913* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990): 97; Anderson, *Race and Politics in North Carolina*: 134–140.

4 Anderson, *Race and Politics in North Carolina*: 147–161; Leonard Schlup, "Cheatham, Henry Plummer," *American National Biography* 4 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999): 765–766; Michael J. Dubin, *United States Congressional Elections, 1788–1997* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 1998): 282.

5 "The Solitary Colored Member," 6 December 1888, *Washington Post*: 2; "Why We Are 'Suckers,'" 8 April 1889, *Chicago Daily Tribune*: 1.

6 Anderson, *Race and Politics in North Carolina*: 166–167, 171–172; "Cheatham's Constituents," 11 January 1890, *Washington Post*: 1; "Tanner's Vacant Chair," 4 October 1889, *New York Times*: 5.

7 H.R. 634, 51st Cong. (1889); House Committee on Education, *Establishment and Temporary Support of Common Schools*, 51st Cong., 1st sess., H. Rept. 2605 (1890).

8 *Congressional Record*, Appendix, 51st Cong., 1st sess. (23 August 1890): 624; H.R. 11568, 51st Cong. (1890).

9 "Cheatham No Kicker," 29 July 1889, *Washington Post*: 2; Anderson, *Race and Politics in North Carolina*: 168; Stephen W. Stathis, *Landmark Legislation, 1774–2002* (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Press, 2003): 134; *Congressional Record*, Appendix, 51st Cong., 1st sess. (23 August 1890): 625; *Congressional Record*, House, 52nd Cong., 1st sess. (24 March 1892): 2554; H.R. 4426, 52nd Cong. (1892); "Bland Not Beaten," 26 March 1892, *San Francisco Chronicle*: 2; *Congressional Record*, House, 52nd Cong., 1st sess. (13 July 1892): 6133; S. 51, 52nd Cong. (1892); "Silver Bill Killed," 14 July 1892, *New York Tribune*: 1.

10 Anderson, *Race and Politics in North Carolina*: 188; *Congressional Record*, Appendix, 52nd Cong., 1st sess. (28 June 1892): 508, 510.

11 Anderson, *Race and Politics in North Carolina*: 165, 172, 178; Dubin, *United States Congressional Elections, 1788–1997*: 291.

12 *Congressional Record*, House, 52nd Cong., 1st sess. (25 May 1892): 4668–4684; H.R. 8982, 52nd Cong. (1892); H.R. 9012, 52nd Cong. (1892); 26 Stat. 62 (1890); *Congressional Record*, House, 52nd Cong., 1st sess. (26 July 1892): 6824.

13 Anderson, *Race and Politics in North Carolina*: 141, 186, 194, 199; Parsons et al., *United States Congressional Districts and Data, 1883–1913*: 255–257; Dubin, *United States Congressional Elections, 1788–1997*: 299.

14 House Committee on Elections, No. 2, *Henry P. Cheatham v. Frederick A. Woodard,* 54th Cong., 1st sess. H. Rept. 1809 (1896): 1–2; "State Topics," 21 November 1894, *Lenoir Topic* (NC): 2; "Congressional Contests," 30 November 1894, *Evening Visitor* (Raleigh, NC): 3; Anderson, *Race and Politics in North Carolina*: 229–230.

15 *Congressional Record,* Senate, 55th Cong., 1st sess. (13 May 1897): 1065; "Honoring Cheatham," 5 June 1897, *Washington Bee* (DC): 5; "Colored Congressman Of Carolina in '87 Dies," 30 November 1935, *Chattanooga Daily Times* (TN): 7; "Well Known Negro Educator Stricken," 30 November 1935, *Greensboro Daily News*: 3.

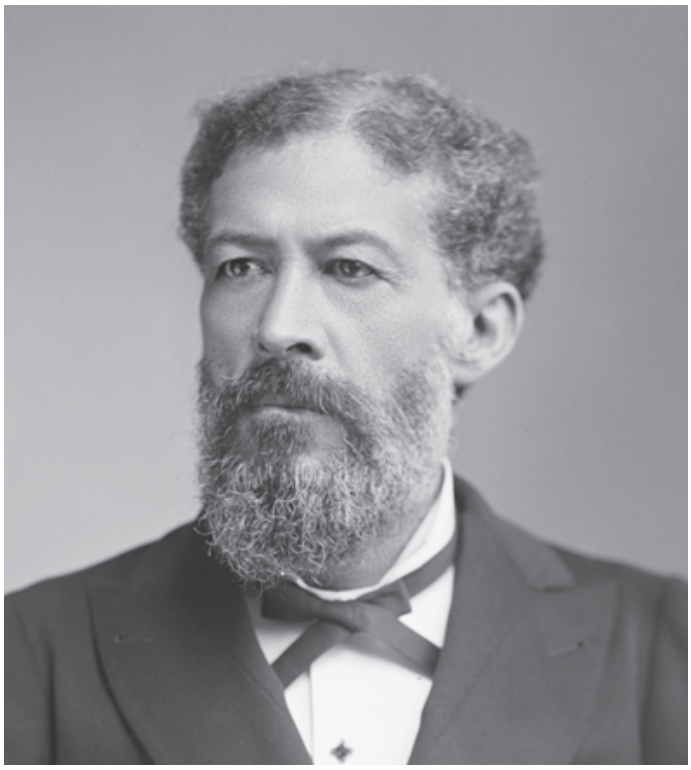
John M. Langston

1829–1897

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1890–1891

Republican from Virginia



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Alongside luminaries including Frederick Douglass, John M. Langston was one of the most prominent African-American leaders in the United States during the nineteenth century. In 1855, he became one of the first African Americans to hold elective office in the nation as the township clerk for Brownhelm, Ohio. On September 23, 1890, Langston, a lawyer, educator, activist, and former diplomat, was sworn in to the 51st Congress (1889–1891) after successfully contesting the election of his Democratic opponent. Langston was the first Black Representative from Virginia in the U.S. House of Representatives—one of many achievements in his long political career.

John Mercer Langston was born free in Louisa, Virginia, on December 14, 1829. His father, Ralph Quarles, was a plantation owner and had been a captain in the Revolutionary War. Langston's mother, Lucy, was a free woman of Native American and African descent who had been enslaved by Quarles. In 1806, Quarles emancipated Lucy and their daughter, Maria. Lucy Langston left Quarles shortly after she was freed and had three children outside their relationship: William, Harriet, and Mary Langston. The couple later reunited, though state law forbade them to marry, and had three more children: Gideon, Charles Henry, and John Mercer. When John Langston's parents died in 1834, his father's estate was divided among his three sons and held in trust. Four-year-old John Langston moved in with a family friend, William Gooch, and his family in Chillicothe, Ohio. When Langston was 10 years old, Gooch made plans to move to Missouri, then a slave state. John's brother, William, sued to relinquish Gooch's custody over his brother, fearing the move would jeopardize John's freedom and his substantial inheritance. The court prevented Gooch from taking John to Missouri, and Langston entered the care of Richard Long, an abolitionist who had purchased William Gooch's Ohio farm.[1]

In 1840, John Langston's brother Gideon brought him to live in Cincinnati, Ohio, where he went to school and was exposed to some of the strongest antislavery rhetoric in the North. A year later, he experienced several days of sustained White violence against Black communities in the city. In 1843, William Langston took custody of John and returned with him to Chillicothe.[2]

Following the example set by his older brothers and their colleagues, who were among the first Black graduates of Oberlin College in Ohio, Langston also attended Oberlin and earned a bachelor's degree in 1849 and a master's degree

in theology in 1852. Langston then set out to become a lawyer, a profession that had welcomed only three Black men in the nation in the early 1850s. After two law schools denied him admission, he studied under local abolitionists in Elyria, Ohio. In September 1854, Langston appeared before a committee on the district court to confirm his knowledge of the law. The committee admitted him to the Ohio bar but made clear they were affording this status only because of Langston's light skin, which they claimed granted him the rights of a White man in the state. He commenced his practice in Brownhelm, Ohio. In 1854, he married Caroline Wall, also a former student at Oberlin, who was active in the abolitionist movement. The couple had five children: Arthur, Ralph, Chinque, Nettie, and Frank.[3]

By the mid-nineteenth century, Langston began regularly attending Black political conventions in Ohio. By one count, he attended at least 21 of these public meetings convened by African Americans to mobilize support for Black civil and political rights between 1849 to 1873. By the early 1850s, Langston had entered politics, and at one point allied with the Free Democrats, antislavery activists previously affiliated with the Free Soil Party. In early April 1855, Langston became one of the first African Americans elected to public office in the United States when Brownhelm Township voted him clerk on the Liberty Party ticket. Following his victory, Langston wrote a letter to Frederick Douglass to tell him the news, which Douglass published in his newspaper, *Frederick Douglass' Paper*. "What we so much need just at this junction, and all along the future," Langston advised, "is political influence; the bridle by which we can check and guide to our advantages, the selfishness of American demagogues. How important, then, it is, that we labor night and day to enfranchise ourselves."[4]

In 1856, he left Brownhelm for Oberlin and served on the town's board of education, the first of several local offices he held during more than a decade there, including a seat on the Oberlin town council. During the Civil War, Langston recruited Black soldiers for the U.S. Army. He unsuccessfully pursued a commission as a colonel in the U.S. Army in the final year of the war.[5]

Following the war, Langston led the National Equal Rights League, a nationwide organization that campaigned for Black voting rights and lobbied Congress to prohibit discrimination. In 1867, Langston served as general inspector of schools for the Freedmen's Bureau, touring the postwar South and encouraging formerly enslaved men and women to seek educational opportunities. He regularly spoke out against segregated facilities, including churches, and worked with Republican Party officials to mobilize Black voters in the South. He gave speeches, encouraged Black candidates to run for office, and organized chapters of the Union League throughout the region.[6]

For the first two decades of the postwar era, Langston held prominent political and educational appointments. In 1868, he returned to Washington, DC, where he established the law department at Howard University, a new college founded for Black students. In the early 1870s, Senator Charles Sumner of Massachusetts sought Langston's aid in drafting his civil rights bill. In 1871, Langston received an appointment from President Ulysses S. Grant—for whom he had campaigned in 1868—to the District of Columbia board of health. During his tenure at Howard University, Langston served as dean of the law department and later as vice president and acting president from December 1873 to June 1875. Langston resigned from Howard when the board of trustees failed to offer him a full term as president.[7]

In 1877, President Rutherford B. Hayes appointed Langston resident minister to Haiti and chargé d'affaires in Santo Domingo, a position he held until 1885 when Democratic President Grover Cleveland began his first term in office. In 1882, the Democratically-controlled Congress voted to reduce Langston's salary after he campaigned for Republican President James A. Garfield in 1880. Following his departure in 1885, Langston petitioned the U.S. Court of Claims for more than $7,000 withheld from him during his service. The U.S. Supreme Court ruled in his favor in 1886. From 1885 to 1887, Langston served as president of the Virginia Normal and Collegiate Institute in Petersburg. He left when the college's board of governors fell into Democratic hands.[8]

Langston settled in south-central Virginia and became active in the community. In 1888, a citizen's committee asked Langston to run for a seat in the U.S. House, representing the "Black Belt of Virginia," a region where African Americans were 65 percent of the population. Langston began an energetic campaign for the Republican nomination, lobbying Black and White delegates to the district convention.[9]

White Republicans led by former Confederate general William Mahone, a central figure in Virginia Republican politics, worked against Langston's candidacy. Mahone used

his formidable influence with Black and White Republicans in the district—cultivated by the distribution of patronage positions—to hold a district convention that excluded Langston's supporters and nominated White candidate Judge R.W. Arnold. Langston appealed for support from the national Republican executive committee to no avail, but the national party also did not respond to Mahone's request for campaign support during the race. Langston, who ran as an Independent Republican against both Arnold and the Democratic nominee, methodically canvassed the district. He invested $15,000 of his own money into the campaign to purchase a meeting hall and hire organizers. He also benefited from the support of local women's clubs established to back his candidacy.[10]

Langston's Democratic opponent, Edward Venable, refused to divide time with him at public meetings throughout the campaign. Moreover, because Langston's candidacy as an Independent Republican threatened to divide the Republican vote, several prominent African Americans came out against him. By the 1880s, Langston and Frederick Douglass clashed over political arguments that increasingly turned personal. As the election neared, Douglass wrote a letter denouncing Langston's candidacy as detrimental to the goals of the Republican Party, and the Mahone faction spread copies throughout the district. On Election Day, Langston dispatched supporters to monitor every precinct for fraud and other irregularities. His lieutenants instructed voters to say Langston's name after voting as evidence of their support. Black voters were directed to separate lines at the polls, forcing them to wait as long as three hours to vote. Ballot boxes were allegedly emptied of Langston's votes, and Langston's supporters were not permitted to witness the count. Arnold drew enough Republican votes from Langston to put him in second, 641 votes behind Venable. Arnold was a distant third.[11]

Langston contested the result in the House. Both Venable and Langston accused the other campaign of buying votes. But Langston made the case that the Democrats had manipulated the lines at polling sites and used other means such as intimidation to turn away Black voters. Langston's poll observers corroborated these charges with evidence, and the Republican majority on the Committee on Elections ruled in Langston's favor on June 16, 1890.[12]

The House, however, delayed hearing his case for three months. Democrats repeatedly blocked Langston's claim from receiving consideration on the floor, primarily by denying the House a quorum, which it needed to proceed with debate. Earlier in the year, the Republican Speaker of the House, Thomas Brackett Reed of Maine, had done away with obstructionist tactics that the minority party had long used to frustrate and delay the majority's agenda. Reed's reforms empowering the GOP majority proved crucial in Langston's seating in the 51st Congress.[13]

On September 23, 1890, Langston's case finally came to a vote before a crowded gallery occupied primarily by African Americans. All but nine of the 152 Democratic Members retired to the hallway to avoid a quorum. But Republican discipline prevailed; the majority doggedly mustered enough Members, primarily from their own ranks. Despite Democratic protests, Reed announced a quorum was present and the House declared Langston the winner by a vote of 151 to 1. Langston held Virginia's Fourth District seat for the remaining seven months of the Congress. Most Democratic Members were absent from the floor for Langston's swearing in, but a few welcomed him respectfully when they returned. Langston was seated next to Henry Plummer Cheatham of North Carolina, another Black lawmaker, on the Republican side of the chamber.[14]

Langston was appointed to the Committee on Education. The first session of the 51st Congress concluded only one week after Langston was sworn in, and he returned home to campaign for re-election. William Mahone, now the governor, again refused to support Langston as his district's Republican candidate. Antagonized by Langston's Independent run for office in 1888, Mahone accused him of "arraying black against white" and of undermining the Republican Party's interest in the state. With strong support from Black voters, the district convention backed Langston. Republican newspaper accounts indicated that President Benjamin Harrison, congressional Republicans, and the GOP national leadership supported Langston's re-election. Many White Republicans in the district, however, followed Mahone's lead and abandoned Langston. That year, Democrats were also mobilized in opposition to Langston for his support of a federal elections bill which would have worked to protect Black voting rights. Langston ultimately lost the election to Democrat James Fletcher Epes by about 3,000 votes in the state's first Democratic sweep since before secession. The contest mirrored a national trend: From nearly a 20-Member deficit, Democrats in the U.S. House captured a 100-Member majority in the 52nd Congress

(1891–1893). Langston believed the election was tainted by fraud—as evidenced by long lines for Black Republicans at the polls, missing ballots in Black strongholds, and Mahone's efforts to undermine his candidacy by urging his supporters to vote for Epes. Ultimately, Langston decided against contesting the election in the 52nd Congress because Democrats held the majority.[15]

Langston returned to Capitol Hill in December 1890 for the second session of the 51st Congress. He made his first speech on January 16, 1891, in support of the federal elections bill which the House had already passed and was then under consideration in the Senate. The measure placed congressional elections under federal authority and better secured Black voting rights. Langston recalled the history of those of African descent in North America and highlighted the contributions Black Americans had made to the United States. Langston reminded the House of the sacrifices African-American troops had made in defense of their country as soldiers, as well as state court rulings that had for decades confirmed the citizenship of Black Americans. The elections bill, Langston said, would not only protect Black voting rights but would outlaw poll taxes and other restrictive measures that also excluded White voters. Langston rejected calls for Black Americans to emigrate abroad, reminding the House of the constitutional guarantee of birthright citizenship. For Langston, the bill would stop the Democratic Party's efforts to maintain a stranglehold on political affairs in the South. Ultimately, Langston was optimistic about what he hoped would be "the good time coming" in the United States and declared that nothing would deter Black Americans in pursuit of civil and political rights in the United States. "Abuse us as you will, gentlemen," Langston told the Democrats in the chamber, "There is no way to get rid of us. This is our native country."[16]

One day after his speech, Langston asked the U.S. Attorney General to send the House all documentation he had regarding lawsuits in response to alleged violations of voting rights laws. The Judiciary Committee agreed to Langston's resolution, and it was adopted in the whole House.[17]

On January 19, Langston introduced a joint resolution to amend the Constitution to mandate literacy tests for all voters in the United States. Langston sought to make this a federal requirement to undermine state efforts designed to deliberately restrict Black voters. In addition, the measure allowed for the reduction of state representation in Congress based on the number of voters rather than the total population. The House never considered Langston's amendment.[18]

Langston also submitted bills to establish a national industrial university for Black students and to observe the birthdays of former Presidents Abraham Lincoln and Ulysses S. Grant as national holidays, but the bills died in committee. Langston tried but was unable to secure the appointments of several Black candidates to the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, New York, and the U.S. Naval Academy at Annapolis, Maryland. He also supported the Republican majority's high tariff, which was designed to drive up the price of cheap goods manufactured abroad in the hope of protecting domestic producers.[19]

On February 27, 1891, Langston participated in debate on a civil appropriations bill on the House Floor. He used his experience as a diplomat to advocate for federal funding to improve American shipping, recalling that he observed an incessant flow of ships from Europe in Haiti during his work there. He suggested that congressional investment would help the United States grow its international trade and provide for the "general welfare and defense of American interests."[20]

With the end of the 51st Congress, Langston returned to Petersburg, Virginia. In 1892, Republicans in his Virginia district asked him to run for the House again, but he declined. He continued to be active in politics, often speaking publicly about the achievements of Black Americans. Promised a federal judicial appointment as well as several U.S. Department of Treasury patronage positions, Langston began campaigning for President Benjamin Harrison's re-election in 1892; however, when the administration withdrew the promised positions, he backed rival Republican James G. Blaine's quest for the nomination. Langston spent the remainder of his life traveling between Petersburg and Washington and working on his autobiography, *From the Virginia Plantation to the National Capitol*, which was published in 1894. Langston died at home in Washington, DC, on November 15, 1897.[21]

Manuscript Collections

Fisk University (Nashville, TN). *Papers*: 1853–1898, approximately 3 feet (900 items). The papers of John M. Langston consist of correspondence, speeches, drafts of writings, receipts, estate papers, banking papers, handbills, passports, minutes, a scrapbook, and newspaper clippings. Subjects covered in the papers include slavery in the United States, the abolition movement, Reconstruction, American

relations with Haiti and the Dominican Republic, Howard University, the War Department, and the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands.

Howard University, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center (Washington, DC). *Papers*: 1870–1891, 2 linear feet. Four scrapbooks of John M. Langston containing newspapers clippings, broadsides, programs, and invitations relating to race relations and politics in the United States. Includes information about the Virginia Normal and Collegiate Institute (now Virginia State University) in Petersburg, Virginia, and the John G. Whittier Historical Association in Memphis, Tennessee.

Notes

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3 William Cheek and Aimee Lee Cheek, "John Mercer Langston: Principle and Politics," in *Black Leaders of the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Leon Litwack and August Meier (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988): 110; Langston, *From the Virginia Plantation to the National Capitol*: 125, 142–143, 181; Eric Foner, *Freedom's Lawmakers: A Directory of Black Officeholders During Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993): 128.

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10 "Revolt Against Mahone," 20 September 1888, *New York Times*: 1; "Mahone's Lost Power," 21 September 1888, *New York Times*: 1; William F. Cheek, "A Negro Runs for Congress: John Mercer Langston and the Virginia Campaign of 1888," *Journal of Negro History* 52, no. 1 (Jan. 1967): 18–19, 26, 29; Langston, *From the Virginia Plantation to the National Capitol*: 454–455, 458; "Campaign Features," 11 August 1888, *Washington Post*: 2.

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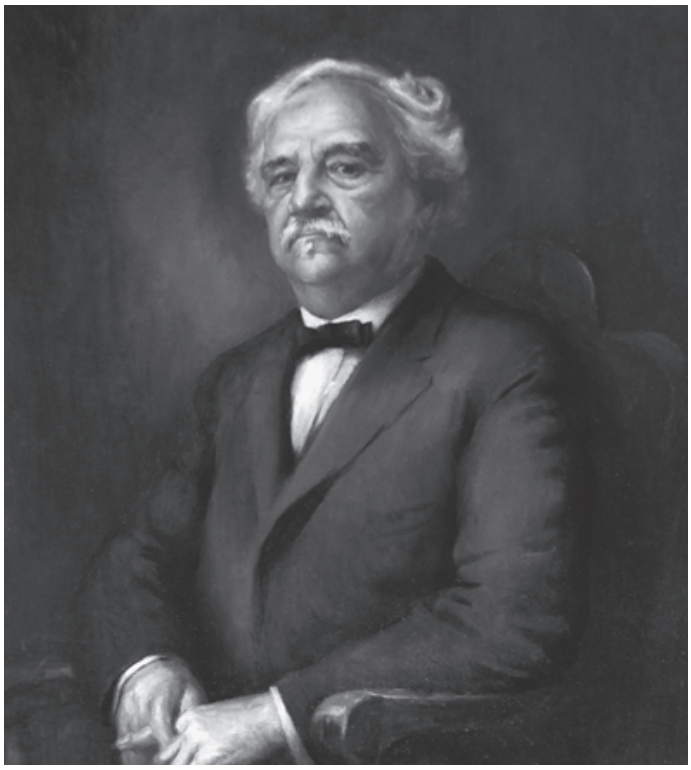
Thomas E. Miller

1849–1938

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1890–1891

Republican from South Carolina



Harleston, Edwin. "Portrait of Thomas Miller" Lowcountry Digital Library, Avery Research Center at the College of Charleston, 1919

A seasoned local and state politician, Thomas E. Miller joined the U.S. House of Representatives after a contested election in 1890. Miller brought his extensive experience fighting for Black civil and political rights in post-Civil War South Carolina to an abbreviated term in the 51st Congress (1889–1891). With little time to legislate, Miller used his new position as a platform to protest the deterioration of Black civil and political rights occurring in the South. "I shall not be muffled here," Miller declared on the House Floor. "I am in part the representative of the living; of those whose rights are denied; of those who are slandered by the press, on the lecture platform, in the halls of legislation, and oftentimes by men in the livery of heaven, and I deem it my supreme duty to raise my voice, though feebly, in their defense."[1]

Thomas Ezekiel Miller was born on June 17, 1849, in Ferrebeeville, South Carolina. He was raised by Richard and Mary Ferrebee Miller. Many years later, Thomas Miller recalled that his father was White and claimed that his mother was the daughter of Judge Thomas Heyward, who had signed the Declaration of Independence.[2]

By the late 1850s, Thomas Miller was living in Charleston, South Carolina, attending illegal schools for free Black children, and selling the *Charleston Mercury* newspaper at hotels. During the Civil War, Miller delivered newspapers on the railroad line that ran between Charleston and Savannah, Georgia. He was made assistant conductor of the railroad, which required him to wear the uniform of the Confederate army because the rebel government controlled the railroads. Captured by Union forces in January 1865, he spent two weeks in a Savannah prison camp before his release. When the Civil War ended, Miller went to Hudson, New York, where once again he sold newspapers on a railroad line. He finished his education at the Hudson School, just north of New York City, before earning a scholarship to Lincoln University, a school for African-American students, in Chester County, Pennsylvania. After graduating in 1872, Miller returned to South Carolina, where he won his first elective office as school commissioner of coastal Beaufort County. He subsequently moved to Columbia and studied law at the newly integrated University of South Carolina. He continued his legal studies under the tutelage of state solicitor P.L. Wiggins and state supreme court justice Franklin L. Moses Sr. Admitted to the South Carolina bar in December 1875, Miller set up his practice in Beaufort, South Carolina, seat of the coastal county where he had won his first election just three years

before. In 1874 he married Anna Hume, with whom he had nine children.[3]

Shortly after establishing his law practice, Thomas Miller was elected to the state general assembly where he served until 1880 before securing a term in the state senate. Miller was deeply involved in attempts to revive the flagging South Carolina Republican Party after Democrats led by Governor Wade Hampton gained control of the state in 1877. He served as a member of the Republican state executive committee from 1878 to 1880. Miller was also a customs inspector and served in the state militia throughout the 1880s. He unsuccessfully sought the Republican nomination for a U.S. House seat in 1884, and in 1886 he returned to the state house of representatives for one year.[4]

In 1888, Miller entered the race for a seat in the U.S. House that had been formerly occupied by Black Representative and Civil War hero Robert Smalls. Covering the center of the South Carolina's pre-Civil War rice and cotton plantations, the "shoestring district" had narrow borders that twisted from Sumter County in the center of the state to Georgetown and parts of Charleston on the coast. African-American residents were 82 percent of the gerrymandered district's population. Republicans expected Smalls to run in 1888 to avenge his 1886 election loss to Democrat William Elliott, an outcome Smalls unsuccessfully contested. But Miller's supporters convinced Smalls to defer. Facing the incumbent Elliott, Miller received financial backing from Randall D. George, one of the wealthiest Black men in the state. Representative Elliott was initially declared the winner by slightly more than 1,000 votes, with 54 percent to Miller's 45 percent of the vote.[5]

Miller contested the election, charging that many registered Black voters had been prevented from casting their ballots. Though the Republican-controlled Committee on Elections in the 51st Congress ruled in Miller's favor, his case did not come up on the House Floor until September 23, 1890, immediately after a vote seating Virginia's first Black Representative, John M. Langston. Democratic Members had tried to obstruct the seating of Langston by deserting the House Chamber in an effort to prevent a quorum; however, Republican Speaker Thomas Brackett Reed of Maine declared a quorum present and held a vote to seat Langston.[6]

Inspired by their success seating Langston, House Republicans moved quickly to take up Miller's claim. Representative Charles Triplett O'Ferrall of Virginia, who was charged with looking after the Democratic Party's interests during the Langston vote, protested that the case was unexpected and reiterated previous complaints that a quorum was not present. Daniel Kerr of Iowa asked for 20 minutes to debate the nomination. Accusing Democrats of conspiring to stonewall Miller's consideration, Speaker Reed shut down all protest. Shouts from the packed Republican side of the chamber implored the Speaker to call a vote. Over O'Ferrall's vehement protests, the House seated Miller by a vote of 157 to 1. Elliott was unseated, and the following day Miller was sworn in and was assigned to the Committee on Labor.[7]

Miller got to work and began introducing legislation almost immediately. Six days after his swearing-in, he submitted a bill to appropriate funds for the construction of a monument to Black Union soldiers. The proposal would have also created a commission of three former Union generals—former Representative Benjamin Franklin Butler of Massachusetts, Oliver O. Howard, and William Birney—tasked with choosing the monument's location. Miller also introduced legislation to fund, construct, and operate a home for Black Americans who had been formerly enslaved and needed assistance in old age.[8]

Miller only had a week on Capitol Hill before the first session of the 51st Congress concluded on October 1. He then returned to South Carolina to run for re-election to the 52nd Congress (1891–1893). In November 1890, in a campaign once again funded by Randall George, Miller won an apparent victory in a three-way contest that included White Independent Republican candidate Ellery M. Brayton and former Representative Elliott, the Democrat whom Miller had unseated in September. Elliott insisted the vote count was fraudulent and contested the results. On November 9, the South Carolina supreme court, seizing on minor details such as discrepancies in paper size, color, font sizes, and weights, ruled that Miller's ballots were illegal and that Elliott was therefore the winner. Miller contested the court's decision before the House of Representatives and returned for the final session of the 51st Congress with the election still unresolved. He submitted just three private bills during the three-month session but made two significant speeches on pressing matters for Black Americans in the South.[9]

On January 12, 1891, Miller spoke in favor of Massachusetts Representative Henry Cabot Lodge's bill authorizing the federal government to oversee federal

elections and protect voters from violence and intimidation. Miller urged the Senate to join the House in passing the Lodge proposal, which he considered to be a crucial means of undermining the "infernal lynch law" employed across the region against African-American voters. Republicans had delivered a number of federal appointments to Black Americans, but voting rights protections were more important, he said. Only then could Black Americans elect candidates that might take action to arrest the growth of extrajudicial terror in the South. "Offices are only emblems of what we need and what we ought to have," Miller pleaded. "We need protection at home in our rights, the chiefest of which is the right to live."[10]

Miller worked to secure Black Americans a place of respect in a peaceful and prosperous South. On February 14, 1891, Miller rebutted a discriminatory speech by Senator Alfred Holt Colquitt of Georgia, in which he blamed southern freed people for slowing regional economic development. Miller's passionate reply took on Colquitt point by point, arguing that it was White southerners who encouraged economic stagnation by exploiting Black farmers and denying Black Americans full citizenship. "It is not the negro," he said, "that keeps Northern capital and Western energy from within the borders of the South land." Rather, he argued, "it is the clannishness of the white citizens, it is the petty prejudices of the white citizens … it is the mean jealousy of the white citizen, it is his love of misjudging and misrepresenting historical achievements that drive from our borders thrift, capital, energy, and inventive genius."[11]

Miller told his colleagues of the economic obstacles facing Black agricultural workers, citing the way many landowners paid tenant farmers in credit to be used only at certain stores, where merchants frequently charged exorbitant prices for their wares. He submitted copies of these credit notes to the *Congressional Record*, documenting how this system trapped Black workers in crushing debt.[12]

Miller, who was still contesting the 1890 election, acknowledged that he may lose his seat for speaking out against South Carolina Democrats but declared himself willing to pay that price. "If it should lose me a single vote, I will accept it. I have stated nothing but the truth; I have done nothing but my duty; I would not for anything do less," he vowed. "I leave here possessed of the consciousness that I have endeavored to defend, in this Chamber, my people and my party."[13]

When the House convened for the 52nd Congress in December 1891, Miller, now a private citizen, appealed to his former colleagues to overturn the state supreme court decision and declare him the winner of the 1890 contest against Elliott. However, the makeup of the new Congress was drastically different: Democrats now outnumbered Republicans nearly two-to-one. Their firm majority meant the Committee on Elections could stall consideration of Miller's contest. In fact, the panel did not take up the case until one month before the end of the Congress: February 11, 1893. Indiana Republican Henry Underwood Johnson lambasted the committee for traveling "at the pace of the tardy snail" and submitted a resolution demanding that Miller's case should be decided within five days. Although Speaker Charles Frederick Crisp of Georgia rejected Johnson's resolution, the committee soon ruled against Miller on February 25, 1893. By that time, George Washington Murray had defeated Miller for the Republican nomination to represent the district in the 53rd Congress (1893–1895).[14]

While Murray went on to win election to the U.S. House, Miller returned to the South Carolina state house for a single term in 1894. For the next 40 years, he remained an active observer of politics. He also was one of six prominent South Carolina Black politicians—including former Representative Robert Smalls—who served as delegates to the 1895 state constitutional convention. White Democrats, led by then Senator Benjamin Ryan Tillman, dominated the convention and were determined to draft a new state constitution with measures designed to disenfranchise the state's Black citizens. Miller and the Black delegates tried to delay convention resolutions and offer alternatives but were consistently rebuffed.[15]

Following the convention debacle, Miller redoubled his efforts to serve his community, especially through education, and helped establish the Colored Normal, Industrial, Agricultural and Mechanical College of South Carolina, which later became South Carolina State University. Although previously affiliated with Claflin University, a Black school staffed by White educators, the new college hired only Black teachers. Miller himself was named its first president when it opened in 1896. He held this position until 1911, when he was forced to resign by newly elected Governor Coleman Livingston Blease, a Democrat who Miller had opposed during the 1910 campaign.[16]

Miller later retired to Charleston, where he remained active in civic affairs. He supported American entry into World War I, helping to recruit more than 30,000 Black soldiers. He served on a Black subcommittee of the all-White state committee on civic preparedness during the war. By 1924, Miller had moved to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Miller testified before the House Judiciary Committee that year regarding several bills proposing to investigate race relations in the South.[17]

He returned to Charleston in 1934, where he lived with his daughter as his eyesight failed. Thomas Miller died in Charleston on April 8, 1938.[18]

Notes

1 *Congressional Record,* House, 51st Cong., 2nd sess. (14 February 1891): 2695.

2 William C. Hine, "Miller, Thomas Ezekiel," *American National Biography* 15 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999): 518–520; "Interview with The Hon. T.E. Miller," Federal Writers' Project, 1936, WPA Federal Writers' Project Materials on African American Life in South Carolina, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, Columbia, South Carolina, https://digital.library.sc.edu/collections/wpa-federal-writers-project-materials-on-african-american-life-in-south-carolina/.

3 Hine, "Miller, Thomas Ezekiel," *American National Biography*: 518–520*;* "Interview with The Hon. T.E. Miller," Federal Writers' Project, 1936; "Personals: Thomas E. Miller," *Journal of Negro History* 23, no. 3 (July 1938): 402.

4 Hine, "Miller, Thomas Ezekiel," *American National Biography*: 518–520; "Interview with The Hon. T.E. Miller," Federal Writers' Project, 1936; Eric Foner*, Freedom's Lawmakers: A Directory of Black Officeholders During Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993): 150.

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6 House Committee on Elections, *Miller vs. Elliott*, 51st Cong., 1st sess., H. Rept. 2502 (1890); *Congressional Record*, House, 51st Cong., 1st sess. (23 September 1890): 10338–10339.

7 *Congressional Record*, House, 51st Cong., 1st sess. (23 September 1890): 10339; "Republicans Steal," 24 September 1890, *Atlanta Constitution*: 1; "Langston Gets His Seat," 24 September 1890, *Chicago Daily Tribune*: 7.

8 H.R. 12166, 51st Cong. (1890); H.R. 12169, 51st Cong. (1890).

9 Hine, "Miller, Thomas Ezekiel," *American National Biography*: 518–520; Michael Dubin indicates that Elliott won by more than 400 votes—45 to 39 percent in a small turnout. Brayton won 16 percent of the vote. See Dubin, *United States Congressional Elections, 1788–1997*: 292. See also "Elliott Re-Elected to Congress," 10 November 1890, *New York Times*: 1; "Will They Heed the Lesson?," 17 November 1890, *Washington Post*: 4; Committee on Elections*, Miller vs. Elliott*, 52nd Cong., 2nd sess., H. Rept. 2569 (1893): 2; H.R. 12728, 51st Cong. (1891); H.R. 13181, 51st Cong. (1891); H.R. 12476, 51st Cong., (1891).

10 *Congressional Record,* House, 51st Cong., 2nd sess. (12 January 1891): 1216.

11 *Congressional Record,* House, 51st Cong., 2nd sess. (14 February 1891): 2691, 2694.

12 *Congressional Record*, House, 51st Cong., 2nd sess. (14 February 1891): 2691–2696.

13 *Congressional Record,* House, 51st Cong., 2nd sess. (14 February 1891): 2695.

14 Dubin, *United States Congressional Elections, 1788–1997*: 301; *Congressional Record*, House, 52nd Cong., 2nd sess. (11 February 1893): 1489–1494; Committee on Elections*, Miller vs. Elliott*, 52nd Cong., 2nd sess., H. Rept. 2569 (1893).

15 Hine, "Miller, Thomas Ezekiel," *American National Biography*: 518–520; Stephen Kantrowitz, *Ben Tillman and the Reconstruction of White Supremacy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000): 221–226.

16 William C. Hine, "South Carolina State College: A Legacy of Education and Public Service," *Agricultural History* 65, no. 2 (Spring 1991): 151–152.

17 Hine, "Miller, Thomas Ezekiel," *American National Biography*: 518–520; Hearings before the House Committee on the Judiciary, *H.R. 3228 and H.R. 5564*, 68th Cong., 1st sess. (1924): 37.

18 "Interview with The Hon. T.E. Miller," Federal Writers' Project, 1936; "Hon. T.E. Miller, Last S.C. Race Congressman, Grandfather of Miss Anne M. Cooke, Passes Away," 13 April 1938, *Atlanta Daily World*: 1; "Personals: Thomas E. Miller," *Journal of Negro History* 23, no. 3 (July 1938): 400–402; "T.E. Miller, 88, Dies; Ex-Representative," 10 April 1938, *New York Times*: 47.

George Washington Murray

1853–1926

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1893–1895; 1896–1897

Republican from South Carolina



Image courtesy of the Library of Congress

In 1892, George Washington Murray, a farmer and inventor, won election to the U.S. House of Representatives from South Carolina. As the only Black Member in the 53rd and 54th Congresses (1893–1897), Murray fought disenfranchisement laws that undermined Black political participation across the South in the 1890s. In 1895, however, South Carolina politicians codified their assault on Black voting power in a new state constitution. Unable to defeat the overwhelming tide of White supremacy, either nationally or at home, Murray was defeated the very next year in his bid for a third term in Congress. His departure from Capitol Hill marked the end of Black representation in Congress from South Carolina for nearly a century.

George Washington Murray was born enslaved on September 22, 1853, near Rembert, in Sumter County, South Carolina. His parents, whose names are not known, were enslaved and died before the end of the Civil War. Murray had at least two brothers: Prince and Frank. Murray never received a formal primary education, but in 1874 he entered the University of South Carolina in Columbia after it was opened to Black students by the Republican state government. When Democrats took control of the state government in 1877, Murray and the other Black students were forced out of the university. He eventually graduated from the nearby state teacher-training institution. Murray married Ella Reynolds in 1877, and they had two children: Edward and Pearl. Murray also had a son, William, from another relationship.[1]

Working as a farmer, a teacher, and a lecturer in Sumter County, Murray obtained eight patents for various agricultural tools. His agricultural success garnered him local recognition, and he was selected as the Sumter County delegate to the 1880 Republican Party state convention. Murray's support of Republican President Benjamin Harrison during the 1888 campaign won him a patronage appointment as customs inspector at the port of Charleston in February 1890. That same year he sought the nomination for the South Carolina "shoestring district," which included sections of Charleston and Georgetown on the coast and twisted narrowly to the northeast to include central portions of the state. The Seventh District had a recent history of Black representation: Civil War hero Robert Smalls in the 49th Congress (1885–1887) and the incumbent, Thomas E. Miller, who served in the 51st Congress (1889–1891). In 1890, Miller defeated Murray for the Republican nomination but eventually lost his bid for re-election to Democrat William Elliott.[2]

In 1892, Murray again pursued the Seventh District seat. Murray defeated Miller and a White candidate named E.W. Brayton to capture the Republican nomination. Although reapportionment modified the "shoestring district" slightly, African-American residents made up nearly 75 percent of the population. During the general election, especially in areas outside Charleston, precinct workers looked for any reason to reject votes cast for Murray. In one instance, an election official judged that Murray's ballots were one-eighth or three-sixteenths of an inch too short. In other cases, Murray's votes were challenged amid accusations that the ballot boxes were allegedly not opened at the appointed time, and that the precinct managers failed to record the name of the precinct before sending the election returns to the state capital, Columbia.[3]

Murray's candidacy, however, was helped by divisions within the state Democratic Party. Then Governor Benjamin Ryan Tillman, a future Senator who led a statewide political machine mobilized to establish White supremacy in South Carolina, was at odds with E.M. Moise, the district's Democratic candidate. Moise disagreed with the governor by rejecting populist economic proposals such as the coinage of silver, which emerged as a national issue during the 1892 election. Like many farmers, Murray supported silver as a way to expand the money supply and provide some means of debt relief to growers in the mostly agricultural district. Though Moise was originally declared the winner, canvassers for the state board of election—run by Democratic supporters of Governor Tillman—confirmed that Murray had won by 40 votes. In the House, he received an assignment to the Committee on Education.[4]

Murray's position as the only Black Member during his two terms in Congress defined his career. One of the first things he did after arriving in Washington was to visit newly inaugurated Democratic President Grover Cleveland. In their meeting, Murray told Cleveland that southern African Americans were concerned about their welfare under a Democratic President but that the new administration had a fresh opportunity to prove that the national Democratic Party cared about their well-being. Murray asked Cleveland to consider appointing more African Americans to government positions, but neither the President nor his congressional allies were concerned with appealing to this new constituency for votes.[5]

When a financial panic gripped the country in early 1893, President Cleveland blamed much of the economic instability on the 1890 Sherman Silver Purchase Act. He sought to repeal the law that required the federal government to trade 4.5 million ounces of silver bullion each month in exchange for legal tender to pump into the economy. Cleveland called a special session of Congress to deal with the crisis. Murray joined Populists and other Silverites in defending the Silver Purchase Act. Speaking on the House Floor for the first time on August 24, 1893, Murray argued that most of his constituents earned little and were disadvantaged by the diminishing supply of gold on which the economy was based. Murray believed that silver coinage would help to stabilize the economy in his district and noted that his constituents traced their overwhelming poverty to the gold standard, "the circulating medium, which like a viper with its victim in its coils, has been drawing its cords tighter and tighter around their prosperity, until it is dead. I am of the opinion that the only sure and permanent remedy is a lengthening of the cords, an enlargement of the volume of money." Although Murray took the floor at 10:00 p.m., a large crowd gathered in the gallery to hear his maiden speech. Ultimately, however, proponents of silver coinage were unable to secure the necessary votes and, overcoming a Senate filibuster lasting two months, President Cleveland secured the congressional repeal of the Sherman Silver Purchase Act on October 30, 1893.[6]

In 1893, when Representative Henry St. George Tucker of Virginia authored a bill to remove from southern polling places the impartial election supervisors and federal marshals who had helped enable Black voting in the region, Murray sought to block the legislation. On several occasions, he contested Tucker's allies on the House Floor, citing personal experiences of discrimination. On October 2, 1893, Murray interrupted freshman Representative and future Speaker Champ Clark of Missouri, who insisted that state officials adequately monitored polling places. Murray challenged Clark's arguments, including his claim that federal officials arrested potential voters to keep them from the polls which skewed the results. Three days later, Murray made a long speech against Representative Tucker's legislation. "While I can not persuade myself that there can be found here and in the Senate enough cruel and wicked men to make this law effective," he pleaded with President Cleveland to not "join in this cowardly onslaught to strike down the walls impaling the last vestige of liberty to a helpless class of people." Murray called upon Black voters to consider any Member who voted for the bill "as their perpetual enemy."

The bill passed both chambers and, despite Murray's stated hope for a presidential veto, was signed into law by Cleveland in February 1894.[7]

In 1894, Murray faced a crucial decision when running for re-election for a seat in the 54th Congress (1895–1897). The South Carolina legislature had dissolved the old Seventh District, cutting off much of Charleston and Murray's Black voting base and created a new First District that was far more favorable to White candidates. Murray secured the Republican nomination in the new district, overcoming competition from former Member Robert Smalls. Former Representative William Elliott, who had been unseated by Black Republican Representative Thomas Miller in 1890, won the Democratic nomination to face Murray in November. Elliott emerged with 60 percent of the vote in the general election, but several precincts reported instances of fraud. Murray appealed to the state board of election canvassers, but they rejected his claim.[8]

In 1895, Murray prepared to contest Elliott's election before the House in the 54th Congress. On February 23, after the death of abolitionist and activist Frederick Douglass, Murray attempted to introduce a resolution to have Douglass lay in state in the Capitol. At the end of the legislative day, Murray waited while colleagues delivered several lengthy eulogies for North Carolina's Zebulon Baird Vance, who had been a Confederate officer, wartime governor, and later U.S. Senator, and who had died almost a year earlier. When the series of speeches concluded, Murray rose to request unanimous consent to introduce his resolution honoring Douglass but was told that the House had already adjourned. He never had the chance to introduce the resolution.[9]

In 1895, Democrats in the South Carolina state legislature passed a referendum to revise the state's Reconstruction-era constitution. Murray tried to organize Black voters to elect sympathetic delegates to the constitutional convention, but only six Black delegates managed to gain seats, among them former Representatives Robert Smalls and Thomas Miller. The convention proved disastrous for Black voters in South Carolina. White Democrats created new residency requirements, instituted poll taxes, established property qualifications, and created literacy tests—all aimed at disenfranchising Black voters.[10]

Despite the looming disenfranchisement of his core supporters, Murray's contested election case was still in the hands of the House Committee on Elections. Murray provided the committee with a massive amount of testimony indicating that he had been fraudulently denied re-election. Murray's evidence revealed that ballot boxes in three of four heavily Republican counties in his new district were never opened, that Black voters were issued fake registration certificates or had their paperwork withheld entirely, and that local authorities simply failed to open certain precincts in Black neighborhoods. The worst fraud occurred in the small portion of southern Charleston that remained in Murray's district. In a precinct with 2,000 more registered Black voters than White voters, officials had reported 2,811 votes for Elliott and only 397 for Murray.[11]

After reviewing the testimony, the Republican-controlled House Committee on Elections concluded that Murray had prevailed by 434 votes. On June 3, 1896, the whole House first took up the case late in the first session of the 54th Congress. Democrats spent several hours trying to prove that Murray was not favored by all African-American voters and thus could not claim the majority of votes cast based solely on the demographics of the district. The next day, the House voted to seat Murray, 153 to 33. With only seven days remaining in the first session, Murray was again assigned to the Committee on Education and was also appointed to the Committee on Expenditures in the U.S. Department of Treasury.[12]

Upon joining the 54th Congress, Murray immediately turned his attention to re-election in the fall of 1896 where he faced one hurdle after another. The new state constitution's discriminatory voting clauses prevented scores of his Black constituents from being able to register, while hundreds of others were turned away from the polls. Elliott ultimately defeated Murray with 67 percent of the vote.[13]

Even in defeat, Murray kept up the fight for voting rights. In December 1896, he introduced legislation intended "to insure minority representation in Federal elections." In February 1897, Murray announced he would object to South Carolina's nine electoral votes in the presidential election—which went to Democratic candidate William Jennings Bryan—if Congress did not investigate the state's new election laws. He submitted a petition signed by hundreds of South Carolina Republicans, alleging that more than 100,000 eligible Black men had been denied the vote in the 1896 election. Influential Republicans attempted to dissuade Murray, fearful that disrupting the electoral vote count would impede Republican William McKinley's apparent victory. Murray dropped his objection

but submitted a resolution requesting an investigation into South Carolina's electoral vote, which was referred to the Committee on Election of President, Vice President, and Representatives. Although the committee reported favorably on the resolution on March 2—one day before the end of the Congress—it refused to take stronger action, referring the matter to the 55th Congress (1897–1899).[14]

After leaving Congress, Murray returned to his South Carolina farm. He invested in more land, which he sold to Black tenant farmers. In 1904, Murray was convicted in a circuit court for forgery related to a contract dispute between two of his tenants. After another legal trial on a perjury charge along with a suspicious fire in his home, Murray fled to Chicago in 1905 to avoid a prison sentence. He also told family members he was concerned about escalating harassment and feared he would be the victim of violence if he remained in the state. Ella Murray was unwilling to leave South Carolina, and the two separated. In 1908, Murray married Cornelia Martin, who ran a boarding house. The Murrays adopted a 10-year-old boy, Donald, in the 1920s.[15]

Murray became active in the Republican Party in Chicago. He tried several unsuccessful business ventures, including investing in a local Black-owned department store. Murray also lectured across the country. He compiled many of his speeches into two self-published books, which claimed to take a scientific approach to the problems facing African Americans in the United States. In *Race Ideals: Effects, Cause and Remedy for Afro-American Race Troubles* (1914) and *Light in Dark Places* (1925), Murray made the case for cultural pride as a key component to ending racism and discrimination in American society, along with self-help strategies of a sort popularly associated with Booker T. Washington.[16]

Murray died of cancer in Chicago on April 21, 1926. Former Mississippi Representative John R. Lynch and antilynching activist Ida B. Wells-Barnett were among the speakers at his funeral.[17]

Notes

1 John F. Marszalek, *A Black Congressman in the Age of Jim Crow: South Carolina's George Washington Murray* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2006): 6–7, 9, 157–158.

2 Stephen Middleton, *Black Congressmen During Reconstruction: A Documentary Sourcebook* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2002): 245; Marszalek, *A Black Congressman in the Age of Jim Crow*: 9, 22; Stanley B. Parsons et al., *United States Congressional Districts, 1883–1913* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990): 143.

3 Parsons et al., *United States Congressional Districts, 1883–1913*: 278–279; Marszalek, *A Black Congressman in the Age of Jim Crow*: 37; William J. Gaboury, "George Washington Murray and the Fight for Political Democracy in South Carolina," *Journal of Negro History* 62, no. 3 (July 1977): 259–260.

4 Michael J. Dubin, *United States Congressional Elections, 1788–1997* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 1998): 301; Thomas Holt, "Murray, George Washington," *Dictionary of American Negro Biography* (New York: Norton, 1982): 465; Marszalek, *A Black Congressman in the Age of Jim Crow*: 47–50.

5 Marszalek, *A Black Congressman in the Age of Jim Crow*: 51.

6 *Congressional Record*, House, 53rd Cong., 1st sess. (24 August 1893): 858; Gaboury, "George Washington Murray and the Fight for Political Democracy in South Carolina": 260–261; Marszalek, *A Black Congressman in the Age of Jim Crow*: 57–58; Neil MacNeil and Richard A. Baker, *The American Senate: An Insider's History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013): 312; Robert J. Dole, *Historical Almanac of the United States Senate: A Series of "Bicentennial Minutes" Presented to the Senate During the One Hundredth Congress* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1989): 159.

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8 Parsons et al., *United States Congressional Districts, 1883–1913*: 278–279; Marszalek, *A Black Congressman in the Age of Jim Crow*: 68–69, 75–81; Dubin, *United States Congressional Elections, 1788–1997*: 310; Gaboury, "George Washington Murray and the Fight for Political Democracy in South Carolina": 260.

9 *Congressional Record*, House, 53rd Cong., 2nd sess. (23 February 1895): 2669; "Fred Douglass's Remains," 24 February 1895, *Atlanta Constitution*: 15.

10 J. Morgan Kousser, *The Shaping of Southern Politics: Suffrage Restriction and Establishment of the One-Party South, 1880–1910* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974): 145–152; Stephen Kantrowitz, *Ben Tillman and the Reconstruction of White Supremacy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000): 198–242.

11 Gaboury, "George Washington Murray and the Fight for Political Democracy in South Carolina": 266; Marszalek, *A Black Congressman in the Age of Jim Crow*: 79; House Committee on Elections, *George W. Murray v. William Elliott*, 54th Cong., 1st sess., H. Rept. 1567 (1896): 2–5.

12 House Committee on Elections, *George W. Murray v. William Elliott*, 54th Cong., 1st sess., H. Rept. 1567 (1896): 55; *Congressional Record*, House, 54th Cong., 1st sess. (3 June 1896): 6072–6077; *Congressional Record*, Appendix, 54th Cong., 1st sess. (3 June 1896): 445–452; Marszalek, *A Black Congressman in the Age of Jim Crow*: 101; *Congressional Record*, House, 54th Cong., 1st sess. (4 June 1896): 6011.

13 Gaboury, "George Washington Murray and the Fight for Political Democracy in South Carolina": 263–267; Dubin, *United States Congressional Elections, 1788–1997*: 327.

14 H.R. 9757, 54th Cong. (1896); *Congressional Record*, House, 54th Cong., 2nd sess. (19 December 1896): 320; H. Res. 543, 54th Cong. (1897); *Congressional Record*, House, 54th Cong., 2nd sess. (15 February 1897): 1868; Committee on Election of President, Vice-President, and Representatives in Congress, *Electoral Vote of South Carolina*, 54th Cong., 2nd sess., H. Rept. 3065 (1897); Gaboury, "George Washington Murray and the Fight for Political Democracy in South Carolina": 266; Marszalek, *A Black Congressman in the Age of Jim Crow*: 107–108.

15 Marszalek, *A Black Congressman in the Age of Jim Crow*: 132–136, 142–143, 145–146, 157–158.

16 Marszalek, *A Black Congressman in the Age of Jim Crow*: 144–145, 146–151.

17 "Death Takes Former Rep. G.W. Murray," 1 May 1926, *Chicago Defender*: 1.

George Henry White

1852–1918

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1897–1901

Republican from North Carolina



Image courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration

George Henry White was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives from North Carolina in 1896. His bold legislative proposals combating disenfranchisement and mob violence challenged the repression of the Jim Crow South. The lone African-American Representative at the dawn of the twentieth century, White denounced the efforts of the Democratic Party in his home state to restrict Black voting rights and embrace White supremacy. After he departed the chamber on March 3, 1901, no Black Member was elected to Congress for another 27 years. "This, Mr. Chairman, is perhaps the negroes' temporary farewell to the American Congress," White declared in his final months as a Representative, "but let me say, Phoenix-like he will rise up someday and come again."[1]

George Henry White was born in Rosindale, North Carolina, on December 18, 1852. His father, Wiley F. White, was a free farmer. His mother, Mary, was enslaved. At the end of the Civil War, White helped out on the family farm and assisted in the family's funeral home business while intermittently attending public schools in Columbus County, North Carolina. In 1873, he entered Howard University in Washington, DC, graduating in 1877. White joined the North Carolina bar in 1879 and served as the principal at several Black public schools. He married Fannie B. Randolph in 1879; six years after her death in 1880, he married Cora Lena Cherry. White had four children: a daughter, Della, with his first wife and two daughters and a son—Mary Adelyne, Beatrice Odessa, and George Henry White Jr.—with his second wife. Beatrice Odessa White died in infancy in 1892.[2]

White's political career began with his election to the North Carolina house of representatives in 1880. That same year, he served as a delegate to the Republican National Convention. White initially focused on legislation pertaining to education, securing funding and authorization to open four Black teacher-training schools to provide training for Black teachers. After establishing a second residence in Tarboro, North Carolina, he was elected solicitor and prosecuting attorney in 1886 in the "Black Second," a boot-shaped congressional district winding from the Virginia border to the southern coast which contained a large Black majority. White considered seeking national office but decided to work on local issues in the solicitor's office.[3]

White's brother-in-law, Representative Henry Plummer Cheatham, held the Second District seat in the House from 1889 to 1893, before losing re-election in 1892.

When White made a serious bid for the "Black Second" congressional seat in 1894, the campaign became marked by family rivalry when Cheatham entered the race for his old seat as well. At the time, the Populist Party—a national third party which largely attracted struggling farmers disenchanted with America's political system—continued to challenge the Republican Party in the district. The volatile political situation divided delegates at the hotly contested 1894 Republican district convention. After 13 ballots, both White and Cheatham emerged claiming the nomination. After both candidates canvassed the district for several months, the two men brought their still-undecided case to Washington, DC, before the National Republican Congressional Committee. After hearing each man's arguments, a seven-member panel agreed to support Cheatham. But Cheatham failed to capture the backing of the Populists, and in a three-way general election he lost handily to incumbent Democratic Representative Frederick Augustus Woodard after a Populist candidate siphoned off a large fraction of the White Republican vote.[4]

Two years later, in 1896, White handily defeated Cheatham for the Republican nomination to the House. Hoping to avoid Cheatham's fate in another three-way election, White reached out to Populist voters in the district by embracing the call for the free coinage of silver while distancing himself from the national Republican adherence to the gold standard. His chances for election improved greatly when Republican and Populist district leaders agreed on a "fusion" plan in the fall of 1896. White also benefited when the state legislature reversed many of the Democratic election laws that impeded African-American voters in 1894—each of the three parties provided a judge and registrar at every polling place to ensure a fair election. Turnout among Black voters in North Carolina rose to record levels of more than 85 percent. On Election Day, White defeated Woodard and Populist candidate D.S. Moss with 52 percent of the vote.[5]

The only African-American lawmaker in the 55th Congress (1897–1899), George Henry White was part of a large Republican majority that had been swept into office on the coattails of President William McKinley. He received a seat on the Agriculture Committee, an assignment that positioned him to serve the interests of his largely rural constituency. Early in the 55th Congress, White, like many Republicans hoping to spur domestic production, voted to raise tariffs, fees the government placed on imports. White intended his vote to protect eastern North Carolina's timber industry.[6]

White also joined his party in embracing imperialism. Although he missed the vote on a resolution on April 18, 1898, authorizing U.S. military intervention to help Cuba achieve independence from Spain, he announced on the House Floor the following morning that he backed a U.S. invasion of Spanish-controlled Cuba. He later declared his unqualified support for the "acquisition of all of the territory that is within our grasp as a result of that war," including not only Cuba but the former Spanish colonies of Puerto Rico and the Philippines as well. White was not present for the vote to annex the Hawaiian Islands. Critical of the apparent mistreatment of the native Hawaiians, White nonetheless remained loyal to Republican foreign-policy objectives and steered clear of overt conflict with his colleagues who overwhelmingly supported annexation. White later offered legislation creating the Hawaiian territorial government, a measure he hoped would ensure the voting rights of Hawaiian residents.[7]

As the only African-American legislator between 1897 and 1901, White's primary focus in Congress was to defend the civil rights of his Black constituents. "I am easily the leader of one thing, and that is the Black phalanx on this floor," White declared in 1898. "I have no rival and will not be disturbed in that leadership."[8]

Throughout his two terms, White attempted to use congressional power to address the country's obligations to its Black citizens at both local and national levels. For instance, he offered a resolution providing relief for the widow and surviving children of Black postmaster Fraser B. Baker, who along with his infant daughter was murdered by a White mob in Lake City, South Carolina. Like many of his earlier Black colleagues, White proposed compensation for depositors of the failed Freedman's Savings and Trust Company and reimbursement for P.B.S. Pinchback, a Black politician from Louisiana who had incurred significant expenses related to his contested election in the 43rd Congress (1873–1875). White was finally successful in obtaining modest compensation for former Representative Robert Smalls of South Carolina for his seizure of the steamship *Planter* from Confederate forces in Charleston in 1862.[9]

White also made several unsuccessful attempts to push Congress to open new opportunities for Black Americans. In 1898, for instance, White sought an amendment to commission the first all-Black artillery unit in the U.S.

Army—noting that no Black serviceman had ever served as an artilleryman. He also proposed $15,000 in federal funding for an exhibit on Black contributions to the progress of the country at the 1900 Paris Exposition.[10]

Returning home to campaign for re-election, George Henry White was the primary target of White supremacist politicians who feared the renewal of the Republican-Populist political fusion strategy. The *Raleigh News and Observer* was particularly scathing, calling White the mastermind behind the "Negro domination" of local politics and businesses, and citing as proof his refusal to give his seat to a White Republican. White, meanwhile, armed himself with endorsements. Republican colleague George Newell Southwick of New York printed glowing praise of White in the *Colored American*, a Black newspaper published in Washington, DC. Second District Republicans also expressed solidarity with White by renominating him without opposition in May 1898.[11]

The last stages of the campaign witnessed White supremacist forces align against White. White's opponents fabricated and misconstrued a number of quotations from his renomination and accused him of calling on Black Americans to take up arms in the South in pursuit of "social equality." The White Government Union, a new group led by former Representative Furnifold McLendel Simmons which was aligned with the Democratic Party, used the words attributed to White to stir outrage among White voters. The press also continued to stoke unfounded fears that African Americans were planning an armed rebellion. In 1898, Populists also broke from standing fusion agreements and nominated their own candidate, James B. Lloyd, threatening to undercut a significant part of White's support. The final week of campaigning descended into chaos. After Lloyd refused to run on a platform of White supremacy, William Fountain added his name to the ballot as an Independent Populist and sought to swing the Populist Party against George Henry White. At a Democratic campaign event as Election Day approached, South Carolina Senator and former Governor Benjamin Ryan Tillman unabashedly praised North Carolina's efforts to establish White supremacy. Although Black voter turnout was low, the confusion of a four-way race divided the vote in White's favor, and he won re-election. After the election in November 1898, North Carolina experienced grotesque violence when White supremacists in Wilmington, the biggest city in the largely rural state, attacked Black neighborhoods: killing at least seven and as many as 20 Black residents, injuring many more, and overthrowing the local government.[12]

The bloody Wilmington coup traumatized Black North Carolinians well beyond the city, and disgusted White as he returned to Washington for the final session of the 55th Congress. On January 26, 1899, he vented his frustration in his longest floor speech to date. During the consideration of a measure to extend America's standing army after the Spanish-American War, White segued debate to disenfranchisement in the South. He argued in favor of a bold proposal to decrease representation in the U.S. House for states with discriminatory laws proportionate to the number of eligible voters they prevented from going to the polls. "If we are unworthy of suffrage, if it is necessary to maintain white supremacy," White chastised his colleagues, "then you ought to have the benefit only of those who are allowed to vote, and the poor men, whether they be black or white, who are disfranchised ought not go into representation of the district of the state." Republicans greeted his speech with long applause.[13]

The 56th Congress (1899–1901) convened with a Republican majority, and White was given a second assignment on the District of Columbia Committee, which administered the capital city's government. He submitted bills to aid the District's residents, including a request that unclaimed federal pensions earmarked for Black Civil War soldiers be redirected into a retirement home for African Americans in the District of Columbia. White also introduced legislation to prohibit fertilizer factories in the District, industries that used unsightly and foul-smelling dead animals in their operations.[14]

On January 20, 1900, White introduced an unprecedented bill to make lynching a federal crime, subjecting those who participated in mob violence to potential capital punishment—a sentence equivalent to that for treason. White provided national statistics on lynchings over a six-month period in 1899 and listed the ostensible crimes said to have justified the murder of innocent Black Americans: alleged property crimes and assault, social transgressions—including interactions with White women—and the simple act of looking for work. "Mr. Chairman, the sickening effect of these crimes is bad enough in degenerating and degrading the moral sensibilities of those who now play upon the arena of the nation," White declared on the House Floor, "but this is nothing when compared with the degrading and

morbid effect it must have upon the minds of children in communities where these murders are committed in open daylight with the flagrant defiance of all law, morals, the State and nation, and the actors are dubbed as the best citizens of the community." He concluded: "I tremble with horror for the future of our nation when I think what must be the inevitable result if mob violence is not stamped out of existence and law once permitted to reign supreme." White's landmark antilynching bill did not attract significant support on Capitol Hill or from President William McKinley, and subsequently died in the Judiciary Committee.[15]

White announced he would not run for renomination to the 57th Congress (1901–1903) in a speech on June 30, 1900. Several factors contributed to his decision. In 1899, the North Carolina state legislature followed the lead of neighboring states and passed new laws further restricting Black voter registration. White speculated that he may even be denied a certificate of election from the state government if he won re-election. He also faced criticism from White Republicans in the district, who disapproved of White's statements about the need for Black candidates and patronage appointees in a largely Black congressional district. Without strong Republican support, White faced formidable odds defeating his Democratic opponent Claude Kitchin, a White supremacist whose family was well-connected in North Carolina Democratic politics. White also faced resistance at the national level when, as a delegate to the Republican National Convention in mid-June, he watched as the convention rejected the addition of an antilynching plank and voting rights guarantees to the national party platform.[16]

On January 29, 1901, White gave a celebrated valedictory address to the 56th Congress. He acknowledged that his departure from Capitol Hill signaled the end of an era but predicted the return of Black Members to Congress in the future. He called for respect and equality for African Americans. "The only apology that I have to make for the earnestness with which I have spoken," White concluded, "is that I am pleading for the life, the liberty, the future happiness, and manhood suffrage for one-eighth of the entire population of the United States."[17]

Fearing for the well-being of his family, White moved away from North Carolina. The health of his wife, Cora, had suffered greatly under the strain of racist attacks against her and her husband. "I cannot live in North Carolina and be a man and be treated as a man," White lamented to the *Chicago Daily Tribune*. He also encouraged Black families to leave the South and settle in western farming regions, to, he said, "lose themselves among the people of the country. A few families could settle here and there. Then their children will be better educated."[18]

After leaving the House, George Henry White began a second successful career as a lawyer and an entrepreneur, opening a law practice in Washington, DC, in 1901. Hoping to create a safe place where Black Americans could thrive beyond the restrictive confines of the Jim Crow South, White organized the town of Whitesboro on 1,700 acres of land in Cape May, New Jersey. By 1906, its population had swelled to more than 800 people. In 1905, White left Washington to establish another law practice in Philadelphia. He also opened the People's Savings Bank to help Black homeowners and merchants. White made significant connections with the Black community in Philadelphia, becoming active in the local branch of the NAACP and serving as a board member of the Frederick Douglass Hospital.[19]

In April 1912, White announced his candidacy for Pennsylvania's First District following the death of Representative Henry Harrison Bingham. In a statement, White declared that Black Americans were "entitled to at least one Representative in the American Congress." White, however, ultimately did not formally put his name forward for the nomination, and William Scott Vare won the seat. In 1917, White's bank failed. A year later, George Henry White died in Philadelphia on December 28, 1918.[20]

Notes

1 *Congressional Record*, House, 56th Cong., 2nd sess. (29 January 1901): 1638.

2 Benjamin R. Justesen, *George Henry White: An Even Chance in the Race of Life* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2001): 2–3, 35–36; George W. Reid, "Four in Black: North Carolina's Black Congressmen, 1874–1901," *Journal of Negro History* 64 (Summer 1979): 235; Justesen, *George Henry White*: 166.

3 Justesen, *George Henry White*: 80–81, 151; Stanley B. Parsons et al., *United States Congressional Districts, 1883–1913* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990): 97–99.

4 Justesen, *George Henry White*: 151–153, 182, 185, 187, 188–189; Michael J. Dubin, *United States Congressional Elections, 1788–1997* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 1998): 308.

5 Justesen, *George Henry White*: 206, 210–211; H. Leon Prather Sr., *We Have Taken a City: The Wilmington Racial Massacre and Coup of 1898* (Rutherford, NJ: Associated University Presses, 1984): 34–35; Dubin, *United States Congressional Elections, 1788–1997*: 318.

6 Justesen, *George Henry White*: 213; *Congressional Record*, House, 55th Cong., 1st sess. (31 March 1897): 550.

7 *Congressional Record*, House, 55th Cong., 2nd sess. (19 April 1898): 4086; *Congressional Record*, House, 55th Cong., 3rd sess. (26 January 1899): 1124; Justesen, *George Henry White*: 235; *Congressional Record*, House, 56th Cong., 1st sess. (5 April 1900): 3814.

8 *Congressional Record*, House, 55th Cong., 2nd sess. (22 April 1898): 4194.

9 "Topics of Talk in Beaufort," 28 February 1898, *Charleston News and Courier* (SC): 6; "Negro Postmaster Killed," 23 February 1898, *New Haven Register* (CT): 1; H.R. 2578, 56th Cong. (1899); H.R. 6573, 56th Cong. (1900); An Act For the Relief of Robert Smalls, 31 Stat. 1600 (1900).

10 *Congressional Record*, House, 55th Cong., 2nd sess. (7 March 1898): 2556; H.R. 4755, 56th Cong. (1899); H.J. Res. 75, 56th Cong. (1899).

11 Eric Anderson, "White, George Henry," *American National Biography* 23 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999): 205–206; "Southwick Praises White," 11 June 1898, *Colored American* (Washington, DC): 1; Justesen, *George Henry White*: 233–234; Justesen, *George Henry White*: 232–234.

12 Justesen, *George Henry White*: 238–241, 245–246; "The Negro White Speaks," 28 July 1898, *North Carolinian* (Raleigh, NC): 6; "Glorious Day in Cumberland," 25 October 1898, *Semi-Weekly Messenger* (Wilmington, NC): 8; Helen G. Edmonds, *The Negro and Fusion Politics in North Carolina, 1894–1901* (1951, repr.; New York: Russell and Russell, 1973): 163–164; John Hope Franklin and Alfred A. Moss, *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of African Americans*, 8th ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000): 288; David S. Cecelski and Timothy B. Tyson, eds., *Democracy Betrayed: The Wilmington Race Riot of 1898 and Its Legacy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998): 35; David Zucchino, *Wilmington's Lie: The Murderous Coup of 1898 and the Rise of White Supremacy* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2020).

13 *Congressional Record*, House, 55th Cong., 3rd sess. (26 January 1899): 1125; Justesen, *George Henry White*: 263.

14 H.J. Res. 67, 56th Cong. (1899); H.R. 8696, 56th Cong. (1900).

15 H.R. 6963, 56th Cong. (1900); Edmonds, *The Negro and Fusion Politics in North Carolina*: 86; *Congressional Record*, House, 56th Cong., 1st sess. (23 February 1900): 2151–2154.

16 "Southern Negro's Plaint," 26 August 1900, *New York Times*: 8; Eric Anderson, *Race and Politics in North Carolina, 1872–1901: The Black Second* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981): 299–300; Justesen, *George Henry White*: 290, 292–293.

17 *Congressional Record*, House, 56th Cong., 2nd sess. (29 January 1901): 1638.

18 "Sees No Hope In South, 26 August 1900, *Chicago Daily Tribune*: 7; "Southern Negro's Plaint."

19 Justesen, *George Henry White*: 356, 411.

20 "Announces His Candidacy for Congress," 30 March 1912, *Philadelphia Tribune*: 1; "He Has Heard the Battle Cry," 20 April 1912, *Chicago Defender*: 4; "White Not in the Fight," 20 April 1912, *Afro-American* (Baltimore, MD): 4; "Vare Wins For Congress," 26 April 1912, *Baltimore Sun*: 15; "Former N.C. Negro Congressman Dead," 29 December 1918, *Wilmington Morning Star* (NC): 1; "Ex-Congressman Geo. White, Negro, Dies in the North," 29 December 1918, *Greensboro Daily News* (NC): 16; "Last Negro Congressman George H. White, Is Dead," 30 December 1918, *Greensboro Patriot* (NC): 1.


COMMITTEE ON EXPENDITURES
IN THE
EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENTS

Exile, Migration, and the Struggle for Representation

1901 – 1965

William L. Dawson was born in Albany, Georgia, in 1886, and grew up in the Jim Crow South. By the time he was a teenager, the defeat of Reconstruction and the consolidation of power by Democrats committed to White supremacy had severely restricted life in Black communities throughout the region. In the early twentieth century, Dawson joined the legions of African Americans seeking a better life elsewhere. In 1905, he enrolled at Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee. He graduated from the historically Black institution and later moved to Chicago, where he worked as a Pullman porter and earned a law degree. He went on to serve as a U.S. Army officer in World War I.[1]

Dawson's personal journey converged with the experiences of tens of thousands of African Americans who departed southern states in the Great Migration. During the early decades of the twentieth century, Black communities grew in northern and midwestern cities such as New York, New York; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Detroit, Michigan; and Chicago, Illinois. There, Black people found some relief from Jim Crow—jobs, schools, and the freedom of movement that was so often restricted in the South. But they never completely escaped discrimination, nor fully exercised basic civil and political rights. Black Americans routinely found segregated housing, unequal pay, and significant barriers to participating in representative democracy no matter where they settled in the United States.

Representative William L. Dawson of Illinois chaired the Committee on Expenditures in the Executive Departments, later known as the Committee on Government Operations, for 10 nonconsecutive terms beginning in the 81st Congress (1949–1951). Dawson was the first Black Member to chair a House standing committee.

Image courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration

The same discriminatory forces that caused Dawson and thousands of other Black Americans to leave the South also led to the complete disappearance of Black lawmakers on Capitol Hill. The once-promising era of Reconstruction gave way to a steady decline in the number of Black Americans elected to Congress in the late nineteenth century. Following the departure of George Henry White of North Carolina in 1901, no Black American was elected to Congress until 1928. This extended exile from the national legislature endured for nearly three decades, transcended regional boundaries, and mirrored a decline in Black state and local officeholders in the South. There, Jim Crow and state governments perpetuated White supremacy by law. In the North, district boundaries, subtle and explicit discrimination, and party politics conspired against Black candidates in rural and urban congressional districts alike. Thus, even though African Americans found access to the ballot when they left the South, they still found themselves excluded from Congress. Despite the obstacles arrayed against them, Black Americans consistently sought ways to influence the political process from outside the halls of power and continued to try to win election to local, state, and federal offices.



Oscar De Priest of Illinois stands outside the Capitol. After a 28-year absence of Black representation in Congress, De Priest represented a Chicago district from 1929 to 1935.

Image courtesy of the Library of Congress

In Chicago during the 1920s, William Dawson joined an emerging cohort of Black Republicans seeking to gain political access and patronage amid the Great Migration. The city's ward system created opportunities for local leaders who could marshal the votes of their communities. Dawson campaigned for candidates, was elected as an alderman in 1935, and twice pursued the Republican nomination for Illinois's First District in the U.S. House of Representatives.

Dawson spent much of the Great Depression during the 1930s building a base of local support. His Republican political career plateaued, however, as scores of Black Chicagoans embraced the Democratic Party of Franklin D. Roosevelt, which offered them a modicum of relief from the ravages of the Depression. It was not long before Dawson joined them by switching his party allegiance. In 1942, Dawson was elected to the House as a Democrat and firmly secured control of patronage in Chicago's second ward. In a congressional career that spanned nearly three decades, Dawson became the most powerful Black Member of Congress to that point in U.S. history. He amassed seniority, worked closely with Democratic leadership, and was the first Black American to chair a House standing committee.

Whether he was in Georgia, Illinois, or on Capitol Hill, segregation and discrimination marred Dawson's personal and professional experiences. Through it all, he set a new standard for Black Americans in the legislative branch, became a trusted ally and party stalwart, and achieved real power through his control of the House Committee on Government Operations. This mixture of power and limitations, visibility and isolation, made Dawson's life and career a microcosm of the uniquely American dilemma that other Black lawmakers confronted during this era.

This essay explores the many contradictory experiences of Black Americans on and off Capitol Hill during the first six decades of the twentieth century, a period marked by migration and the struggle to overcome political exclusion. While 22 Black Members were elected to Congress in the final 30 years of the nineteenth century—all from southern states—Dawson was one of only eight African Americans elected to the House from 1901 to 1965 from industrial cities in the North and West.

Dawson was not the first Black politician sent to Congress during the period. Indeed, Black Americans

hailed their return to Capitol Hill with the 1928 election of Oscar De Priest, a Chicago Republican. In the 1930s and 1940s, a small number of Black Representatives made modest gains in the legislative branch, though it was not until 1945 when two Black Members once again served simultaneously in Congress. Following World War II, incremental gains in Black representation in Congress coincided with the first significant civil rights legislation since Reconstruction. At the same time, segregationist southern Democrats steadily amassed influence in Congress through seniority and committee chairmanships. They grasped the reins of power in the House and Senate, and for decades used parliamentary maneuvers to delay bills, disrupt the legislative process, and stifle calls for reform.

Thanks to the extraordinary efforts of social movement activists, however, the era culminated in the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which expanded the role of the federal government in guaranteeing individual rights across the United States and altered the social and political landscape of the South. Black Members supported the goals of the postwar civil rights movement and labored from inside the halls of power to ensure that new legislation would deliver meaningful results. The cumulative struggles of six decades produced a dramatic ending to this era—one that fundamentally transformed democracy in the United States and the story of Black Americans in Congress.

EXILE

On December 6, 1901, the New York *Sun* printed a short history of the "rise and fall" of Black Americans on Capitol Hill. The paper included a brief description of each Black Member who had served between 1870 and 1901 under the headline "No Negro Now in Congress." The 57th Congress (1901–1903) had opened the previous day, and the absence of Black Members seemed to signal the end of a chapter in congressional history. The *Sun* offered a retrospective on Black Representatives and Senators, noting that during the preceding three decades, only the 50th Congress (1887–1889) had not welcomed a Black Member. Because of the "persistent efforts to disenfranchise the black voters," the *Sun* acknowledged, Black Americans had "entirely lost the political vantage ground" granted by the Fifteenth Amendment. The *Sun* predicted future Black candidates had little chance of winning election to Congress. The article proved prescient; 28 years passed before another Black Representative was sworn in on Capitol Hill.[2]



The first African American to receive a Ph.D. from Harvard University, pathbreaking scholar and activist W.E.B. Du Bois was one of the founders of the NAACP. He edited the organization's monthly magazine, *The Crisis*, for more than two decades.

Image courtesy of the Library of Congress

In 1903, the leading Black intellectual of the era, the scholar and activist W.E.B. Du Bois, linked this lack of political representation to a larger phenomenon in American society. For Du Bois, "despite compromise, war, and struggle," freedom had not been won for African Americans in the four decades following the Civil War. "Before the courts, both in law and custom, they stand on a different and peculiar basis. Taxation without representation is the rule of their political life." A "color line" had been drawn in the United States, Du Bois declared, and it constituted the most significant challenge facing the United States at the beginning of the twentieth century.[3]

Black Americans never accepted their exile from national politics. Instead, they engaged in a struggle for representation on several fronts. Black candidates ran for office. Black activists and organizations mobilized to pressure lawmakers in Congress to act on issues that mattered to them. And faced with a repressive system of segregation in the South, Black men and women sought new opportunities by migrating northward and westward in greater numbers than ever before, a movement that reestablished their communities in places where they could more freely exercise political power.

Exclusion

On the same day the *Sun* noted the absence of Black Members in the 57th Congress, the front-page headline described Republican efforts in the House to punish southern states for disenfranchising Black voters. In January 1901, Representative Edgar Dean Crumpacker of Indiana had raised the possibility of reducing southern influence in Congress based on Section 2 of the Fourteenth Amendment. Crumpacker proposed subtracting the number of disenfranchised voters from the population totals of individual states, which were used to determine the number of seats apportioned to each state in the House. The House voted down his measure. At the start of the 57th Congress, the Republican majority had increased significantly, and Crumpacker urged his colleagues to renew this effort. In early 1902, Charles William Frederick Dick of Ohio proposed an investigation to determine the relationship between the congressional representation of states that disenfranchised Black voters and the voting totals in those states' congressional elections. Ultimately, the proposed reduction efforts were rejected by the House. During debate, Representative Thomas Spight of Mississippi, a Confederate veteran turned newspaper publisher, boasted that the Mississippi state constitution was designed to disenfranchise: "I will not deny that the leading purpose was to eliminate the negro from the political equation." He added that the South would rather have no congressional representation than to "return again to the state of affairs existing in the reconstruction period" when African Americans exercised their right to vote.[4]

Amid Congress's failure to defend Black voting rights, the Supreme Court also made several rulings that enabled discrimination at the state and local level to flourish. In 1896, the *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision gave legal blessing to the system of segregation crystallizing in the South. The link between political exclusion and unequal justice was underscored two years later in *Williams v. Mississippi* (1898), when a Black man convicted of murder by an all-White jury appealed the decision, claiming that state laws disenfranchising Black voters had also stripped them from the jury pool, which ultimately denied Black defendants equal protection of the law. The court refused to acknowledge that Mississippi's state laws led solely to Black disenfranchisement and did not consider the juror selection process to be intentionally discriminatory. In *Giles v. Harris* (1903), Black voters in Alabama filed a class action suit claiming to have been discriminated against in attempting to register to vote. The Supreme Court ruled that regulating elections was beyond its jurisdiction, leaving the process in the hands of state legislators who, as its immediate beneficiaries, resoundingly approved of Black disenfranchisement.[5]

The Supreme Court's rulings left southern states with immense power just as a broad movement of social, economic, and political reform emerged to challenge corruption and inequality in American life. The progressive movement was composed of a diverse array of social reformers pushing for the modernization and democratization of American society. Their efforts included regulating the quality and production of food, establishing laws for child labor and guidelines for industrial safety, and implementing conservation, temperance, and even experimental social welfare programs. From the 1890s through World War I, progressives ushered in political reforms, including direct primary elections, the popular election of U.S. Senators, and women's suffrage.[6]

Black civil and political rights were not part of this agenda, however. Progressive reformers focused on the need for expertise in all fields, which provided a convenient justification for limiting the franchise to those citizens that most progressives considered qualified to vote. In practice, this movement often complemented Jim Crow, and the restrictive measures implemented in southern states at the turn of the twentieth century continued to deprive Black citizens of their civil and political rights for decades.[7] State and local laws, court decisions, and the ongoing, ever-present threat of violence established formidable impediments to Black political participation.

Despite these barriers, Black candidates continued to seek elected office, particularly during the first decade of the twentieth century. In 1902, Black Republican Alexander D. Dantzler was his party's nominee for a House seat representing the Seventh District of South Carolina against Democrat Asbury Francis Lever. Although Dantzler won just 167 votes to Lever's 4,220, Dantzler turned to the contested election process in the House, hoping that the Republican majority would admit him or declare the seat vacant. If the Black residents of the district were able to register to vote, Dantzler asserted, he would have won. Dantzler also claimed that South Carolina's election laws, which required literacy tests and property qualifications for prospective voters, were unconstitutional. When the House Committee on Elections dismissed the contest, it rejected Dantzler's argument and accepted the initial vote tally. The National Negro Suffrage League submitted a memorial to

Representative Joseph Weeks Babcock of Wisconsin, the head of the National Republican Congressional Committee, declaring that the Republican-led committee's report "establishes a precedent which, until reversed, will render of no effect any future contest from any of the disfranchised States of the South." During the next decade, Dantzler and several other Black candidates from South Carolina used the same strategy to contest the victories of their Democratic opponents. In each instance, the Committee on Elections cited the Dantzler case from 1902 as precedent and dismissed their claims, urging the contestants to take their case to the Supreme Court to rule on the constitutionality of South Carolina's election laws.[8]

While state laws enabled discrimination and disenfranchisement, southern Democrats worked to expand segregation into areas of federal jurisdiction. In 1913, Democrats gained control of Congress and the White House for the first time since the mid-1890s. The administration of President Woodrow Wilson proceeded to segregate executive departments. Congress, which had the responsibility of administering the nation's capital, also did much to promote the practice of segregation in Washington. From 1913 to 1921 and again after 1933, southerners largely controlled the committees and subcommittees that appropriated funds and oversaw the city government. In places where Congress could have overturned Jim Crow practices—in public parks, theaters, restaurants, and innumerable other locations, including the principal train depot and transportation hub of the city, Union Station—it did nothing.[9]

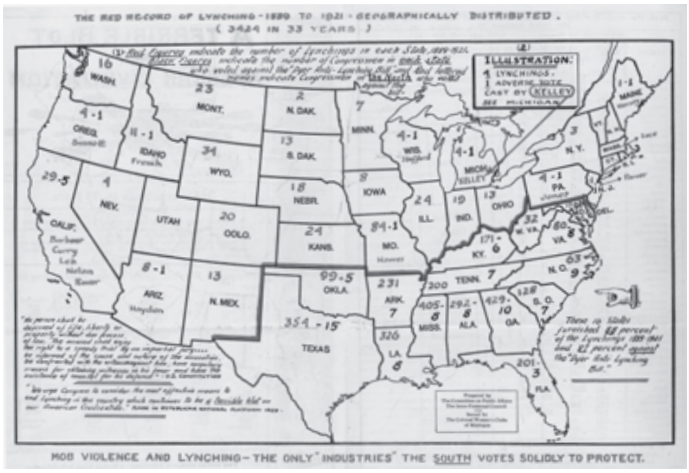
"Any Place that is North and East—And Not Dixie"

When the Republican Party acquiesced to the disenfranchisement of its southern supporters, the chances of electing Black candidates from the region swiftly vanished. The denial of Black political rights in the South, coupled with the intensifying social and economic repression, led many to leave the region. In his 1949 poem, "One-Way Ticket," Langston Hughes described the feeling of despair that had driven many to leave the South. Hughes, whose grandfather, Charles Henry Langston, was the brother of former Virginia Representative John M. Langston, identified Jim Crow laws, lynchings, and fear as the root causes of this demographic shift. Black Americans left the South, he wrote, and headed in the direction of "Any place that is North and East—And not Dixie."[10]

In 1910, nearly 90 percent of all African Americans lived in the South. Largely employed in agriculture, most faced economic uncertainty—especially as the boll weevil decimated cotton crops around the turn of the century. Crop prices fluctuated significantly during the first decades of the twentieth century, and indebtedness increased as many of the Black farmers who had been able to purchase property faced the prospect of losing their land and having to make other arrangements, such as tenant farming or sharecropping.[11]

In the next decade, Black migration intensified, as Black Americans sought jobs and new freedoms beyond the Jim Crow South. In the late 1910s, World War I accelerated this process. Black migrants found work in war production and other industries as wartime mobilization tightened the labor supply. Those labor shortages provided Black workers with jobs in the steel, shipbuilding, and automotive industries as well as in ammunition plants and meat-packing factories. Black communities grew rapidly in cities such as Chicago, Detroit, New York, and St. Louis, Missouri.[12]

Whether their motivation was economic or political, individual or communal, immense numbers of African Americans streamed northward. By one estimate, nearly 450,000 southern-born Black Americans left the South between 1910 and 1920; in the 1920s, more than 800,000



During the 67th Congress (1921–1923), the House Judiciary Committee considered antilynching legislation from one of its members, Missouri Representative Leonidas Carstarphen Dyer. The committee's records include this map of lynchings in each state from 1889 to 1921. A thick red line separates northern and southern states. According to the map issued by the Colored Women's Clubs of Michigan, southern states accounted for 88 percent of lynchings during this period and 87 percent of southern Representatives voted against Dyer's antilynching bill. Along the bottom of the page in capital letters the map proclaimed: "Mob violence and lynching—the only 'industries' the South votes solidly to protect."

Image courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration

made the same trek. Between 1910 and 1930, Detroit's African-American community grew 2,000 percent—from a population of 5,700 to about 120,000.[13]

Migration shaped the lives of the eight Black Members elected to Congress from 1928 to 1965. Five of the lawmakers had been born in the South. Some had participated in the Great Migration to northern and western urban areas with their parents—or later, as young adults—attracted by better economic, social, and cultural opportunities. Born in Florence, Alabama, in 1871, Oscar De Priest was seven when his family joined the exodus of some 60,000 Black families from the Lower Mississippi Valley to Kansas. He eventually moved to Chicago as a young man. His successor in the House, Arthur W. Mitchell, was born in Lafayette, Alabama, and taught school in the South before attending college in New York and Massachusetts, eventually settling in Chicago to practice law in the 1920s. William Dawson, who succeeded Mitchell, was born in Albany, Georgia, and moved to Chicago prior to World War I. Robert N.C. Nix Sr. of Pennsylvania was the son of Nelson Nix, who was born enslaved and became an educator and college president in Orangeburg, South Carolina. Robert Nix moved to New York City to live with extended family and eventually attended college and began his career as a lawyer in Philadelphia. Augustus F. "Gus" Hawkins was born in Shreveport, Louisiana, in 1907; his family moved to Los Angeles, California, when he was a teenager.[14]



This 1936 photo of the NAACP's headquarters at 69 Fifth Avenue in New York City shows one way the organization raised awareness of the persistent violence against African Americans. Each time a lynching occurred in the United States, a flag with the words "A Man Was Lynched Yesterday" was flown outside the office.

Image courtesy of the Library of Congress

Even those Black Members born and raised in the North and elected at mid-century were only one generation removed from the South. Adam Clayton Powell Jr. was born in New Haven, Connecticut, where his father was a minister, and moved to Manhattan when he was less than a year old. His father, however, had been born in Franklin County, Virginia, in 1865. In Detroit, Charles C. Diggs Jr. was elected in 1954 and John Conyers Jr. a decade later, but both had roots in the South. Diggs's family was originally from Mound Bayou, Mississippi. Conyers's father, John Conyers Sr., an organizer and union official in the United Auto Workers, had moved from Monroe, Georgia, to Detroit in 1926.[15]

Ultimately, the election of Black Representatives during the mid-twentieth century would have been all but impossible without the Great Migration. No longer subject to ubiquitous voter suppression, skyrocketing Black populations in northern cities created new constituencies and new opportunities for political activism and the pursuit of leadership.

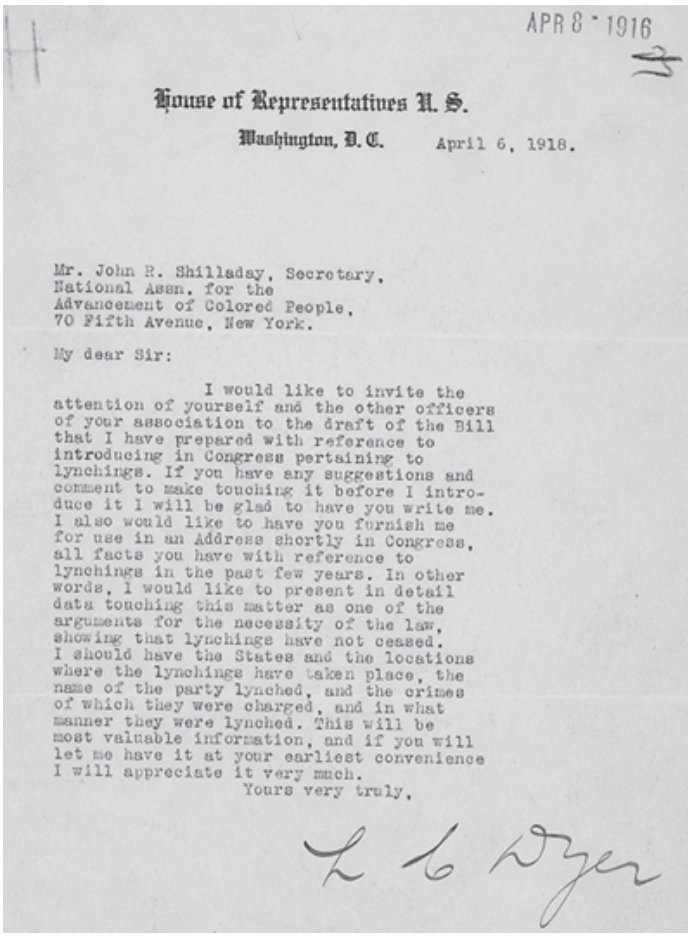
"This Shame and Disgrace among the Nations of the World"

Lynching was perhaps the issue around which Black Americans most urgently sought legislative change. In the absence of congressional representation, the NAACP embraced the mantle of advocating for the interests of Black Americans. Founded in 1909, the NAACP began a national campaign against lynching. In 1917, the organization led a silent march down Fifth Avenue in New York City to draw attention to the ongoing crisis for African Americans across the United States. The NAACP also attempted to lobby Congress for legislation, and one of its central goals was the passage of a federal antilynching law. The organization produced a report, *Thirty Years of Lynching in the United States, 1889–1919*, to spur congressional action, and sent James Weldon Johnson to Washington to serve as its congressional lobbyist. A poet, composer, writer, and activist, Johnson pushed lawmakers debating reapportionment to reduce southern representation in Congress as punishment for the region's disenfranchisement of Black people. He also decisively shaped the NAACP's antilynching campaign. Of his experience, Johnson recalled, "I tramped the corridors of the Capitol and the two office buildings so constantly that toward the end, I could, I think, have been able to find my way about blindfolded."[16]

Johnson and Atlanta civil rights activist and NAACP assistant executive secretary Walter White searched for allies on Capitol Hill. One potential ally was Republican Leonidas Carstarphen Dyer of Missouri. Since his election to the House in 1910, Dyer had made an effort to serve as an advocate for the Black community, particularly as the number of Black voters increased in his district. Dyer represented a thin sliver of the southern and eastern sections of St. Louis. Part of the heavily industrialized district hugged the Mississippi River and included growing African-American neighborhoods. In July 1917, in East St. Louis, Illinois, violence between White and Black residents led to 47 deaths, including 38 African-American men, women, and children. In a 1917 hearing to consider the creation of a joint committee to investigate the causes of the riot, Dyer decried the slaughter as one of "the most dastardly and most criminal outrages ever perpetrated in this country."[17]

The events were part of a wave of mob violence during the war in which White vigilantes targeted Black neighborhoods, demonstrating that violence against African Americans was just as possible in major cities as it was in the rural corners of the Deep South. Dyer introduced his antilynching measure on April 8, 1918. The bill was designed "to protect citizens of the United States against lynching in default of protection by the States." He sought to charge lynch mobs with capital murder, to try lynching cases in federal court, and to fine counties where lynchings occurred. The Dyer bill also mandated jail time and imposed a fine of up to $5,000 on state and local law enforcement officials who refused to make a reasonable effort to prevent a lynching or who surrendered a prisoner in their custody to a lynch mob. Finally, the bill sought to establish guidelines for fair courtroom proceedings by excluding lynch mob participants and supporters from juries.[18]

During debate, Dyer emphasized that lynching—and the refusal by states to prosecute the perpetrators—violated victims' Fourteenth Amendment rights to equal protection of the law. He cited child labor laws as well as Congress's December 1917 passage of the Eighteenth Amendment, which forbade the production, transportation, or sale of alcohol within the United States, as precedents for federal intervention. "If Congress has felt its duty to do these things, why should it not also assume jurisdiction and enact laws to protect the lives of citizens of the United States against lynch law and mob violence?" Dyer asked. In the Democratic-controlled 65th Congress (1917–1919), however, the measure remained stuck in the House Judiciary Committee.[19]



APR 8 - 1916

House of Representatives U. S.

Washington, D. C. April 6, 1918.

Mr. John R. Shilladay, Secretary,
National Assn. for the
Advancement of Colored People,
70 Fifth Avenue, New York.

My dear Sir:

I would like to invite the attention of yourself and the other officers of your association to the draft of the Bill that I have prepared with reference to introducing in Congress pertaining to lynchings. If you have any suggestions and comment to make touching it before I introduce it I will be glad to have you write me. I also would like to have you furnish me for use in an Address shortly in Congress, all facts you have with reference to lynchings in the past few years. In other words, I would like to present in detail data touching this matter as one of the arguments for the necessity of the law, showing that lynchings have not ceased. I should have the States and the locations where the lynchings have taken place, the name of the party lynched, and the crimes of which they were charged, and in what manner they were lynched. This will be most valuable information, and if you will let me have it at your earliest convenience I will appreciate it very much.

Yours very truly,

L C Dyer

In April 1918, Representative Leonidas Dyer wrote to the NAACP to assist in gathering information on underreported lynchings in the United States.

Congressman L.C. Dyer to John R. Shillady, 6 April 1918, NAACP Records, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, courtesy of the NAACP

In January 1920, with Republicans now in the majority, the Judiciary Committee held a hearing on antilynching bills introduced by Dyer and several other Members. James Weldon Johnson appeared before the committee—providing statistics on lynchings and presenting newspaper coverage of these incidents. In December 1921, Dyer introduced another antilynching bill, and under the NAACP's intense lobbying, it came before the full House in January 1922. Southern Democrats decried the measure, mustering arguments about the rights of states under the Constitution. Hatton William Sumners of Texas, a Dallas attorney who later served 16 years as chair of the House Judiciary Committee, led the opposition. Sumners positioned the South as the true victim and likened the bill to an act of legislative "mob" violence; he suggested Congress let southern states resolve the lynching issue on their own.[20]

On January 26, 1922, several hundred African-American spectators packed the House Gallery, intensely monitoring the debate. On several occasions they cheered loudly in violation of gallery rules. Some traded barbs with southern Members on the House Floor, whose speeches repeatedly referred to NAACP activists as "race agitators." The Dyer bill passed the House that afternoon. The NAACP proceeded to engage in a formidable public campaign, but with southern Democrats in the Senate obstructing debate on the bill and threatening to filibuster, Senate Republicans declined to take up the fight.[21]

Dyer reintroduced antilynching legislation at the opening of the 68th Congress (1923–1925) and two more times before the end of the decade. Despite the setbacks in Congress, Johnson called upon "those who hold dear the institutions of our country and who feel this shame and disgrace among the nations of the world" to remain committed to federal action. He continued the NAACP campaign throughout most of the 1920s, testifying at a 1926 Senate Judiciary subcommittee hearing to provide updated figures on lynchings in the South. Despite his efforts, the NAACP could not prod Congress to act definitively to protect the safety of African Americans.[22]

Pivotal Decade

The 1920s began with the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment, which guaranteed women's suffrage. Passed by Congress in 1919, the amendment made no reference to voting rights for Black Americans. In fact, southern Democrats often used congressional debates on women's voting rights to warn of what they considered the dangerous potential for Black enfranchisement if such an amendment were to be added to the Constitution. The first woman elected to Congress, Representative Jeannette Rankin of Montana, used discriminatory ideas about race to appeal for support from southern Members for the cause of women's suffrage. She acknowledged and sympathized with the prejudices of her southern colleagues, making the case that White women were more prepared for democratic participation than African Americans. "The women of the



Founded in 1909, the NAACP became a primary advocacy group for early civil rights causes. The 1929 annual meeting in Cleveland, Ohio, celebrated the twentieth a
left), and Walter White (first row, ninth from left).

Image courtesy of the Library of Congress

South have stood by you through every trial," she implored southern Representatives. "Are you going to deny them the equipment with which to help you effectively simply because the enfranchisement of a child-race 50 years ago brought you a problem you were powerless to handle?" Even in a moment of change when women across the country were guaranteed the right to vote in national elections, the possibilities for fundamental reforms designed to benefit African Americans were few and far between.[23]

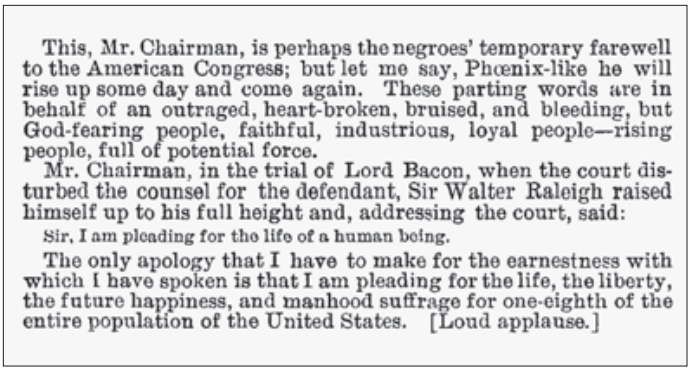
While none of the 11 women elected to the House of Representatives during the 1920s were African American, Black women aspired to win a seat in Congress. In 1924, Lucille Randolph joined her husband A. Philip Randolph, the nation's leading Black trade unionist, as Socialist candidates in two adjacent Manhattan congressional districts. Lucille Randolph focused her campaign on the need for federal action against lynching, pledging to support the Dyer bill if elected. But the Randolphs' third-party bids each received just three percent of the vote. In 1933, Black women activists in New York organized the Harlem Congressional League with the goal of eventually electing a Black woman to Congress.[24]

With little chance of passing legislation to protect the civil and political rights of African Americans, several Members of Congress tried to use other means to address these issues in the 1920s. In 1920, Representative George Holden Tinkham of Massachusetts briefly revived the congressional apportionment reduction efforts of 20 years earlier, calling for investigations into voter disenfranchisement in the South. The House Committee on the Census held hearings on congressional reapportionment, and witnesses included the NAACP's Johnson and White and other legal advocates. They called on the committee to penalize southern states that continued to disenfranchise Black residents by reducing their seats in the House. Tinkham repeatedly invoked Section 2 of the Fourteenth Amendment as a mandate for Congress to take punitive action.[25]

The demographic transformations of northern and midwestern cities raised the possibility that Black Americans could have political influence, and perhaps once again



anniversary of the organization and was attended by NAACP staff, including W.E.B. Du Bois (first row, fifth from left), James Weldon Johnson (first row, sixth from



This, Mr. Chairman, is perhaps the negroes' temporary farewell to the American Congress; but let me say, Phœnix-like he will rise up some day and come again. These parting words are in behalf of an outraged, heart-broken, bruised, and bleeding, but God-fearing people, faithful, industrious, loyal people—rising people, full of potential force.

Mr. Chairman, in the trial of Lord Bacon, when the court disturbed the counsel for the defendant, Sir Walter Raleigh raised himself up to his full height and, addressing the court, said:

Sir, I am pleading for the life of a human being.

The only apology that I have to make for the earnestness with which I have spoken is that I am pleading for the life, the liberty, the future happiness, and manhood suffrage for one-eighth of the entire population of the United States. [Loud applause.]

On January 29, 1901, George Henry White of North Carolina gave his valedictory address as the sole Black Member of the 56th Congress (1899–1901), promising the return of African Americans to Congress. His speech, which filled more than four pages in the *Congressional Record*, insisted upon civil and political rights for African Americans.

Congressional Record, House, 56th Cong., 2nd sess. (29 January 1901)

elect their own to speak for them in Congress. The *New York Amsterdam News* made a public appeal for more Black congressional candidates. The increase in New York's Black population had made victory possible, argued the paper, but Black voters deserved to have a Black candidate to "support like the Italians support and elect Congressman Fiorello La Guardia," who represented East Harlem in Congress.[26]

In the 1920s, Black candidates sought elected office in Chicago, where the city's history of Black municipal officeholding laid the groundwork for congressional candidates. The Republican Party led the way in Chicago, with a formidable machine under Mayor William Hale Thompson and elected officials like alderman Oscar De Priest. But northern Democrats also recognized the potential in the city's Black electorate. In 1924, the Democratic Party nominated Black attorney Earl B. Dickerson to challenge the longtime incumbent, Republican Martin Barnaby Madden, for a Chicago seat in the House.[27]

It was in Chicago that a Black candidate finally broke through the color line established by Jim Crow disenfranchisement. In 1928, when Representative Madden died during his twelfth term, Republicans chose the Alabama-born De Priest as their candidate for Illinois's First District. De Priest had risen in the ranks of urban machine politicians and gathered support by helping to deliver jobs and services to the Black migrants transforming the city's South Side. De Priest's election to the 71st Congress (1929–1931) served as a marker for a new era in American politics, as a Black candidate had succeeded beyond the geographical boundaries of the South.

THE "FULFILLMENT OF WHITE'S PROPHECY"

In his last speech on the House Floor, in 1901, George Henry White of North Carolina—the final Black lawmaker elected in the nineteenth century—had predicted the return of Black Members to Congress. Oscar De Priest arrived on Capitol Hill 28 years later. Six months before his election, the *Chicago Defender* hailed the candidate as the "fulfillment of White's prophecy." African Americans across the country celebrated De Priest's victory, and he recognized his responsibility to act as a voice for Black Americans beyond his district, especially those still residing in the South. "It's a long, hard fight down there," he acknowledged, "and I appreciate the fact the eyes of America are centered upon me. Prejudice has got to be broken down in this country and I've got to help do it."[28]

Taking office in 1929, De Priest's first term coincided with the stock market collapse and the onset of the Great Depression, which had devastating effects on his Chicago constituents. During his three terms in office, De Priest represented a district facing economic upheaval and undergoing a political transformation. He navigated a world in which his voters actively questioned his party's handling of the economy, and his Black constituents, in particular, began to leave the Republican Party in response to the New Deal policies of Democratic President Franklin D. Roosevelt.

Black Representation Returns

Southern lawmakers reacted to De Priest's election with disdain. In December 1928, before De Priest was even sworn in as a Member of the House, third-term Representative Miles Clayton Allgood of Georgia resigned his seat on the House Committee on Enrolled Bills when he learned that De Priest had been assigned to that panel. "It is largely an honorary committee," Allgood explained, "and, so far as I am concerned, all honor departed from it when De Priest was made a member."[29]

Reached for comment by a reporter, De Priest responded, "Who cares?" But his remarks belied the fact that during his six years on Capitol Hill, De Priest worked to combat both openly racist actions by House colleagues and more subtle slights that chipped away at his equal standing on Capitol Hill. De Priest responded with indignation to both types of attacks and used the levers of power at his disposal—however limited they were—to seek retribution. He also invoked the privileges of membership in the House to

make clear to his colleagues that he was willing to challenge discrimination within the Capitol and beyond.[30]

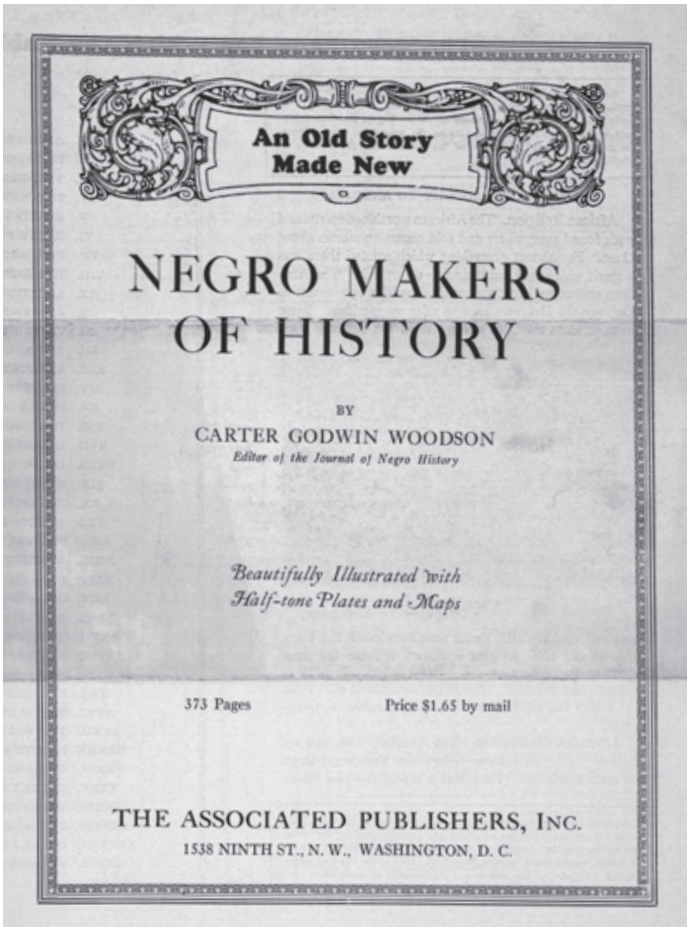
On February 20, 1930, De Priest was part of a celebration of "Negro History Week" held under the auspices of Black historian Carter G. Woodson's Association for the Study of Negro Life and History. Former Members John R. Lynch and Thomas E. Miller attended the event; Henry Plummer Cheatham had to decline the invitation after sustaining injuries in a car crash. Before the meeting, De Priest brought Lynch and Miller, as well as several other guests including Woodson, to the Speaker's private dining room in the Capitol. At the gathering a short while later, the former lawmakers told the assembled crowd of their time in office. De Priest used the occasion to call for the enforcement of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments, pointing out that Congress had no problem appropriating money for the enforcement of the Eighteenth Amendment prohibiting the sale of alcohol.[31]

In the House, De Priest built on the legacy of his predecessors, including Lynch, Miller, and Cheatham. He introduced an antilynching bill and proposed a measure that would enable defendants to appeal for a change of trial venue if they were concerned about discrimination from a state or local court based on "race, color, or creed." Aiming to leverage the power of the federal government in overcoming discrimination, he recognized the need to address federal programs first. De Priest was critical of the New Deal and amended a funding bill to prevent discriminatory hiring practices at the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), one of the Roosevelt administration's high-profile public work initiatives.[32]

De Priest tried to eliminate discrimination in public accommodations and waged a battle to desegregate the House restaurant in the U.S. Capitol. In 1934, a member of De Priest's staff was denied access to the White-only dining room. De Priest had eaten in the restaurant with his staff before without incident and objected to the enforcement of the policy in his absence. He introduced a resolution for the House to investigate the practice of exclusion, asking his colleagues, "If we allow segregation and the denial of constitutional rights under the Dome of the Capitol, where in God's name will we get them?" Ultimately, the House approved the resolution, but the committee report tacitly supported the restaurant's policy. Whether on or off Capitol Hill, De Priest found that challenging segregation from the House was often an uphill battle.[33]

Black Americans and the Democratic Party

In 1930, former Representative John Lynch described the plight of Black voters in decidedly unfavorable terms. They were, he observed, forced to choose "the least of two evils." Republicans had become largely indifferent to the needs of African Americans, once a core party constituency. The only other option for Black voters, Lynch said, was a Democratic Party as openly opposed to their interests as it had been since before the Civil War. "So if some of us want to punish the Republican party we can't do it without endorsing, approving, ratifying and condoning the denial of every one of our human rights and every wrong which we as a race have been forced suffer," he concluded. But by the 1930s, the Great Migration and the Great Depression would transform the northern wing of the Democratic Party and give rise to new forms of Black political participation that Lynch did not foresee at the start of that tumultuous



Historian and educator Carter G. Woodson's scholarly work explored the history of African Americans in the United States.

Library of Congress, Rare Book and Special Collections Division, Printed Ephemera Collection



On February 23, 1948, southern state governors met with Democratic National Committee chair, Senator James Howard McGrath of Rhode Island (seated), to voice opposition to the civil rights policies of the Harry S. Truman administration. Standing from left to right: Benjamin Travis Laney Jr. of Arkansas, Robert Gregg Cherry of North Carolina, William Preston Lane Jr. of Maryland, James Strom Thurmond of South Carolina, and Beauford Halbert Jester of Texas.

Image courtesy of the Library of Congress

decade. These changes also opened new opportunities for ambitious Black politicians such as Arthur Mitchell and William Dawson, who identified a pathway to power through a rapidly changing Democratic Party.[34]

Oscar De Priest learned this firsthand, and Illinois's First District provided a window into the process of Black political realignment in northern cities. Upon arriving in Chicago, most Black Americans had followed long-standing tradition and embraced the Republican Party. The local GOP welcomed their votes and encouraged their support by elevating men such as De Priest to positions of prominence. But in 1934, De Priest faced Mitchell, a Chicago Democrat who had left the Republican Party two years earlier. Mitchell responded to the overtures of a Democratic Party that was actively courting Black voters, seeking to unite them with White immigrant voters in a new coalition that was committed to supporting an active government solution to the country's economic despair. This development coincided with the election of President Roosevelt, who at the time of Mitchell's political conversion was about to initiate a massive spending effort to combat the problems of the Great Depression. Mitchell touted his support for the New Deal on the campaign trail and claimed that Black Americans would be better served by voting Democratic. De Priest rejected these arguments and claimed that Roosevelt's New Deal legislation had increased Black unemployment. He also criticized New Deal agricultural policy, which he claimed was hurting Black farmworkers in the South. Mitchell won the November contest by a slim margin, becoming the first Black Democrat elected to Congress in American history. His victory signaled the beginning of a long-term shift in Black political allegiance to the Democratic Party.[35]

The expansion of the federal government under Roosevelt produced a vast array of programs that cemented new bonds between Washington and the people of Mitchell's district. The New Deal prioritized economic relief for those in need, an important policy goal to the countless families Mitchell represented who had left the South in recent years and who often faced discrimination in the labor market as they sought to establish themselves in the Windy City. The New Deal also established an extensive jobs program delivered through a slew of new federal agencies, including the CCC, the Public Works Administration (PWA), and the Works Progress Administration. While discrimination remained—as De Priest emphasized with his CCC amendment—Black workers generally benefited from these programs. The PWA notably tried to employ Black workers in proportion to their share of the local population, thereby ensuring fair access to work, and helped construct public buildings worth millions of dollars in Black neighborhoods.[36]

Black voters nationwide began leaving the Republican Party because of the growing perception that local Democratic organizations better represented their interests. Local patronage positions and nationally administered emergency relief programs in Depression-era Chicago and other cities, for instance, proved crucial in attracting African-American support. There were limits to the New Deal's aid to Black Americans, however. The protections of the Social Security program did not apply to workers in agriculture, for instance, thus excluding from a key economic security program the large subsection of Black workers who still toiled on farms. Moreover, federal funds and jobs were channeled largely through state and local governments, which enabled varying amounts of discrimination. While New Deal programs typically failed to equally distribute economic relief to Black Americans, particularly in southern states, the tangible assistance was significant. Black voters began consistently voting Democratic by the late 1940s, and the party attracted more support from African Americans in the ensuing decades.[37]

While John Lynch may have misjudged the capacity of Democrats in the North to appeal to Black voters, his

assessment was more accurate when it came to the southern Democrats who held significant levers of power in the legislative process—enough to hinder any New Deal legislation they opposed. Having already narrowed the benefits of Social Security legislation, southern Democrats worked in the House Rules Committee to ensure that the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 excluded agricultural, domestic, and service workers—exempting many Black workers in the South from the benefits of the law, such as the minimum wage.[38]

Northern New Dealers in Congress were largely supportive of Black civil and political rights. In the late 1930s and early 1940s, several attempts were made to pass antilynching legislation. But the southern wing of the Democratic Party obstructed these efforts, just as they consistently used procedural maneuvers to ensure that the core economic New Deal legislation did not disrupt the racial hierarchy in the South. By withholding their votes, they could sink administration proposals with ease.[39]

The War for Democracy on Capitol Hill

Black Americans continued to remake the demographic and political landscapes of the United States after the country entered World War II in December 1941. The recovery initiated by the New Deal stabilized American society but had been unable to end the Great Depression; only wartime mobilization did that. The massive federal effort to retool the American economy and wage a two-theater war required all hands to work, and it drew another wave of migrants out of the South in search of new opportunities in war production industries. During the war and the rest of the 1940s, nearly 1.5 million African Americans followed well-worn paths out of the South and to the destination cities of two decades earlier, such as New York and Chicago, and to new industrial centers along the West Coast, including California's Los Angeles and Oakland and Seattle, Washington. All told, during the roughly two decades of migration accelerated by the two world wars, more than 3.5 million African Americans emigrated from the South to start new lives in the urban North and the West.[40]

As Black Americans reconstituted their communities in new places, they exercised their civic voice in new ways. Many embraced wartime rhetoric that depicted the United States as being in a fight to preserve democracy against an avowedly racist foe in Nazi Germany. The *Pittsburgh Courier* coined the wartime slogan of Black America when it declared a "Double V" campaign—victory over fascism abroad and victory over racism at home.[41]

The federal government's dominance in the wartime economy opened new opportunities for Black Americans to challenge entrenched systems of labor market discrimination. The military effort necessitated the hiring of hundreds of thousands of workers in factories across the nation, but most employers still relegated Black workers to the lowest-paid positions, if they hired them at all. In 1941, A. Philip Randolph, the longtime labor activist and head of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, called for African Americans to march on Washington to demand an end to the discriminatory hiring practices in those federally funded defense production industries.[42]

To forestall a mass protest in the capital during wartime, Roosevelt issued Executive Order 8802 on June 25, 1941, which declared "full participation in the national defense program by all citizens of the United States, regardless of race, creed, color, or national origin," based on "the firm belief that the democratic way of life within the Nation can be defended successfully only with the help and support of all groups within its borders." The order required that the federal government, unions, and defense industries "provide for the full and equitable participation of all workers." It also created the Fair Employment Practices Committee (FEPC) to investigate complaints about discrimination in hiring.[43]



This 1942 photograph of a military policeman astride his motorcycle on a Columbus, Georgia, military base underscores the reality that Jim Crow practices prevalent in civilian life were also a part of military service. Nearly one million African Americans served in World War II, most in the segregated U.S. Army.

Image courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration

While Black labor leaders forced the President's hand on job discrimination, Representative Arthur Mitchell highlighted the ways discriminatory practices by the United States and its allies undermined the war effort. For example, in 1942, Representative Mitchell repeatedly linked wartime setbacks suffered by the British to their persistent bigotry. Mitchell noted that the colonial power failed in Singapore "due in part to its own discriminations." He found potential similarities in his own country, where Black Americans suffered under Jim Crow and experienced unequal treatment in so many aspects of life. "America might suffer a like fate," Mitchell warned, "if we insist upon destroying the morale of one-tenth of its fighting strength." The American call to arms, Mitchell noted bitterly, "is for white people only, except where Negroes are needed to do the most menial service. Is this democracy?" To Mitchell, if the United States was going to assume a new role of global leadership, the nation must reflect on its shortcomings.



A March 1949 Herblock cartoon depicts President Harry S. Truman and "John Q. Public" inspecting worm-ridden apples symbolizing Truman's Fair Deal policies such as civil rights and rent controls. The worm labeled "Coalition" represents the alliance between Republicans and southern Democrats that successfully blocked many of Truman's initiatives.

Image courtesy of the Library of Congress

"While we are adjusting affairs the world over," he said, "we must not fail to adjust affairs in our own country and in our own hearts."[44]

Black lawmakers also couched their critique of disenfranchisement in this international perspective. In 1943, the House debated a bill to outlaw the poll tax. Although just a first-term legislator at the time, Representative William Dawson, who had succeeded Mitchell in the House, told his new colleagues that he knew "more about what is the real ground of this subject matter than any man in this assembly." From his early life in Georgia, he had seen the restrictive effect of the poll tax, which he said violated "the true spirit of the Constitution of the United States." Five months later, Dawson testified on the bill before the Senate Judiciary Committee. Again, he spoke of the constitutional right to vote withheld from African Americans, but this time he connected this situation to the significance of the concept of "democracy" around the globe. If the poll tax survived, Dawson warned, "our vaunted government of the people, by the people and for the people is a joke to the rest of the world," as it will remain unable to guarantee all the people "their sacred right of franchise." The 1944 Supreme Court decision in *Smith v. Allwright* outlawed the White primary, ending a key practice that had perpetuated the dominance of segregationists in the Democratic Party. Southern states remained highly capable of ensuring Black disenfranchisement, however, even as Black soldiers gave their lives for democracy.[45]

THE UPHILL BATTLE FOR CIVIL RIGHTS ON CAPITOL HILL

The postwar period began with a renewed emphasis in Washington, DC, on the need for civil rights legislation. Reflecting the increasing influence of Black voters within the Democratic Party, President Harry S. Truman organized the President's Committee on Civil Rights in 1947. The committee drafted a report outlining an agenda for civil rights reform which included federal antilynching legislation, voting rights protections, a permanent FEPC, the elimination of the poll tax, and the creation of an effective civil rights division in the U.S. Department of Justice. President Truman called for congressional action on these recommendations and later used a July 1948 executive order to desegregate the military.[46]

Civil rights were central to President Truman's re-election campaign in 1948. William Dawson praised the President's record, declaring that his administration had made a

"strike at the heart of some of the glaring inequalities in the treatment of our citizens." Representative Adam Clayton Powell Jr., however, was more reluctant to celebrate Truman's actions.[47]

Powell had joined Dawson in the House in 1945. Elected from a Harlem district, he was the first Black Member to represent New York in Congress. When he arrived in the 79th Congress (1945–1947), it was the first time that two Black Members had served simultaneously since the 51st Congress (1889–1891). Throughout 1948, Powell urged Truman and the Democratic Party to earn the votes they sought from Black Americans. "Negroes will not be satisfied with words. Negroes have been studied, commissioned and conferenced almost to death. The time has long passed for action," Powell said. He also confronted northern Democrats for their complicity in maintaining segregation. On the House Floor, Powell criticized those who blamed the "Solid South" for Jim Crow as a way to evade their own "individual cowardice, bigotry, and hypocrisy." Powell denounced what he called a "bipartisan Jim Crow policy" in Congress and ultimately withheld a public statement in support of the Truman campaign until October 1948.[48]

Democratic divisions were exacerbated by a faction of southern Democrats who were upset with the Truman administration's civil rights efforts and defected to form the States' Rights Democratic Party. These dissidents, known as Dixiecrats, sought to preserve and maintain segregation. They nominated South Carolina governor and future U.S. Senator James Strom Thurmond as their presidential candidate in 1948. When Thurmond called for President Truman to engage in a public debate in front of southern audiences, Dawson stepped forward to criticize the very notion. "We're interested in a man's position and not his oratory, and Truman's position on civil rights is well known," he said. "How can the subject of human rights," he asked, "be debatable anyhow?"[49]

After Truman prevailed in the 1948 election, Democrats and the press cited Black voters as a key constituency in this triumph. Dawson had addressed the Democratic convention in Philadelphia to support Truman's nomination and worked diligently to generate Black support for the President's re-election campaign. While most of the southern Democrats who bolted to the Dixiecrats returned to the party following the election, the third-party effort showed just how far congressional foes of civil rights would go to impede change and limit the role of the federal government in guaranteeing equality.[50]



This hand fan commemorates the 85th Congress (1957–1959), the first Congress since Reconstruction with four Black lawmakers serving simultaneously.

Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

Eager to alter this dynamic and to stake their claim to a place in the emerging postwar political order, more Black candidates sought congressional seats in the urban North. In 1948, 10 Black candidates ran for House seats under the banner of former Vice President Henry Wallace's Progressive Party, including Joseph H. Rainey, who was unsuccessful in his pursuit of a seat representing a Philadelphia congressional district. Rainey, a Philadelphia judge, was the president of the city's NAACP branch and the namesake grandson of the first African American elected to the House, Joseph H. Rainey of South Carolina. The GOP put forward Black candidates in northern cities as well. In 1950, for example, several Black Republicans were nominated to run for seats in New York, Philadelphia, St. Louis, and Cleveland, Ohio.[51]

Only two new Black Members, however, joined Dawson and Powell on Capitol Hill during the 1950s: Democrats Charles Diggs of Michigan and Robert Nix of Pennsylvania. Though limited in number, the presence of Black legislators,



Minister and activist Adam Clayton Powell Jr. of New York relished his position as a national spokesperson for the advancement of African-American rights. In this 1950 photo, Powell reviews a fair employment practices bill with his colleagues on the House Education and Labor Committee. Left to right: Hugo Sheridan Sims Jr. of South Carolina, Samuel Kerns McConnell Jr. of Pennsylvania, Thomas Jefferson Steed of Oklahoma, John Lesinski of Michigan, Powell, and Thruston Ballard Morton of Kentucky.

Image courtesy of the Library of Congress

coupled with the growing strength of a grassroots movement for civil rights, ultimately led to legislative victories that guaranteed Black civil and political rights to an extent unknown since Reconstruction.

Institutional Opportunities

The 81st Congress (1949–1951) began with a landmark appointment when the Democratic Caucus named William Dawson to lead the Expenditures in the Executive Departments Committee (renamed the Committee on Government Operations in 1952), making him the first Black Member to chair a standing committee in Congress. Dawson wielded significant power by conducting oversight of federal agency spending, holding investigations of executive department agencies and programs to audit federal appropriations. Except for the Republican-controlled 83rd Congress (1953–1955), Dawson held the post for the rest of his career—serving 10 nonconsecutive terms and becoming the Black Member with the longest tenure as chair of a committee.[52]

Dawson's committee chairmanship elevated his profile on the Hill, but he remained one of only four Black Members of Congress in the 1950s. During their service, Dawson, Powell, Diggs, and Nix outlined a legislative agenda that went beyond civil rights and voting rights laws directed at the South. Black legislators knew that racism and discrimination were not merely regional dilemmas. After all, the cities they represented were rife with discriminatory practices, whether codified in law or simply in the everyday actions of citizens. With that reality in mind, the lawmakers introduced legislation to create federal housing initiatives, shape urban renewal efforts, and promote fair employment practices. While most of these bills were never signed into law, they contained ideas and spoke to priorities that became central to the Democratic agenda later in the 1960s.

Employment discrimination remained a persistent concern of Black legislators. The threat of mass protest had led to the creation of the FEPC during the war, but southern Democrats and Republicans blocked efforts to make it a permanent tool in the fight against workplace bias. In 1948, Powell tried to add an FEPC amendment to legislation creating the European Recovery Plan, also known as the Marshall Plan, but the House voted it down.[53]

In the 81st Congress, however, Powell introduced a bill to prohibit discrimination in hiring and to establish a permanent FEPC to enforce the ban. Powell was named the chair of the Committee on Education and Labor's special subcommittee to consider his proposal. When he took the gavel, Powell became the first Black Member to lead a subcommittee hearing on proposed legislation, which he did in May 1949. He resisted many amendments and other maneuvers by opponents who aimed to weaken the bill in the House. Before the full chamber approved the bill, however, the opposition was able to eliminate most of its strong enforcement provisions, and the Senate declined to act on it.[54]

Black Members also backed initiatives to shape housing policy in American cities, from public housing to urban revitalization efforts. Powell unsuccessfully attempted to add antidiscrimination riders to housing bills several times. In 1958, he introduced legislation to increase the federal reimbursement for businesses uprooted and displaced by urban renewal projects. Nix drafted measures to set standards for urban renewal proposals and appropriate federal funds for new projects. Nix and Diggs introduced bills that were precursors to the Area Redevelopment Act of 1961, which was designed to focus federal resources on the specific needs of a particular city or region.[55]

As the Senate persistently obstructed civil rights legislation, advocates sought other ways to initiate reform. Powell developed a creative legislative solution for bills up for consideration, which involved attaching a rider prohibiting federal funds for institutions that promoted

or endorsed segregation. In 1946, he first deployed this approach, which came to be known as the "Powell amendment," on a funding bill for school lunches that became law. At the time, Powell's move deferred to the imperatives of a segregated school system by requiring matching appropriations for Black and White students. He also introduced a similar amendment to a 1950 education bill, aiming to ensure that it prohibited discrimination in the distribution of school funds based on race or color.[56]

Beginning in 1955, Powell vowed to attach his rider to every education bill, starting with appropriations for school construction. But he reframed the amendment, consulting with the NAACP to devise wording that would undermine school segregation more directly. Instead of banning discrimination in funding, the new Powell amendment prohibited federal funding for schools that continued to segregate their facilities. Many Members agreed with his principled stand, though they thought that the amendment would make the passage of the bill extremely unlikely, thereby undermining the appropriation of necessary federal investment in schools. Powell responded to his critics on the House Floor in June 1956. He urged his northern Democratic colleagues not to let the southern wing of the party block the education bill. He refuted claims that the federal government did not have the authority to enforce such a measure, quoting the Government Accounting Office which had affirmed Congress's power to regulate the distribution of funding in this way. For Powell, if Congress did not act to end school segregation, America's foreign policy would also suffer. "It would hold the United States and democracy up to ridicule before the whole world as a nation of pretense and preachments but not practices."[57]

Representative Dawson opposed Powell's effort, predicting the amendment would erode support for the school construction bill. Ultimately, the measure was defeated in the House, an outcome which Dawson claimed "vindicated my judgement." He criticized Powell for missing the long-term implications of his actions and sought a less confrontational approach to ensure that neither Black nor White students "will suffer cruel educational deficiencies."[58]

Like Powell, Charles Diggs used his seat in Congress to highlight the needs of Black Americans well beyond his Detroit district. In August 1955, the murder of Emmett Till, a 14-year-old boy from Chicago who was visiting family in Mississippi, once again brought national attention to the barbaric practice of lynching which remained a part of the Jim Crow system of segregation and repression. Determined to expose the brutality of the act, Till's mother allowed the national press to photograph his mutilated body, and thousands of mourners streamed past the open casket.[59]

Representative Diggs accompanied Till's mother to the September 1955 trial in Sumner, Mississippi, which resulted in the acquittal of the two accused murderers. Diggs described the trial as "so filled with perjury, illegal and unethical practices of withholding evidence that undoubtedly a democratic nation could not imagine happening in its halls of justice." Though he did not directly intervene in the case, Diggs noted that the Black community in Sumner welcomed his presence, as he was "a representative in the Federal Government—one of their own—and he was on the scene with them." In addition to standing up for the Till family, Diggs pushed the Department of Justice to investigate the ongoing disenfranchisement of Black voters in Mississippi and proposed the House unseat the state's delegation as long as these practices continued.[60]

Diggs's involvement contrasted sharply with that of William Dawson, who represented the Chicago district where Till's mother lived. Dawson did not publicly comment on Till's lynching, although he did provide financial assistance to Till's mother. This was not enough for the NAACP. In a 1956 open letter to Dawson, the organization criticized the Chicago Representative for not



The trial of Roy Bryant and J.W. Milam for the murder of Emmett Till was held in September 1955 in Sumner, Mississippi. Till's mother Mamie Bradley (third left) received support from Representative Charles C. Diggs Jr. of Michigan (second right), and activist Dr. T.R.M. Howard (third right) of Mound Bayou, Mississippi, founder of the Regional Council of Negro Leadership.

Memphis Press-Scimitar Newspaper Morgue, Special Collections Department, The University of Memphis Libraries

speaking out on Till's murder and denounced the lawmaker for "silence, compromise, and meaningless moderation" on civil rights matters.[61]

Black Members were joined by some of their White colleagues in introducing another round of antilynching bills in the two decades following World War II. Whereas the Dyer bill in the 1920s and several proposals in the late 1930s were subject to extended debates on the floor and several hearings, the antilynching efforts of the late 1950s and early 1960s did not receive similar scrutiny. The result was the same, however; southern Democrats maneuvered against these bills in the House and found ways to block any antilynching legislation in the Senate.

Congress, Committees, and Civil Rights Legislation

Congress lagged behind the presidency, the judiciary and, often, public sentiment during much of the postwar civil rights movement. Southern Democrats still wielded power on Capitol Hill, exerting largely unchecked influence as committee chairs in an era that saw the apex of committee power in Congress. This power was in no small part the product of decades of Black disenfranchisement in the South. The Democratic Party dominated elections in the South, and Democratic House candidates achieved consistent electoral victories without opposition. Starting in 1931, apart from the 80th (1947–1949) and 83rd Congresses, Democrats held the majority in the House. Southern Democrats from safe seats accrued seniority and rose within the ranks of the party, inheriting the gavels of numerous House committees. They were well-positioned by the 1950s to obstruct and defeat civil rights bills through parliamentary maneuvers, filibusters, and the committee approval process.[62]



As chair of the House Judiciary Committee, Emanuel Celler of New York was a prime mover behind the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

Image courtesy of the Library of Congress

Notwithstanding Dawson's position as chair of Government Operations, the small number of Black Members found it difficult to exert power in committees in the 1950s. In the 84th Congress (1955–1957), for instance, when Democrats regained the majority after a brief period of Republican control, southern Members opposed to Black civil rights chaired 12 of the 19 House committees, including some of the most influential panels: Education and Labor; Interstate and Foreign Commerce; Rules; and Ways and Means. The powerful coalition of southern Democrats and northern Republicans that had formed to oppose the economic and social programs of the New Deal continued to impede the work of civil rights reform well into the 1960s.

For most of this period, the House Judiciary Committee, under the leadership of Chair Emanuel Celler of New York, offered civil rights reformers one of the few friendly committee forums. A Judiciary subcommittee held hearings in July 1955 on more than 45 civil rights bills introduced in the 84th Congress. On the House Floor, a bipartisan group of Members emerged as civil rights advocates. Democrats such as Celler, Clifford Philip Case of New Jersey, and Helen Gahagan Douglas of California, were joined by Republicans such as Jacob Koppel Javits of New York, Hugh Doggett Scott Jr. of Pennsylvania, and Frances Payne Bolton of Ohio. In the mid-1950s, Case, Javits, and Scott were elected to the Senate and influenced that chamber's civil rights agenda.[63]

But no matter how much support rank-and-file Members provided, any measure that passed out of Judiciary was sent to the House Rules Committee, which directed legislation onto the floor and structured bills for debate. Chaired by arch-segregationist Howard Worth Smith of Virginia, this influential panel repeatedly sabotaged civil rights proposals; Smith either weakened bills or refused to consider them altogether. He often shuttered committee operations, retreating to his farm in Virginia's horse country to stymie deliberations. When he explained one of his absences by noting that he needed to inspect a burned-down barn, Leo Elwood Allen of Illinois, the ranking Republican on the Rules Committee, remarked, "I knew the Judge was opposed to the civil rights bill. But I didn't think he would commit arson to beat it."[64]

The Senate's antimajoritarian structure magnified the power of pro-segregation conservatives. In contrast to the rules of the House, which strictly limited Members' ability to speak on the floor, the Senate's practice of allowing Members to hold the floor without interruption played into the hands of obstructionists. The filibuster—a Senate tactic that allowed a Senator or a group of Senators to prevent a vote on a bill—became the civil rights opponents' chief weapon. In this era, too, the Senate modified its rules, raising the bar needed to achieve cloture—the practice of ending debate to hold a vote on legislation. From 1949 to 1959, cloture required the approval of two-thirds of the Senate's membership rather than two-thirds of the Senators who were present.[65]

As in the House, influential southern Senators held key positions and were among the most determined parliamentarians. Richard Brevard Russell Jr. of Georgia framed his opposition to civil rights initiatives around concerns about federal interference in state affairs. Russell used Senate procedure in an attempt to become a more palatable public figure than many of the Senate's virulent segregationists, such as Mississippi's James Kimble Vardaman or Theodore Gilmore Bilbo. Russell attracted northern and western Republicans to his cause based on their opposition to the expansion of federal powers that would be necessary to enforce civil rights in the South. Mississippi's James Oliver Eastland, another procedural tactician who presided over the Judiciary Committee beginning in March 1956, bragged that he had special pockets tailored into his suits where he stuffed bothersome civil rights bills. Between 1953 and 1965, the Senate Judiciary Committee killed almost every one of the more than 122 civil rights measures introduced in that chamber during those 12 years.[66]

These procedural impediments in Congress made the courts an even more important venue for the civil rights struggle. In 1954, the Supreme Court's unanimous decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*, a case that tested the segregation of school facilities in Topeka, Kansas, set a new precedent regarding segregated schools in the South. "In the field of public education, separate but equal has no place," the Justices declared, and a second *Brown* decision in 1955 directed school systems across the nation to move toward desegregation "with all deliberate speed."[67]

Despite significant moments of federal intervention, including President Dwight D. Eisenhower's 1957 decision to send troops to Little Rock, Arkansas, to assure access for Black students, implementation of the Supreme Court's ruling was slow. "*Brown v. The Board of Education* notwithstanding," Georgia Representative and civil rights icon John Lewis recalled of his youth in Troy, Alabama, "nothing in my life had changed." In fact, school segregation continued throughout the South. The enthusiastic and vocal racism of earlier opponents of desegregation was increasingly abandoned in favor of a seemingly color-blind approach that used new, ostensibly class-based divisions, such as neighborhood boundaries and tax policy, to perpetuate inequalities.[68]



In 1959, an African-American child watches an angry mob march towards Little Rock High School to protest desegregation.

Image courtesy of the Library of Congress

Nevertheless, *Brown* was a significant victory over an entrenched Jim Crow system based on the *Plessy* precedent. On Capitol Hill, southern defiance was blatant. Senators Russell, Thurmond, and Harry Flood Byrd Sr. of Virginia drafted a public statement. Titled the "Declaration of Constitutional Principles" and known as the Southern Manifesto, it attacked the *Brown* decision, accusing the Supreme Court of abusing judicial power and trespassing upon what they said were states' rights. Signed on March 12, 1956, by 82 Representatives and 19 Senators—roughly one-fifth of Congress—and read on the House Floor the next day, the manifesto urged southerners to exhaust all "lawful means" in the effort to resist the "chaos and confusion" that would result from school desegregation.[69]

RIGHTS AND REPRESENTATION

Support for the passage of major civil rights legislation grew in Congress during the mid-1950s as the nonviolent civil rights movement transformed public opinion. In Montgomery, Alabama, local activists led by 27-year-old



Rosa Parks, with journalist Nicholas Chriss, rides on a desegregated bus on December 21, 1956. As an NAACP activist in Montgomery, Alabama, Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat to a White rider on a public bus in 1955. Her act of civil disobedience galvanized the U.S. civil rights movement. Congress later honored Parks with a Congressional Gold Medal and by making her the first woman to lie in honor in the Capitol Rotunda after her death in 2005.

Image courtesy of the Library of Congress

Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. launched a boycott of the city's segregated bus system. The protest began after the arrest of NAACP activist Rosa Parks, who defied local ordinances in December 1955 by refusing to yield her seat on the bus to a White man. The year-long—and, ultimately, successful—boycott brought national attention to the struggle and launched King to the forefront of a grassroots, nonviolent humanitarian protest movement.[70]

Much like the NAACP in the 1920s, the civil rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s pressured Congress to pass legislation to address racial inequality in the United States. This time, however, the protest movement benefited from voices in the halls of Congress. Black Members, though few, were poised to contribute to this effort on Capitol Hill.

Civil Rights Act of 1957

Despite the many obstacles to passing civil rights legislation, a reform bill began to move through Congress in 1956. Its progress was partly the result of pressure by advocacy groups such as the NAACP, proposals by President Eisenhower's Attorney General Herbert Brownell Jr., and the growing presidential ambitions of Senate Majority Leader Lyndon B. Johnson.[71]

In a November 1956 letter to President Eisenhower, Charles Diggs called for immediate action on civil rights legislation in the 85th Congress (1957–1959). Diggs also addressed a letter to Democratic Speaker Sam Rayburn of Texas and House Majority Leader John W. McCormack of Massachusetts, denouncing "conservative elements of our Party," including "your Colleague, Senator Eastland," who had been able to "stifle liberal legislation, especially Civil Rights." He asked Democratic leaders if they were prepared to join the fight to end the filibuster in the Senate, "the chief weapon of the Dixiecrats to kill civil rights?" He also urged the passage of "right to vote, anti-poll tax, anti-lynching measures" at the beginning of the new Congress.[72]

On May 17, 1957—on the three-year anniversary of the *Brown* decision—more than 20,000 people attended a rally at the Lincoln Memorial urging the federal government to protect Black civil and political rights. Representatives Powell and Diggs joined Martin Luther King Jr. in addressing the crowd.[73]

A month later, Powell and Diggs argued for a strong bill on the House Floor. Powell aimed his remarks at amendments that preserved trials by local juries. Since southern states prevented Black citizens from serving on juries, White defendants accused of crimes against African Americans were often easily acquitted. The Harlem lawmaker stressed that these local infringements had international implications. "America stands on trial today before the world and communism must succeed if democracy fails," he said. By the mid-1950s, the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union had pushed the U.S. government to reckon with continued racial inequity at home, which threatened to undermine the federal government's claims to global leadership. The U.S. Department of State tried to assuage the concerns of potential allies, particularly among the increasing number of independent African nations—emphasizing the freedoms inherent in American society as well as the dangers of Soviet totalitarianism. "Speak no more concerning the bombed and burned and gutted churches behind the Iron Curtain when here in America behind our 'color curtain' we have bombed and burned churches and the confessed perpetrators of these crimes go free because of trial by jury," declared Powell.[74]

Diggs informed his colleagues that on a recent congressional delegation to the African continent, "we were constantly questioned about the treatment of minority groups and peoples here in the United States." The stories of disenfranchisement and segregation, Diggs said, were detrimental to "the prestige of the United States in the Free World." Diggs also responded to congressional opponents of the bill, who incredulously called for evidence of

disenfranchisement. He listed many of the tactics used by local officials to deny African Americans the ability to register to vote, actions which he characterized as "intimidation, coercion, and subterfuge." He singled out specific counties in several southern states in which no Black residents were registered to vote. "The reason that we are here today seeking relief on the Federal level is because the offending States are not protecting the right to vote," Diggs told his colleagues.[75]

A majority of the House agreed, passing the bill by a vote of 286 to 126 on June 18, 1957. But the bill that passed the House in June did not survive Senate consideration intact. In the Senate, Democrat Paul Howard Douglas of Illinois and Republican Minority Leader William Fife Knowland of California circumvented Eastland's Judiciary Committee and got the bill onto the floor for debate. Senator Johnson played a crucial role, too, discouraging an organized southern filibuster while forging a compromise that appeased southern Members by preserving local juries in any civil rights case. Sent back to the House shorn of important voting protections, it was approved on August 27. A day later, Senator Thurmond held the floor for more than 24 hours in a personal filibuster against the bill. Nevertheless, on August 29, the Senate approved the Civil Rights Act of 1957 by a vote of 60 to 15.[76]

The resulting law, signed by President Eisenhower in early September 1957, was the first major civil rights measure passed since 1875. The act established a two-year U.S. Commission on Civil Rights (CCR) to investigate and report on civil rights infringements and created a civil rights division in the Department of Justice. But the law was unable to enforce voting requirements and punish the disenfranchisement of Black voters. Three years later, the Civil Rights Act of 1960—again significantly weakened by southern opponents—expanded the powers of the CCR and stipulated that voting and registration records in federal elections must be preserved.[77]

A Movement for Change on Capitol Hill

By 1958, four Black Representatives were taking on new positions within House leadership and experimenting with ways to exercise more power within the institution. But Black Members of Congress were too scarce to form a voting bloc powerful enough to change how the institution worked. It would be five more years before Gus Hawkins of California joined the House and a year later John Conyers of Michigan was elected. Every one of the Black Members in the House in 1965 would go on to hold office for at least 20 years, so they all eventually earned a committee chairmanship. Conyers became the longest-serving Black Member in congressional history—and the third-longest tenured of all House Members—with nearly 53 years in office before he resigned in 2017. But in the early 1960s, there simply were not enough African-American lawmakers to drive a policy agenda.

In the 87th Congress (1961–1963), Powell ascended to chair the House Committee on Education and Labor, a post he held for three terms. Only the second Black American to chair a standing committee in Congress, Powell set a new standard for Black Americans exercising power on Capitol Hill. His panel reviewed and approved legislation that formed core components of President Johnson's Great Society agenda in the mid-1960s, including the Higher Education Act of 1965.[78]

Powell used his position as chair of the committee's Ad Hoc Subcommittee on the War on Poverty to continue his work highlighting the issues facing urban communities in the North. A subcommittee hearing on de facto segregation tried to shift the focus of Congress to northern cities. "A far more difficult social problem to solve," Powell said, "is the form of racial segregation whose roots are not nourished in the law, but instead germinate in the soil of social mores and custom."[79]

The War on Poverty Subcommittee conducted a hearing on urban poverty in the middle of West 114th Street in Harlem. Powell led the open-air meeting on a sweltering summer day in New York City, calling witnesses to discuss



In 1948, the States' Rights Democratic Party, also known as the Dixiecrats, nominated segregationist governors Strom Thurmond of South Carolina (right) for President and Fielding Lewis Wright of Mississippi (left) for Vice President.

Image courtesy of the Library of Congress

the need for quality housing and an end to persistent employment discrimination. "All of you out there are the best experts on black problems because you are black," Powell told the crowd of more than 200 spectators. On August 7, 1965, the subcommittee held hearings on the need for community action programs in Los Angeles. Only days later, violence and civil unrest swept through the city's Watts neighborhood.[80]

While Powell's chairmanship demonstrated the expanded possibilities for Black Members to exert power in Congress, the collective agenda of Black Representatives in the early 1960s prioritized federal civil rights and voting rights legislation to undercut the pillars of the Jim Crow South. To achieve these goals, they needed broad support in the House and Senate as well as reforms to congressional procedures that could allow legislation to circumvent long-standing obstacles laid by southern Democrats.

At the start of the John F. Kennedy administration in 1961, Speaker Sam Rayburn sought to revise House Rules, directly challenging the entrenched power of Rules Committee Chair Howard Smith. Rayburn proposed adding three more Members to the panel, a move he believed would break Smith's stranglehold over civil rights legislation. Rayburn recruited a group of roughly two dozen northern Republicans who supported the expansion and declared their intention to "repudiate" a GOP alliance with southern Democrats, which they called an "attempt to narrow the base of our party, to dull its conscience, to transform it into a negative weapon of obstruction."



Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. stands on the second story of the A.G. Gaston Motel in Birmingham, Alabama, on May 16, 1963. In April, King was arrested for violating a court injunction against protests during the campaign to desegregate the city. After an agreement with city officials to desegregate public spaces, the Ku Klux Klan engaged in a series of violent acts of retaliation culminating with the bombing of Birmingham's Sixteenth Street Baptist Church, which killed four young girls.

Image courtesy of the Library of Congress

Republican votes proved decisive as the changes were approved by a margin of 217 to 212. The rules change was a key first step in creating the possibility for new legislation, but more importantly, the support of northern Republicans presaged the development of a coalition that would undercut the power of southern segregationists and pass sweeping civil rights laws.[81]

In 1962, Congress approved a constitutional amendment to prohibit the poll tax. Ratified by the states in 1964, the Twenty-fourth Amendment was a significant addition to the Constitution and proved effective in eliminating one of the main components of Jim Crow disenfranchisement.[82]

The postwar civil rights movement had slowly built support for legislative reform and directed pressure at lawmakers on Capitol Hill. Protests at lunch counters in Greensboro, North Carolina, in 1960 gained national and international attention. They were followed in 1961 by a campaign to desegregate interstate buses by the Freedom Riders, who were beaten and arrested at several stops as they tried to complete a trip from Washington, DC, to New Orleans, Louisiana. In April 1963, Martin Luther King Jr. led a large protest in Birmingham, Alabama, at which Birmingham police commissioner Eugene "Bull" Connor unleashed police dogs and high-powered hoses on the peaceful protesters. Television cameras captured Connor's brutality, and network newscasts broadcast it to shocked national and global audiences.[83]

On August 28, 1963, Randolph, activist Bayard Rustin, King, and other civil rights leaders organized what was to that point the largest ever demonstration in the capital: the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. The event brought together more than 250,000 people on the National Mall to demand civil rights laws and economic justice. Around 150 Members of Congress attended, although the march organizers would not allow elected officials to address the crowd. Randolph, who had called off the planned march on Washington in 1941, hoped the crowd would spur legislators to act. "Legislation is enacted under pressure," he insisted. "You can't move senators and congressmen just because every one thinks a measure is right. There has got to be pressure."[84]

Nix spoke on the House Floor a week before the planned march. While many Members of Congress were anxious about the upcoming event, if not hostile toward it, he defended the protest. For Nix, the march was one front in the struggle to "realize the full promise of democracy which has been withheld cruelly and deliberately" since

emancipation. In the previous century, Nix said, Black Americans had been "teased with mere tastes of freedom." They were now using the "traditional American medium of protest" to take their case directly to Congress and the American people.[85]

Over the previous six decades, a grassroots movement for change had ebbed and flowed in the United States. But this time the scale and scope of the protest movement and the impact it had on the burgeoning cohort of allies within the halls of Congress led to a far different outcome.

Civil Rights Act of 1964

As activists maintained pressure on President John F. Kennedy to act, the administration began coordinating with congressional allies to pass a significant reform bill. Black legislators, of course, had their own ambitions for the bill. First-term Representative Gus Hawkins observed in May 1963 that the federal government had a special responsibility to ensure that federal dollars did not underwrite segregation in schools, vocational education facilities, libraries, and other municipal entities, saying "those who dip their hands in the public treasury should not object if a little democracy sticks to their fingers." Otherwise "do we not harm our own fiscal integrity, and allow room in our conduct for other abuses of public funds?" After Kennedy's assassination in November 1963, his successor, President Johnson, invoked the slain President's memory to prod reluctant legislators to produce a civil rights measure.[86]

In the House, a bipartisan bill supported by Judiciary Chair Emanuel Celler and William Moore McCulloch of Ohio, the committee's top Republican, worked its way to passage. McCulloch and Celler forged a coalition of moderate Republicans and northern Democrats while deflecting amendments designed to undermine the bill.

Black legislators used their committee positions to dramatize the need for a major set of reforms and to debate just how best to accomplish those goals. Powell's House Committee on Education and Labor, for instance, held hearings on components of the civil rights bill in 1963. Hawkins was part of the subcommittee hearings on the Equal Employment Opportunity Act, which became Title VII of the proposed legislation. The Californian used his position on the panel to raise important questions about the need for some type of federal oversight to prevent discriminatory hiring. He also presided over a hearing in Los Angeles on discrimination in education programs funded by the federal government.[87]



President John F. Kennedy and members of his administration meet with event organizers at the White House after the August 28, 1963, March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. Standing from left to right: W. Willard Wirtz, U.S. Secretary of Labor; Floyd McKissick, CORE; Mathew Ahmann, National Catholic Conference for Interracial Justice; Whitney M. Young Jr., National Urban League; Reverend Martin Luther King Jr., SCLC; John Lewis, SNCC; Rabbi Joachim Prinz, American Jewish Congress; A. Philip Randolph, chair of the March on Washington and vice president of the AFL-CIO, with Reverend Eugene Carson Blake, Protestant minister and activist partially visible behind him; President Kennedy; Walter P. Reuther, UAW, with Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson partially visible behind him; and Roy Wilkins, NAACP.

Image courtesy of the Library of Congress

On February 10, 1964, Hawkins spoke on the floor urging his colleagues to support the bill. He also denounced its opponents, who he said were relying on the outmoded ideas at the heart of the 1896 *Plessy* decision to resist progress in 1964. The dramatic changes of the postwar decades, Hawkins said, had set the stage for revolutionary departures from the old ways, at home and abroad. "Today the free peoples of the world are on the march—everywhere," Hawkins declared. "In Europe, Asia, and Africa as in our country, and in Mississippi as well as California, people yearn for freedom, security, self-government, and human dignity."[88]

William Dawson emphasized the domestic implications of this legislation. "These problems are not confined to any one section of the country. They are national," he reminded his colleagues. Dawson dismissed those who urged time-consuming lawsuits to remedy the situation—only federal action could initiate real change. He acknowledged that the bill was not "a panacea" but stressed that it would produce "a major step toward the achievement of full equality for all Americans."[89]

Later that day, the House voted 290 to 130 to approve the Civil Rights Act of 1964. So many members of the Democratic majority opposed the legislation that House leaders needed the votes of 138 Republicans—nearly

80 percent of the GOP conference—to pass the bill. The measure was among the most far-reaching pieces of legislation in U.S. history. It contained sections prohibiting discrimination in public accommodations and in state and municipal facilities, including schools. It applied the Powell amendment to any program receiving federal aid and barred discrimination in hiring and employment based on race, color, sex, religion, or national origin. It also created the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) to investigate workplace discrimination.[90]

President Johnson worked with Senate Democratic leadership to build support for the measure and fend off the efforts of a determined southern minority to kill it. By allowing influential Minority Leader Everett McKinley Dirksen of Illinois to weaken the enforcement powers of the EEOC, bill proponents were able to attract support from a large group of midwestern Republicans who followed Dirksen's lead. On June 10, 1964, for the first time in its history, the Senate invoked cloture on a civil rights bill, and did so by a vote of 71 to 29, cutting off debate and ending a 60-day filibuster—the longest in the chamber's history. On June 19, 1964, 46 Democrats and 27 Republicans joined forces to approve the Civil Rights Act of 1964, 73 to 27. President Johnson signed the bill into law on July 2, 1964.[91]

Voting Rights Act of 1965

A day later, on July 3, Representative Gus Hawkins visited Mississippi along with his California colleagues Phillip Burton and William Donlon "Don" Edwards, as well as William Fitts Ryan of New York. In 1964, a popular movement for voting rights coalesced across the South, directly targeting the Black disenfranchisement efforts at the heart of the Jim Crow system. The Representatives stayed with local families, observed the voter registration process, and commended voting rights campaigners. Mississippi Governor Paul B. Johnson Jr. advised the group not to test any of the provisions of the new Civil Rights Act. Johnson also warned that they may be subjected to violence because Hawkins was Black. In fact, the home Edwards was staying in was bombed the day after he left. After his trip, Hawkins declared that the noble work of the volunteers would "have a lasting effect on Mississippi even if it does no more than arouse national concern over the state." Over the next calendar year, Americans across the country would be confronted with the struggle for Black voting rights in the South.[92]

In Mississippi, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and the Congress of Racial Equality had organized Freedom Summer, a joint effort to staff a voter registration drive and establish "freedom schools" in Black communities. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 included a provision regarding voting rights but limited enforcement powers, and continued resistance by southern state and local governments led many to call for more effective voting rights legislation almost immediately.[93]

In the early 1960s, the movement for voting rights coincided with several Supreme Court rulings, such as *Brown*, that overturned existing precedent and fundamentally changed the voting landscape, particularly in the South. In a string of decisions known as the "reapportionment cases," the court required representation in federal and state legislatures to be based substantially on population. *Baker v. Carr* (1962) upheld lawsuits that challenged districts apportioned to enforce voting discrimination against minorities. In *Gray v. Sanders* (1963), the court asserted the concept of "one man, one vote" by invalidating Georgia's county unit voting system, which used county boundaries to disproportionately empower lightly populated rural areas at the expense of the more heavily populated urban regions. Two decisions in 1964, *Wesberry v. Sanders* and *Reynolds v. Sims*, proved seminal. In *Wesberry*, the Court declared that the equal distribution of population must be a factor in drafting district lines for seats in the U.S. House. In *Reynolds*, the Supreme Court solidified the "one man, one vote" concept in an 8 to 1 decision that expressly linked the Fourteenth Amendment's equal protection clause to the guarantee that each citizen had equal weight in the election of state legislators.[94]

The voting rights movement and the Supreme Court decisions on apportionment affected the elections process, from the drawing of districts to the casting of ballots. But Black Americans in the South remained restricted, and Democrats in the region filled state and local offices with little to no Black participation and only minimal Republican opposition. In Mississippi, for example, the Democratic slate was always full of segregationists. In August 1964, the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP) challenged the seating of the so-called "Regular Democrats" at the Democratic National Convention in Atlantic City, New Jersey. Fannie Lou Hamer, a sharecropper and activist from Ruleville, Mississippi, emerged as the group's leader. The MFDP pointed to the inequities in voter registration, district composition, and electoral procedures in state elections as evidence that the Regular Democrats were not the true, democratically elected

representatives of their constituents. After tense negotiations at the convention, the credentials committee refused to seat the MFDP delegates, instead offering the dissident faction two seats—which the MFDP refused.[95]

Five months earlier, Hamer and four other Black candidates had decided to run for House seats in the November 1964 elections, challenging Mississippi's five incumbent Representatives. Hamer went up against Jamie Lloyd Whitten, the 12-term incumbent from the Second District. After each challenger lost by significant margins in the June Democratic primary, election officials in Mississippi kept the MFDP candidates off the ballot for the general election. Four of the Democratic incumbents won unopposed in November. One Republican, Prentiss Lafayette Walker of the Fourth District, defeated Democrat William Arthur Winstead, who was attempting to win his twelfth term in the House. The MFDP challengers decided to contest these election victories with the hopes that the House would seat them instead of the segregationists.[96]

On January 4, 1965, as the 89th Congress (1965–1967) convened, 600 MFDP supporters arrived from Mississippi to demonstrate peacefully at the Capitol. MFDP candidates Hamer, Annie Devine, and Victoria Grey tried to access the House Floor but were turned away by security. Protesters stoically lined the tunnel between the House office buildings and the Capitol, forcing Members to walk by their silent protest as they made their way from their offices to the floor. William Fitts Ryan backed efforts to block the seating of the Mississippi delegation. Edith Starrett Green of Oregon forced a roll call vote on a proposal to bar the Mississippi Representatives-elect until an inquiry was completed, but they were seated despite the protests. Hamer and other candidates formally contested the election, and their cases were sent to the Committee on House Administration for review.[97]

Black Members of Congress embraced this spirit of democratic participation as protests intensified in early 1965. Representatives Conyers, Diggs, and Hawkins visited the city of Selma, Alabama, on February 5, 1965, as part of a 15-Member congressional delegation that investigated voting discrimination.[98]

Four days later, several Black Members of Congress spoke on the House Floor and patiently explained the situation to their colleagues. Prior to the trip, Members had stated their desire to "listen and learn" about the situation in Alabama. Diggs printed in the *Congressional Record* a voter registration application from Alabama, laying before the House the difficulties faced by prospective voters in the state. Hawkins described the delegation's activities in Selma, particularly their use of a federal building to accept testimony from residents regarding their difficulties trying to register to vote. Hawkins reminded his colleagues that "the constitutionality of this right to vote cannot be disputed. Legally, it does not have to be earned." But Hawkins noted that the law did not apply in much of the South "from a practical standpoint," and he and others recognized that Selma represented one front in an ongoing battle to win this right.[99]

Hawkins printed some of the testimony received by the committee in the pages of the *Congressional Record*, including a brief excerpt from the statement of Launsey West, a U.S. Navy veteran who worked as a house painter. West described specific incidents of police violence against those attempting to register, including several Black women. He also spoke of the devastating personal toll of his participation in the voter registration drive, such as the jobs he had been denied since trying to register. Representative Jeffrey Cohelan of California asked West if he had sought to register earlier. West recalled that other Selma residents warned him that he "might be whipped" if he tried. Cohelan asked, "Well, then, why did you get courage in 1963?" "Because I felt more stronger with others with me," West declared.[100]

Conyers said he returned from Selma convinced that there was "no alternative but to have the Federal Government take a much more positive and specific role in guaranteeing



Following mass arrests of voting rights protesters—including Martin Luther King Jr.—members of a House delegation planning to travel to Selma, Alabama, hold a press conference in Washington, DC, on February 4, 1965. From left to right: Representatives Adam Clayton Powell Jr., Augustus F. "Gus" Hawkins, William Fitts Ryan of New York, Charles Diggs, John Conyers Jr., and Joseph Yale Resnick of New York. Powell ultimately did not travel with the delegation.

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the right to register and vote in all elections." Without federal intervention, the vast power of state and local governments went unchecked in places like Dallas County, which encompassed Selma. "But surely this Government cannot relax," Conyers insisted, "if even one single American is arbitrarily denied that most basic right of all in a democracy—the right to vote."[101]

On March 7, 1965, Alabama state troopers savagely beat protestors marching across the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma. "It was the most disciplined march that I've ever been a part of, walking in twos, not interfering with traffic, not talking loud, not any singing," recalled future Representative John Lewis, who led the marchers. Many of the protestors were kneeling in prayer when the troopers clubbed and gassed them on what would later be known as "Bloody Sunday." Lewis was one of many to be hospitalized; as television cameras captured the onslaught, and networks beamed images into the homes of millions of Americans.[102]

After President Johnson addressed a Joint Session of Congress on March 15 about the events in Selma, legislative action was swift. The bill that quickly moved through both chambers prohibited discrimination at the polls and directly involved the federal government in election oversight. The measure suspended the use of literacy tests for a five-year period and stationed federal poll watchers and voting registrars in counties with persistent patterns of voting discrimination. It also included a "preclearance" provision, which required the Department of Justice to approve any change to election law in counties with a history of discrimination and disenfranchisement. Finally, the bill made obstructing an individual's right to vote a federal crime.[103]



When John Conyers was elected in 1964, he joined incumbent Charles Diggs and represented Detroit, Michigan, in the 89th Congress (1965–1967). This was the first time in the twentieth century that any state sent two African-American Members to Congress simultaneously.

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Unlike the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act cleared the Senate first, on May 26, 1965, by a vote of 77 to 19. As the House debated the bill, Conyers also stressed the Cold War foreign policy implications of denying one group of citizens the right to vote: "We are weak before our enemies if our goals abroad are so shamelessly ignored and subverted here at home." The House passed the bill by a vote of 333 to 85 on July 9, 1965. An amended conference report passed both chambers by wide margins, and President Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act into law on August 6, 1965.[104]

When taken together, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965—arguably *the* most significant pieces of legislation in the twentieth century—profoundly reshaped American politics and society. The antidiscrimination provisions in the Civil Rights Act took aim at the Jim Crow system that had dominated southern life for decades, desegregating public spaces and affording Black Americans access to new opportunities. The federal government took an active role in prohibiting employment discrimination and extending workplace protections to women. The Voting Rights Act enabled voter registration in the South and provided oversight for counties across the nation where discriminatory practices restricted access to the polls.

These changes spurred significant resistance throughout the country. Southern schools, for instance, did not immediately desegregate. But these legislative achievements were influential in making American government and society more democratic. Black voters elected a new generation of political leaders to state and local offices. In the 1970s, groundbreaking electoral victories sent Black Representatives to the House from southern congressional districts for the first time since the nineteenth century. The lasting effects of these landmark laws extended far beyond the South, however. In the ensuing decades, the number of Black Members of Congress grew exponentially. In the 65 years prior to the Voting Rights Act, eight African

Americans were elected to the House. In the six decades that followed, 145 Black Members served in Congress, including nine Black Senators. These changes were the product of a historical moment in which lawmakers were once again willing to use the power of the federal government to guarantee individual rights, thereby vindicating a century-long effort by Black Americans to resurrect the spirit of Reconstruction on Capitol Hill.

"No Contest Without a Contestant"

A month after the passage of the Voting Rights Act, the Committee on House Administration's Subcommittee on Elections held hearings on the Mississippi election cases, welcoming testimony from the state's sitting Representatives. William Meyers Colmer of Mississippi argued that there had been "no legal, bona fide contestant" in each of these cases because the MFDP candidates were not on the ballot in November. Colmer pointed to past precedent to declare there can be "no contest without a contestant." In Mississippi, this was a high bar to meet; the candidates attempted to run in the Democratic primary, but the vast majority of Black voters sympathetic to their cause had been unable to register to vote.[105]

The subcommittee also heard from the contestants, including Fannie Lou Hamer, Annie Devine, and Augusta Wheadon. They spoke of the violence and intimidation that kept many Black voters from the polls in their home state. Wheadon listed the incidents of violence against Black political activists in the months prior to the election. She explained that this overwhelming tide of violence kept her from filing the paperwork to have her named placed on the ballot. "I did not wish to risk my life to get certified to run against Mr. Thomas Abernathy, of the First Congressional District, but I did file notice of contest."[106]

On September 15, the committee issued a report regarding the Mississippi Freedom Democrats' attempts to contest the elections of the state's congressional delegation. The committee sided with the incumbent Mississippi lawmakers and ruled that since the contestants had not been on the ballot, they could not formally challenge the election results. But the committee also pointed to the recently enacted Voting Rights Act, which it claimed would provide "thorough and complete remedies" to the problems Black voters faced in Mississippi.[107]

The matter was not over, however. On September 17, the House engaged in an extended debate on the floor, with Gus Hawkins, a member of the Committee on House



Less than one week after "Bloody Sunday," protestors gather outside the White House—raising awareness about the violence in Selma and carrying signs that read "We demand the right to vote, everywhere" and "Stop brutality in Selma."

Image courtesy of the Library of Congress

Administration, calling for further investigation into the issue given the evidence of disenfranchisement in Mississippi. John Conyers echoed Hawkins's call. Even the normally cautious William Dawson asked the House to unseat the Mississippi Representatives. Dawson rooted his support in House precedent, citing more than 40 contested election cases from 1867 to 1901 in which the House unseated a Representative because Black citizens were barred from voting.[108]

Hamer, Devine, and Gray were granted House Floor privileges during the debate, a welcoming gesture that suggested a formidable segment of the House membership acknowledged the deep-rooted problems facing African Americans in the South. Nevertheless, the committee's report stood as the final word. The House voted to dismiss all five contests.[109]

The events on the House Floor that September day presented a stark reminder of the past, even as they offered a glimpse of the future. The committee's majority relied on procedure and precedent to maintain barriers that had long denied the rights of Black Americans. At the same time, the democratic movement, rooted in the South and led by Black women, that brought the protest to the House Chamber was gaining allies from across the country.

One month after the passage of the Voting Rights Act, and more than a year after the Civil Rights Act was signed into law, Black Americans were at a critical juncture. With the federal government willing to intervene to protect their civil and political rights for the first time since Reconstruction, a key advance had been achieved in the

long struggle for representation. The next step was to seize the opportunity and achieve what Robert Nix had called "the full promise of democracy" by electing Black Members of Congress in greater numbers than ever before.[110]

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Oscar De Priest

1871–1951

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1929–1935

Republican from Illinois



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In 1928, Oscar De Priest of Illinois was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives, becoming the first African American to serve in Congress in the twentieth century. He was the first Black Member elected from outside the South, and he arrived on Capitol Hill 28 years after the departure of George Henry White of North Carolina in 1901. His victory in a Chicago district marked a new era of Black political organization in urban areas in the North. Though De Priest was the only Black Member of Congress during his three terms in office, he embraced his role as the Representative for all African Americans and recognized that "the eyes of America are centered upon me. Prejudice has got to be broken down in this country and I've got to help do it."[1]

Oscar Stanton De Priest was born in Florence, Alabama, on March 9, 1871. His parents, Neander and Martha De Priest, had been enslaved before the Civil War. His father later worked as a teamster and a farmer, while his mother found part-time employment as a domestic worker. In 1878, the De Priest family, along with thousands of other Black residents of the Mississippi Valley, moved to Kansas seeking a better life. The migrants from Mississippi, Louisiana, and Alabama sought to escape poor economic and social conditions after Democrats and former Confederates secured control of southern state governments at the end of Reconstruction. De Priest attended public schools in Salina and enrolled in a business course at the Salina normal school, where he studied bookkeeping.[2]

De Priest settled in Chicago in 1889, well before the wave of African-American migration to northern cities in the 1910s and 1920s. In Chicago, De Priest worked as an apprentice plasterer, house painter, and decorator, and he eventually established his own business and a real estate management firm. In 1898, he married Jessie Williams, a music teacher whose family was from Pennsylvania, and they had two sons: Laurence and Oscar Stanton Jr. Laurence died as a teenager in a drowning accident.[3]

Chicago's budding Republican machine facilitated De Priest's foray into politics. Divided into wards and precincts, Chicago evolved into a city governed by a system of political appointments and patronage. De Priest recognized the potential for a career as a local leader in a city with few Black politicians whose African-American population was experiencing dramatic growth. At first comfortable with a behind-the-scenes role, De Priest eventually assumed a more prominent political position as a loyal Republican interested in helping his party gain influence in Chicago. By 1904,

De Priest's organizing successfully mobilized Black voters for Republicans in the second and third wards. This put him in line for his first elected position: a seat on Chicago's Cook County board of commissioners. He retained this position for two terms, from 1904 through 1908. Caught between rival factions, De Priest failed to secure a third term as commissioner. During a seven-year break from politics, he turned his attention to real estate and became an affluent businessman.[4]

To revive his political career, De Priest curried favor with powerful Republican officials such as Chicago mayor William Hale "Big Bill" Thompson and longtime U.S. Representative Martin Barnaby Madden. Republicans drafted De Priest as their candidate for alderman in 1914, as party leaders sought to appeal to the growing Black population in the city. With the backing of the Republican organization, De Priest won with ease to become Chicago's first Black alderman. De Priest received significant support from Black women voters in the campaign—who had gained the right to vote through a 1913 Illinois state law—and he praised the work of Black women activists led by Ida B. Wells who mobilized voters on his behalf.[5]

As an alderman, De Priest sat on the influential city council from 1915 to 1917. He abruptly resigned at the request of Republican leaders after he was indicted for accepting money from a gambling establishment. "I shall devote myself unreservedly to proving my innocence and restoring my good name in this community," proclaimed De Priest, announcing his decision not to seek another term in office. He was later acquitted of the charges, but his political future remained uncertain. After failing to gain the Republican nomination in 1918, De Priest unsuccessfully attempted to regain his council seat by running as an Independent. In 1924, he was elected third ward committeeman.[6]

The turning point in De Priest's career occurred when Martin Madden, the influential Chicago Representative and chair of the House Appropriations Committee, died suddenly in 1928. Madden had already secured the Republican nomination to run for a 13th term in the House. The Republican machine, led by Mayor Thompson, selected De Priest to replace Madden as the nominee in the lakeshore congressional district encompassing the Loop, the center of Chicago's business district, as well as the city's most populous Black neighborhoods in the Bronzeville section of the South Side. In the November election, De Priest squared off against Democrat Harry Baker and three Independents, including William Harrison, an African-American assistant attorney general. De Priest narrowly defeated his opponents with only a plurality, securing 48 percent of the vote; Harrison siphoned off some of the Black votes in the district. In his two re-elections, De Priest won by more sizable margins, earning 58 and 55 percent of the vote, respectively.[7]

In the House, De Priest did not inherit his predecessor's seat on the Appropriations Committee. During his three terms he served on the Indian Affairs, Invalid Pensions, and Enrolled Bills Committees. De Priest also was a member of the Post Office and Post Roads Committee during the 73rd Congress (1933–1935)—a significant post for a Black Member seeking to represent the interests of African Americans throughout the nation. The year De Priest first won election to the House, the U.S. Post Office Department employed 45 percent of the federal government's Black workers.[8]

As De Priest prepared to take his seat in the 71st Congress (1929–1931) on April 15, 1929, a potential obstacle loomed. After his election in November, the local press speculated that the House might attempt to exclude De Priest. One month before the election De Priest was indicted, charged with conspiracy to commit election fraud in the April primary elections in Chicago. Although he had been cleared of the charges a few days before the start of the new Congress, Ruth Hanna McCormick, another newly elected Republican from Illinois, enlisted the assistance of Speaker Nicholas Longworth of Ohio to thwart potential challenges by southern Democrats to De Priest's seat. Allegedly at the request of his wife, Alice, a personal friend of Representative-elect McCormick's, the Speaker dispensed with the traditional procedure for swearing in Members by state delegation and administered the oath of office en masse—simultaneously to all the Members of the House—to prevent Members who otherwise would have been sworn in before De Priest from disputing the legality of his joining the 71st Congress. De Priest's first day in Congress attracted great interest from the press and many African Americans watched the proceedings from the segregated Visitors' Gallery.[9]

As the first African American elected to Congress for nearly three decades, De Priest forged a new path as a Black Representative from a northern city. He benefited from the demographic shift wrought by the Great Migration that transformed his Chicago district.

But De Priest also encountered a segregated city when he arrived in the nation's capital.

De Priest welcomed the responsibility of representing the entire Black population of the United States. Beginning in his first term, De Priest spoke out about the blatant disregard of constitutional protections for Black Americans in the South and called for a federal elections law to address the disenfranchisement of Black voters. He hoped that Congress would use the provisions in the Fourteenth Amendment to reduce the number of congressional seats held by southern states. "I'm the only member of my race in congress," De Priest said, "but I hope to convince my fellow legislators that the right is on my side."[10]

De Priest pointed to the government's long-term neglect of the Fourteenth Amendment, designed to guarantee the rights of citizens to due process and equal protection of the law, as well as the Fifteenth Amendment, which prohibited discrimination in voting based on "race, color, or previous condition of servitude." Without a new federal commitment to these Reconstruction-era additions to the Constitution, De Priest vowed not to support any bills to fund the enforcement of the Eighteenth Amendment, which prohibited the sale of alcohol in the United States. He also voiced sympathy for African Americans continuing to live in the segregated South. "It's a long, hard fight down there," he lamented.[11]

De Priest experienced blatant discrimination in Congress, as did his family while living in Washington, DC. Many southern Democrats resented his presence on Capitol Hill, and one Member, Miles Clayton Allgood of Alabama, resigned from the Committee on Enrolled Bills rather than serve on the same committee as the Chicago Congressman. Early in De Priest's first term, the First Lady, Lou Hoover, invited his wife Jessie De Priest to have tea at the White House with other congressional spouses. The First Lady's invitation provoked a wave of condemnation across the South. Several southern state legislatures, including Mississippi's, passed resolutions imploring the Herbert Hoover administration to give "careful and thoughtful consideration to the necessity of the preservation of the racial integrity of the white race." The First Lady divided the reception into four sessions in an attempt to avoid a boycott by the wives of southern Members. Mrs. De Priest attended the smallest of the four gatherings with a few women chosen by the administration. Representative De Priest called the southern legislators cowards. "I've been elected to congress the same as any other member," he exclaimed. "I'm going to have the rights of every other congressman—no more and no less—if it's in the congressional barber shop or at a White House tea." Nevertheless, he sought to make the most of the incident by sponsoring a fundraiser in the nation's capital for the NAACP less than two weeks later. The Illinois Congressman invited every House Republican except two—George Moore Pritchard of North Carolina, who had refused to take the office next to De Priest in the House Office Building, and Albert Henry Vestal of Indiana, whose wife had called on the congressional wives' club to bar Jessie De Priest.[12]

De Priest introduced several proposals to use federal power to protect Black civil and political rights. In 1933, he drafted a joint resolution to amend the Constitution to authorize federal courts to change the location of a trial if a defendant's right to impartiality was compromised by "considerations of race, color, or creed." The bill stemmed from the infamous Scottsboro, Alabama, case in which nine African-American boys were sentenced to death by an all-White jury for the alleged rape of two White women, despite a lack of evidence. On the House Floor, De Priest outlined several high-profile cases in which Black defendants were unable to attain a fair trial. "I am making these remarks because I want you to know that the American Negro is not satisfied with the treatment he receives in America," De Priest declared, "and I know of no forum where I can better present the matter than the floor of Congress." De Priest also backed a measure to hold states and counties responsible for the prevention of lynching. The unsuccessful bill he introduced in 1934 would have fined and imprisoned local authorities if prisoners in their jurisdiction were lynched.[13]

In the House, De Priest sought other ways to advance the cause of civil rights and the living conditions of Black Americans across the country. In 1932, he introduced a bill to provide monthly pensions for those who had been formerly enslaved who had reached the age of 75, "to give recognition and do justice to those who are now living who were emancipated by the Emancipation Proclamation issued by Abraham Lincoln in 1863." De Priest requested that an African-American preacher be allowed to offer the opening prayer in the House Chamber in 1934. He also nominated several African-American men from his district to the military academies, including future Tuskegee Airman and Lieutenant General in the U.S. Air Force, Benjamin O. Davis Jr.[14]

Although his individual legislative efforts were unsuccessful, De Priest was adept at the amendment process and in shaping pending legislation. In 1930, he successfully preserved funding in the U.S. Department of the Interior appropriation bill to start a new library at Howard University in Washington, DC, the historically Black university founded in 1867. Opponents tried to strip the money from the bill, citing the need to cut spending amid the Great Depression. De Priest spoke in favor of the appropriation, pointing out that Howard trained many Black teachers who "go back to the Southland and educate the black youth" and that the new library would open many more opportunities. The House approved the measure and it became law in February 1931.[15]

De Priest also added an antidiscrimination rider to a $300 million unemployment relief and reforestation measure in March 1933. The final version of the bill, which launched the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), incorporated De Priest's amendment outlawing "discrimination because of race, color, creed, or criminal records" in the selection of workers for the program. Nevertheless, discrimination in the CCC remained rampant. By 1934, only 6 percent of CCC enrollees were Black, although that figure increased to almost 10 percent by the end of the decade. While roughly a quarter million African Americans served in the CCC, only one in 10 had access to integrated facilities.[16]

De Priest also acted against discriminatory practices within the Capitol. In January 1934, the manager of the House restaurant ordered De Priest's secretary, African-American Morris W. Lewis, and Lewis's son to leave the dining room when they went to get a meal. The manager explained that the restaurant was for Whites only. The incident made headlines when De Priest introduced a resolution calling for an official investigation into whether Representative Lindsay Carter Warren, a Democrat from North Carolina and chair of the House Committee on Accounts, which operated the restaurant, had the authority to maintain a policy of segregation in the public facility. On the House Floor, De Priest refuted Warren's claim that African Americans had always been banned from the restaurant, recalling that he and other Black patrons had frequented the Capitol establishment. Although there was a separate public facility for Black customers next to the kitchen in the basement of the House, De Priest implored his colleagues to support his resolution, remarking, "If we allow segregation and the denial of constitutional rights under the Dome of the Capitol, where in God's name will we get them?"[17]

De Priest's resolution was referred to the Rules Committee, which controlled the flow of legislation in the House and was chaired by southern Democrat and future Speaker William B. Bankhead of Alabama. Many expected the bill to languish in the Rules Committee, but De Priest kept his measure alive by using a parliamentary procedure called a discharge petition, in which De Priest collected the signatures of 145 Members to force the bill out of committee and onto the House Floor for debate. The House ultimately voted in favor of De Priest's call for an investigatory committee, but the panel created to study the restaurant's policy of segregation split along party lines, with the Democratic majority refusing to take any action in regard to the restaurant.[18]

De Priest's congressional career overlapped with some of the worst years of the Great Depression. He joined his Republican colleagues in criticizing President Franklin D. Roosevelt's response to the crisis, predicting the federal spending on New Deal relief programs would cause uncontrolled inflation. He also warned that Communists were spreading subversive propaganda through schools to capitalize on the economic distress across the nation. In 1933, De Priest introduced a resolution that would have organized a special House committee to investigate teachers and students engaged in "practices inimical to our American government."[19]

De Priest's criticism of Roosevelt's economic relief measures alienated many voters in his district. Ultimately, his loyalty to the Republican Party and the continued economic distress many of his constituents experienced cost him his seat in the House. In the November 1934 general election, De Priest faced a formidable challenge from Arthur W. Mitchell, a former Republican active in that party's Chicago political machine. Mitchell had switched to the Democratic Party and had become an ardent supporter of Roosevelt and the New Deal. In a campaign that received national attention because both candidates were Black, Mitchell attacked De Priest's refusal to vote for emergency federal aid to poor Americans and criticized his ineffective protest of segregation in the House Restaurant. De Priest earned just 47 percent of the vote in a losing cause, paving the way for Mitchell to become the first Black Democrat elected to Congress. The contest reflected a larger political trend occurring in Chicago and many other northern

cities: the New Deal drew African-American voters away from the Republican Party to the Democrats during the Great Depression.[20]

In 1936, De Priest challenged Mitchell but failed to regain his congressional seat as President Roosevelt carried House Democrats in his landslide re-election. Mitchell won handily with 65 percent of the vote. In 1943, De Priest again was elected third ward alderman and served on the Chicago city council until 1947, when he was defeated for re-election. He remained active in his real estate business until he died in Chicago on May 12, 1951.[21]

Manuscript Collection

Chicago History Museum, Research Center (Chicago, IL). *Papers*: 1871–1951, 2.5 linear feet. The Oscar De Priest papers contain several dozen condolence letters received by Oscar De Priest and his wife in 1916 upon the death of their son Lawrence; a notebook listing names of those sending flowers to a De Priest family funeral (evidently Lawrence's); a copy of the application for National Register of Historic Places status for De Priest's home (1974); several typewritten sheets of De Priest family genealogical information; and various news clippings about De Priest. Also present are several bulletins/programs produced by the M.W. Prince Hall, Grand Lodge F.A. & F.M. (Masonic), of which De Priest's son, Oscar Stanton De Priest, was Grand Master in the 1950s and 1960s.

Notes

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Arthur W. Mitchell

1883–1968

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1935–1943

Democrat from Illinois



Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

The first African American elected to Congress as a Democrat, Arthur W. Mitchell of Illinois served four terms in the U.S. House of Representatives. A former Republican, Mitchell embodied the shifting party allegiances among Black Americans, who had traditionally backed Republican candidates. He strongly supported President Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal legislation that attracted many Black voters to the Democratic Party during the Great Depression. As the only African-American Member of Congress between 1935 and 1943, Mitchell introduced several measures designed to protect Black civil rights and encourage equal employment in government work and military service. "If our Government is to live as a democracy, it must not escape the responsibilities of a democracy. In a democracy the color of a man's skin has nothing to do with his citizenship rights," Mitchell declared to his colleagues on the House Floor.[1]

Arthur Wergs Mitchell was born on a farm near Lafayette, Alabama, on December 22, 1883. His parents, Taylor Mitchell and Ammar Patterson, had been enslaved before the Civil War. His parents worked on a farm on land they rented, and his father supplemented the family income as a logger. He attended public schools and entered Tuskegee Institute in 1901, working his way through college as an assistant for Booker T. Washington. After receiving his teaching credentials from Snow Hill Institute near Selma, Alabama, he taught in rural schools in Georgia and Alabama. He attempted to put Washington's theories on farm management and land ownership into practice by founding the West Alabama Institute at Greensboro in 1903. He led the school, which relocated to Panola and then to Geiger, until it permanently closed in 1915. Mitchell then moved to West Butler, Alabama, to direct the Armstrong Agricultural School. Mitchell attended both Columbia and Harvard and was admitted to the bar in Washington, DC, in 1927. He practiced law in the nation's capital, and when he moved to Chicago in 1929, he continued his career as an attorney while also becoming involved in the real estate business. Mitchell married Eula Mae King, and had a son, Arthur Wergs Mitchell Jr. When his wife died in 1910, Mitchell married Annie Harris, a former teacher and government employee who held jobs in Chicago and Washington, DC, during Mitchell's congressional career. She died in 1947, and a year later, he married Clara Smith Mann.[2]

Mitchell entered politics as a Republican, but became a Democrat after he moved to Chicago, in part because he believed there was greater room for political advancement, as most elected Black Chicago officials at that time were Republican. Mitchell's party switch was fortuitous, as many Black Americans shifted their allegiance to the Democratic Party in the early days of the New Deal. During the 1932 presidential race, he was hired by the Democratic Party to trail Republican Oscar De Priest's campaign stops in western states on behalf of President Herbert Hoover. Party leaders tasked Mitchell with countering De Priest's appeals to Black voters and making the case for Roosevelt's candidacy. Soon after President Roosevelt's inauguration in March 1933, Mitchell began positioning himself for a run for Congress in Chicago's First District.[3]

In the 1934 Democratic primary for the majority-Black congressional district encompassing Chicago's South Side, Mitchell squared off against Harry Baker. Mitchell lost to Baker by fewer than 1,000 votes, but Baker died before the general election, and party leaders in the district selected Mitchell to take his place. The congressional campaign between Mitchell and Oscar De Priest garnered national attention because both the challenger and the incumbent were African American—De Priest had defeated White Democratic opponents in the three previous campaigns. Mitchell turned the contest against the Republican Congressman into a referendum on President Roosevelt's policies. Capitalizing on growing support for the New Deal, which he believed would help the district, Mitchell orchestrated an aggressive campaign that forced De Priest to defend the Republican Party, whose influence was waning locally partially because of Chicago's Democratic mayor, Edward J. Kelly, who actively courted African-American voters. "De Priest's party was out of power," Mitchell told voters, and he had no way to secure important aid for the district. Instead, "he was a part of the Republican reactionaries, opposing Roosevelt's recovery program."[4]

On November 7, 1934, Mitchell narrowly beat De Priest, becoming the first African-American Democrat elected to Congress. In his next three re-elections, Mitchell won by slim margins—defeating De Priest again in 1936, then Republican alderman and future Democratic Representative William L. Dawson two years later, and former Illinois state senator William E. King in 1940.[5]

Ahead of the new legislative session, Mitchell laid out some of his expectations in an interview with the *Boston Daily Globe*. "I expect to meet some opposition, but life is a struggle in any activity one engages in," he said. "Overcoming barriers makes the victory all the sweeter. I may offend some people, but on the other hand some people may offend me. I don't plan to spend my time fighting out the question where a Negro may eat his lunch at the capital or whether he may be shaved in the House barber shop. What I am interested in is to help this grand President of ours feed the hungry and clothe the naked and provide work for the idle of every race and creed over which floats the stars and stripes." Mitchell criticized his predecessor's efforts to desegregate the Capitol, saying that De Priest's battles for equality in the House had "arrayed race against race." "I am not going into Congress as a Negro with a chip on my shoulder thinking I am of an inferior race and that every man's hand is against me," he said. "I am going in as an American citizen, entitled to my rights, no more, no less, and I shall insist on them. I'm going as the representative of all the people of my district."[6]

Mitchell served on the Committee on Post Offices and Post Roads throughout his eight years in the House, but one of his first acts as a Member of Congress was to introduce antilynching legislation in January 1935. He would introduce the same bill in each of his four terms in office. Mitchell also attempted to use his position in the House to draw attention to racial discrimination in employment and the need for voting rights protections for African Americans. Starting in his first Congress, he repeatedly offered bills that would outlaw racial discrimination in the civil service. Mitchell tried to eliminate the civil service application requirement that called for job seekers to provide a photograph. To avoid the possibility of discriminatory hiring, Mitchell proposed that fingerprints be used instead. Mitchell also supported legislation that would outlaw the poll tax.[7]

In 1935, Mitchell also introduced a bill to create a five-member Industrial Commission on Negro Affairs based in Washington, DC. His proposal required that at least three Black commissioners serve on the panel and provided the commission with a broad mandate to investigate and compile information regarding economic problems facing Black communities across the United States. The commission would also serve in an advisory capacity, on call to review new information or answer questions from government agencies. As with his antilynching bill, Mitchell introduced a version of this proposal in each of his four terms.[8]

During his time on Capitol Hill, Mitchell was a consistent and reliable backer of President Roosevelt and the New Deal. In 1936, the Illinois Congressman gave a seconding speech for Roosevelt's renomination at the Democratic Convention and directed the Democratic effort to turn out Black voters for Roosevelt in western states. Mitchell maintained that the New Deal addressed many of the problems faced by Black Americans—whom he called "America's largest and most neglected minority group." On several occasions, Mitchell spoke on the House Floor to celebrate the jobs programs and relief efforts associated with the New Deal. He praised President Roosevelt's economic answer to the Depression, declaring that the New Deal had produced the best conditions for Black Americans since emancipation. New Deal initiatives such as the Public Works Administration and the Works Progress Administration provided jobs and invested millions of federal dollars in Black communities, and Mitchell repeatedly referenced the positive impact of this material aid in his campaigns and on the floor.[9]

Mitchell also defended Roosevelt's plan to reorganize the federal judiciary in 1937, including a proposal to expand the number of justices on the Supreme Court, noting that unfavorable court rulings had perpetuated discrimination against African Americans. He criticized the court for frequently using the Fourteenth Amendment to protect large corporations and property holders instead of applying the amendment to the rights of citizens and the equal protection of the law.[10]

In 1940, Mitchell introduced a bill to fund the American Negro Exposition in Chicago, an event to commemorate the 75th anniversary of emancipation from slavery and to celebrate the accomplishments of African Americans in the years since. Mitchell hoped the exhibition would highlight the successes of African-American farmers and alleviate unemployment in Chicago by reversing the tide of African-American migration from the rural South to urban centers. "We have to attract these people to agriculture and get them out of these cities," he testified before the Committee on the Library. His bill was signed into law and provided $75,000 to fund the exposition.[11]

During World War II, Mitchell criticized the treatment of Black soldiers, noting that the discrimination endured by African-American troops undermined the nation's stated objective "to extend and protect the doctrine of genuine democracy." Mitchell also nominated several Black candidates for the U.S. military academies.[12]

In 1936, NAACP President Walter White criticized Mitchell for not doing enough to pass effective civil rights legislation. White focused on Mitchell's antilynching bill, which he considered weak in contrast with a proposal from Senators Robert Ferdinand Wagner of New York and Edward Prentiss Costigan of Colorado. The NAACP had endorsed the Wagner–Costigan bill, which contained language defining mob violence and provided stronger enforcement provisions that made clear that the act of lynching, and the failure of government officials to prevent mob violence, deprived individuals of equal protection of the law and due process. For the NAACP, Mitchell's bill left room for interpretation and limited application of the law should it be enacted. Mitchell insisted that he had introduced "the only bill that is going to pass."[13]

In the 75th Congress (1937–1939), the NAACP accused Mitchell of actively obstructing an antilynching bill introduced by Representative Joseph Andrew Gavagan of New York, which was the House version of the Wagner–Costigan proposal and had received the NAACP's endorsement. Gavagan circulated a discharge petition, which required the signature of a majority of House Members, to force the bill out of committee and onto the floor for debate. But at the same time, Mitchell sent Members a message announcing imminent hearings to be held in the Judiciary Committee on his antilynching bill, H.R. 2251—a move that confused many Members regarding the need to sign the discharge petition. The discharge petition was successful, but House Judiciary Committee chair Hatton William Sumners of Texas hastily organized a hearing on Mitchell's bill on March 31 and reported the bill to the floor for debate. In remarks printed in the *Congressional Record*, Mitchell stated that his bill had the potential to pass while Gavagan's bill would be deemed unconstitutional because of the excessive powers it granted to the federal government. On April 12, after the House declined to consider Mitchell's bill, he announced that he would support any antilynching measure. "The authorship of this bill means absolutely nothing as compared with the importance of its passage." The House passed the Gavagan bill on April 15—and Mitchell voted for it—but it died in the Senate. During his next two terms, Mitchell supported subsequent antilynching measures backed by the NAACP and introduced by Gavagan.[14]

Mitchell also made a significant contribution to desegregation outside the halls of Congress. In April 1937,

he traveled from Chicago to Hot Springs, Arkansas, on the Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific Railroad. When the train crossed into Arkansas, a conductor forced Mitchell out of the Pullman car, for which he had two first-class tickets. The Illinois Representative rode the rest of the journey in a car designated for Black passengers that he described as "filthy and foul smelling."[15]

Mitchell responded to the injustice as both a Member of Congress and as a private citizen. First, he sued three Chicago-based railroad companies and filed a complaint with the Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC), contending that interstate trains should be exempt from the Arkansas law requiring segregated accommodations. In 1938, Mitchell introduced a bill to prohibit segregated accommodations in interstate travel, which died in committee. In the courts, however, Mitchell made more progress. After the ICC and a federal district court dismissed his complaint, Mitchell made history by joining a select number of sitting Members of Congress ever to argue a case before the Supreme Court. In April 1941, the high court unanimously ruled in *Mitchell v. United States et al*. that Black passengers had the right to equal accommodations and treatment during interstate travel. Mitchell hailed the decision as a "step in the destruction of Mr. Jim Crow himself." However, the court's opinion did not address the legality of segregation itself. The ICC did not prohibit segregation on interstate trains or buses or in the public waiting rooms of railroad or bus stations until 1955.[16]

By the early 1940s, Mitchell had begun to pursue additional solutions to injustice. In 1940, he voted against the continuation of the House select committee investigating "un-American activities," led by Democratic Representative Martin Dies Jr. of Texas. The Dies Committee was originally created to uncover Nazi and pro-fascist organizations in the United States but frequently accused New Deal officials of having Communist sympathies. Mitchell was one of only 21 Democrats to oppose the committee, siding with President Roosevelt, who had been critical of the panel's scrutiny of some of the most significant New Deal figures and programs.[17]

Mitchell also spoke out against southern Democrats in a 1942 speech on a bill to eliminate the poll tax. He boldly criticized his Democratic colleagues for consistently opposing aid legislation designed to improve the lives of African Americans, noting they refused to change their ways even as Black soldiers were serving abroad in World War II. "In sections where the color of a man's skin determines his citizenship rights there is no real democracy," Mitchell said.[18]

In 1942, Mitchell declined to run for re-election to the 78th Congress (1943–1945). Officials in Chicago's Democratic organization were angry that Mitchell had defied machine orders in pursuing his lawsuit against the Chicago-based rail companies for forcing him to leave his first-class seat in Arkansas and let Mitchell know they planned to withdraw their support. Democratic leaders instead chose his rival, William L. Dawson, partially because they believed he would be a stronger candidate in a competitive Democratic primary and the general election versus Republican opposition. Publicly, Mitchell gracefully accepted the end of his time in Congress, claiming that he was ready for a new phase in his public-service career and that he would devote his efforts to improving race relations. After retiring from the House in January 1943, he moved to Petersburg, Virginia, where he had bought a large tract of land, and devoted himself to farming, lecturing, and practicing law. In 1950, he joined the Southern Regional Council, an interracial civil rights advocacy group, on a speaking tour throughout the South. He died in Petersburg on May 9, 1968.[19]

Manuscript Collection

Chicago History Museum, Research Center (Chicago, IL). *Papers*: 1898–1968, 31 linear feet. Correspondence, clippings, and other papers (chiefly 1934–1942) relating to Arthur W. Mitchell's business activities and service in Congress. A finding aid is available in the repository and online.

Notes

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18 *Congressional Record*, House, 77th Cong., 2nd sess. (13 October 1942): 8151–8152.

19 Nordin, *The New Deal's Black Congressman*: 246–248, 278, 284, 287–288; "Arthur Mitchell, An Ex-Lawmaker"; *Congressional Record*, House, 77th Cong., 2nd sess. (16 December 1942): 9649.

William L. Dawson

1886–1970

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1943–1970

Democrat from Illinois



Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

The third African American elected to Congress in the twentieth century and the first Black Member to chair a standing committee, William L. Dawson served in the U.S. House of Representatives for nearly three decades. A product of the influential Chicago Democratic machine, Dawson was a champion of the cause of civil rights and recognized the importance of working through institutional channels in Congress to build power. Dawson, who was known for his reserved demeanor and allegiance to the Democratic Party, used the established seniority system of the House of Representatives to amass legislative influence on Capitol Hill. "A whole lot of publicity isn't necessary to get things done," the Chicago Representative said. "Nine-tenths of the work of Congress is done off the floor."[1]

William Levi Dawson was born in Albany, Georgia, on April 26, 1886, to Levi Dawson, a barber, and Rebecca Kendrick. One of six siblings, Dawson credited his father and sister with keeping his family together after his mother died when he was a child. Upon graduating from Albany Normal School in 1905, he worked his way through Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee, as a porter and a waiter. He graduated in 1909 with a bachelor's degree, and three years later he moved to Chicago. After attending Kent College of Law and Northwestern University—both in Chicago—Dawson enlisted in the U.S. Army during World War I. In 1917, at the age of 31, he became a first lieutenant with the 365th Infantry of the American Expeditionary Force. Dawson later noted that he was "above draft age and did not have to go," but he believed "it was the duty of every citizen to rally to the colors in time of danger." After returning to Chicago, he resumed his studies at Northwestern and was admitted to the Illinois bar in 1920. Dawson married Nellie Brown on December 20, 1922, and the couple had two children: William Dawson Jr. and Barbara.[2]

In 1928, Dawson waged an unsuccessful bid in the Republican primary against incumbent Martin Barnaby Madden for the congressional district that encompassed numerous Black neighborhoods on Chicago's South Side. Undeterred by the loss, Dawson continued to pursue a career in politics, becoming an ally of Chicago's first African-American alderman, Oscar De Priest, who later won a special election to the House to fill the vacancy left by Representative Madden's death in 1928. In 1933, with De Priest's support, Dawson won election to the Chicago city council. Two years later, backed by Chicago's Democratic mayor, Edward J. Kelly, Dawson won re-

election to a four-year term; he served a total of six years as an alderman. In his second attempt to win a House seat in 1938, Dawson defeated De Priest, who had lost his bid for re-election to the House in 1934, in the Republican primary. But Dawson lost to the incumbent Arthur W. Mitchell in the general election, attracting about 47 percent of the vote to Mitchell's 53 percent. In a city struggling with the economic effects of the Great Depression, Black Chicagoans welcomed President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal reforms. Dawson felt the pull of the Democratic Party, the lure of patronage rewards within the Democratic machine, and a general impatience with the old guard of Black leaders tied to the GOP. Having challenged De Priest, Dawson effectively severed his ties to leading Black Republicans, who passed him over for the party nomination for another term on the city council. Running as an Independent, he failed to secure re-election.[3]

Dawson's political career was revived in 1939 with his acceptance of Mayor Kelly's offer of the post of Democratic committeeman for Chicago's second ward. In line with the growing shift of many African Americans from the Republican to the Democratic Party, Dawson cited President Roosevelt's New Deal agenda as his primary motivation for changing parties. As a committeeman, Dawson efficiently organized his political base, using his precinct workers to help transform other predominantly Black wards into Democratic strongholds. In time, Dawson's followers controlled as many as five wards that generally offered overwhelming majorities to local, state, and national Democratic candidates.[4]

When Arthur Mitchell declined to seek a fifth term in the House in 1942, Dawson opted for a third campaign for a congressional seat—this time as a Democrat. With the solid backing of the Democratic machine, Dawson earned the party nomination by defeating Earl Dickerson, a Chicago alderman. Dawson went on to beat Republican William E. King, a former Illinois state senator and his longtime political rival, in the general election—earning 53 percent of the vote.[5]

During his first two terms in office, Dawson served on three committees: Coinage, Weights, and Measures; Invalid Pensions; and Irrigation and Reclamation. He wanted a seat on Judiciary Committee, but lost out to another Illinois Representative, Martin Gorski. He also served on the Expenditures in the Executive Departments Committee from the 78th through the 80th Congress (1943–1949) before ascending to committee chair in 1949; the committee was renamed Government Operations in 1952. Dawson held this leadership position for ten nonconsecutive terms, only ceding the gavel for one term when Republicans briefly assumed control of the House during the 83rd Congress (1953–1955). Dawson's historic chairmanship was celebrated in the press and at a dinner in his honor hosted by leading national and Illinois Democratic leaders. Dawson spent 15 years on the District of Columbia Committee from the 84th Congress to the 91st Congress (1955–1971), and he also served on the Insular Affairs Committee—later named Interior and Insular Affairs—for two brief stints during the 78th and 79th Congresses (1943–1947), and again during the 82nd Congress (1951–1953).[6]

During his first term in the House, Dawson was the only African American serving in Congress. On February 9, 1943, Dawson made his first speech on the House Floor. He criticized the actions of the House Un-American Activities Committee, which had accused a Black employee at the U.S. Treasury Department, William Pickens, of harboring Communist ties. Dawson called the accusations baseless and declared the unquestioned loyalty of Pickens, who Dawson had known for 40 years.[7]

During his tenure in the House, Dawson steadfastly supported equal employment opportunities. He believed "every American citizen is entitled to a job in this country," and introduced several fair employment bills between 1945 and 1949 to prohibit job discrimination based on race or national origin. In 1944, he testified before the House Labor Committee in support of similar legislation. "The right to work is synonymous with the right to live," he declared.[8]

Dawson also vigorously opposed the use of the poll tax by state governments and introduced bills to outlaw them as a qualification for federal elections. After the House passed an anti-poll tax bill in 1943, Dawson promoted it before the Senate Judiciary Committee, where he asserted that poll taxes were adopted for the "deliberate, vicious, undemocratic purpose of disfranchising large numbers of Negroes and white people because of their economic status."[9]

In 1944, a second Black Representative, Adam Clayton Powell Jr. of New York, joined Dawson in Congress. Dawson and Powell drew intense media attention and scrutiny because of their strikingly different legislative styles. Powell, who epitomized a more confrontational approach within

the civil rights movement, criticized racial inequality, including segregation in certain areas of the Capitol, at every conceivable opportunity. Unlike Powell, Dawson disliked personal publicity, was wary of the media, and lived unpretentiously. He personally attended to many of the details of his office. When in his district, Dawson spent part of each day at his headquarters listening to complaints, requests, and opinions from his constituents. He kept a firm grip on his share of power in Chicago, dispensing patronage and favors through his political machine and its ancillary organizations. Dawson worked behind the scenes to pass legislation to assist his district, particularly as he gained power in Congress.[10]

Throughout his 27 years in Congress, Dawson consistently supported the interests of the Democratic Party. In 1948, Dawson addressed the Democratic National Convention in Philadelphia, praising President Harry S. Truman's civil rights record and taking the opportunity to denounce the agenda of the Republican majority in the House. In 1950, his unswerving loyalty to the party eventually led to a position of national prominence: vice chair of the Democratic National Committee (DNC). Dawson's tenure as vice chair was controversial at the time. The Democratic Party simultaneously touted the appointment and tried to ward off criticism from southern Democrats who objected to Dawson's prominent role in the party. Dawson did not comment publicly on the controversy and largely avoided confronting southern Democrats in the press.[11]

There was no equivocating on the appointment of Dawson as chair of the House Committee on Expenditures in the Executive Departments in 1949. The Illinois Representative was well-positioned to eventually secure the gavel and lead the panel as the third-ranking Democratic member of the committee. Two significant changes in the House Democratic Caucus led to his quick ascension to the chair. First, Carter Manasco of Alabama, the ranking Democrat on the committee in the 80th Congress (1947–1949), lost his bid for re-election in 1948. Next in line was Representative John W. McCormack of Massachusetts. But when the Democrats took back the House majority in the 81st Congress (1949–1951), McCormack was elected Majority Leader and was therefore ineligible to chair the committee. The start of Dawson's chairmanship in January 1949 led to howls of protest from southern Democrats. Joseph Franklin Wilson of Texas resigned from the committee rather than work under Dawson's leadership, and several southern Democrats requested that Speaker Sam Rayburn of Texas intervene to force another appointment. In a show of solidarity with Dawson, McCormack remained on the committee despite the tradition of Majority Leaders declining committee assignments.[12]

One of Dawson's first legislative achievements as chair was to shepherd through Congress President Truman's plan for reorganizing executive departments. Dawson sponsored the Reorganization Act of 1949 and his committee held hearings on the bill. It became law in June 1949. The act enabled the President to create new agencies and restructure existing departments, so long as plans were approved by Congress. Both the House and Senate had 60 days to review the President's proposals, and either chamber reserved the right to block their implementation.[13]

As chair of Government Operations, Dawson mainly held hearings on federal spending and touted the millions of dollars he claimed his committee saved the government through its investigations. For instance, in 1957, the committee began an inquest into federally funded scientific research programs. Dawson was concerned that within a federal department or agency, "such a program can be seriously impeded by wasteful duplication, excessive administration costs, complicated procedures, and organizational financial bottlenecks." In July 1958, Dawson chaired the Government Operations subcommittee hearing exploring the decision-making process for defense spending. In 1966, Dawson's committee criticized the federal government's research priorities after discovering that 90 percent of research and development funding was allocated to nuclear energy, space, and defense programs. Meanwhile, "civilian programs" to mitigate water pollution and address urban housing and transportation issues were overlooked. Dawson also led the Government Operations Subcommittee on Executive and Legislative Reorganization from the 84th to 89th Congresses (1955–1967). While Representative Powell had served as chair of a special subcommittee in the 81st Congress, Dawson was the first Black Member to head a formal subcommittee organized at the start of the session.[14]

In 1951, Dawson played an integral role ensuring that the Universal Military Training Act furthered the desegregation of the armed forces first initiated in 1948. He helped defeat the Winstead amendment, proposed by William Arthur Winstead of Mississippi, which would have permitted military personnel to choose whether they wanted to serve in White or Black units. Dawson spoke on

the House Floor during the debate to urge his colleagues to end racial discrimination in the military, mentioning that an injury he sustained during World War I would not have become a lifelong affliction had he been allowed access to a White hospital. Commenting proudly that he "led Americans in battle," Dawson proclaimed, "If there is one place in America where there should not be segregation, that place is in the armed services, among those who fight for this country."[15]

Dawson was often criticized for not fully employing his authority as a committee chair and a leader of the DNC to promote meaningful change for African Americans. The NAACP condemned his "silence, compromise and meaningless moderation" on issues concerning African Americans, including his refusal to back the Powell amendment, which prohibited federal funding for segregated schools. Although Dawson opposed the measure because he feared the rider would undermine all aid to education, his caution disappointed many of his own staff members. Powell intimated that his colleague cared more about his position in Mayor Daley's Chicago political machine than the success of the civil rights movement—a sentiment shared by other prominent Black leaders and civil rights groups. But Dawson took a more pragmatic approach. He viewed the political machine as an effective political organizing tool in ward politics rather than an inherently corrupt institution—and he questioned the need for the type of outspoken activism associated with Powell. "The world is full of orators, but it isn't full of organizers," he told a reporter in 1946. "In this 2d Ward, we've got organizers. I don't need to make speeches to get out the vote."[16]

After the murder of 14-year-old Emmett Till—a Chicago resident who was visiting family in Mississippi—Dawson was publicly chastised by the NAACP for neither speaking out in defense of Till's family nor denouncing his murder. Dawson declined to respond to these allegations—an approach that exacerbated criticism of the Chicago Representative. Privately, however, Dawson worked behind the scenes, helping Emmett Till's mother, Mamie Bradley, to convince Mississippi officials to release her son's body so that he could be buried in Illinois and he aided Bradley with funeral arrangements.[17]

Dawson refuted detractors who accused him of failing to adequately confront issues important to Black Americans. "How is it," he wondered, "that after fighting all my life for the rights of my people, I suddenly awaken in the September of life to find myself vilified and abused, and those who know me well and what I have stood for are accusing me of being against civil rights." Reacting to criticism that his infrequent speeches in Congress were a sign of ineffective leadership, Dawson defended his approach to politics while maligning some of his outspoken Black colleagues, noting, "I use speeches only as the artisan does his stone, to build something. I don't talk just to show off."[18]

Throughout his congressional career, Dawson balanced his work in Washington with his determination to remain influential in Chicago Democratic politics. He maintained a strong presence in the city's ward politics while serving in Congress, doling out patronage positions and maintaining a strong Democratic organization. He played a key role in Richard J. Daley's election as mayor of Chicago in 1955. In 1960, President John F. Kennedy's narrow victory in the key state of Illinois was largely dependent on the voters in Dawson's wards. Dawson's efforts to mobilize support for Kennedy led to widespread speculation among the press that the President-elect would express his gratitude by inviting the Chicago Representative to become Postmaster General. Kennedy did in fact offer the Chicago Representative the position, but the 74-year-old Dawson declined, insisting he would be more useful to the new administration as a senior Member in the House. Some questioned the authenticity of the offer, with the press insinuating that the position was never intended for Dawson but instead was a political maneuver to continue to build support from Black Americans.[19]

Dawson introduced antilynching legislation several times in the 1940s and 1950s. He also introduced a major civil rights bill on the House Floor in 1963. His bill echoed many of the proposals then being considered in Congress and eventually rolled into the 1964 Civil Rights Act: voting rights, the end to discrimination in public accommodations, the creation of a Commission on Equal Employment Opportunity, and a provision to prohibit discrimination in federally funded programs. "There is a crisis in America that is now a national danger," he declared. "Unless something is done about it, and it must be done soon, this crisis will become a national calamity."[20]

Despite his longevity and influence, Dawson never assumed a leadership role among the small number of African Americans in Congress. He clashed with the confrontational spirit adopted by many Black leaders during the 1960s. When Black Representatives began to organize

and act collectively in 1969, Dawson declined to be part of the group. In May 1970—six months before his death—he did join his Black colleagues in criticizing President Richard M. Nixon for not agreeing to meet with them.[21]

As a loyal Democrat, Dawson supported the Vietnam War and President Lyndon B. Johnson's increasingly unpopular foreign policy in Southeast Asia. In 1966, when the Department of Defense reported that the death rate of Black soldiers in Vietnam was higher than that of White soldiers, Michigan Representatives John Conyers Jr. and Charles C. Diggs Jr. expressed concern and called for further investigation. Dawson considered the war an opportunity for African Americans, who he said had "a great gain to make in the present conflict" while noting that he had not yet read the report. "When we are out there, carrying our load and holding our own," Dawson declared, "the differences of race are wiped out." From 1967 to 1968, Dawson delayed the publication of a committee report that was critical of Johnson administration policy on land reform in Vietnam. John Emerson Moss of California, chair of the Government Operations Subcommittee on Foreign Operations and Government Information, had authored a report that blamed the U.S. State Department and the U.S. Agency for International Development for failing to promote the redistribution of land from landlords to farmers in South Vietnam. This process instead was implemented by the Viet Cong in territory it controlled in South Vietnam—a move calculated to further the organization's revolutionary goals at the expense of the anticommunist forces. Dawson delayed publication of the report for five months to avoid embarrassing the administration. Shortly after, Dawson proposed to abolish the Foreign Operations Subcommittee after the full committee's budget was slashed. Dawson said that the reorganization was necessary due to lack of funding, but some suspected that he made the decision at the request of the Johnson administration. The reorganization plan was scrapped after the House approved a higher budget for the committee.[22]

Dawson rarely faced any significant opposition to his re-election. Several Black Republicans challenged him in the 1950s and 1960s, offering pointed critiques of his policy choices and voting record. Regardless of the mounting criticism against him, Dawson typically cruised to victory, earning between 70 and 80 percent of the vote. His age and his poor health—he had a stroke when he was 71 in 1957—prevented him from playing an active role on the campaign trail in the 1960s. Nevertheless, he continued to enjoy comfortable victories against his opponents in the general election.[23]

By the end of his career, however, the Illinois Representative found himself on the defensive for refusing to disassociate himself from the Daley machine, which by the late 1960s was widely perceived as insufficiently committed to the cause of civil rights. He also faced growing criticism from members of his own party and from civil rights groups. For example, in 1966, he faced a primary challenge from Fred Hubbard, a YMCA youth worker who focused his campaign on framing Dawson as a machine politician unfit to respond to the needs of the district. Dawson remained in Washington during the lead-up to the primary, unconcerned about his opponent, and Hubbard dropped out of the race before the vote. In the general election, the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) organized for his Republican opponent, David Reed, yet Dawson won easily. In their treatise on the significance of the nascent Black Power movement, Stokely Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton wrote that Dawson had "become assimilated" and allowed the White power structure in the city of Chicago to rule over the Black community like "Britain over the African colonies."[24]

Dawson won again in 1968 before deciding to retire at the conclusion of the 91st Congress (1969–1971). On November 9, 1970, only six days after his handpicked successor, Ralph H. Metcalfe, won election to his seat, Dawson died of pneumonia in Chicago.[25]

Manuscript Collections

Fisk University (Nashville, TN). *Papers*: 1938–1970, 20.8 linear feet. The papers of William L. Dawson contain correspondence (1930s–1960s) with major U.S. political figures, speeches by Dawson before the U.S. House of Representatives, Democratic National Convention, church groups, and other organizations, biographical data, scrapbooks of clippings, certificates, awards, printed matter, plaques, and photos.

Howard University, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center (Washington, DC). *Papers*: 1942–1972, approximately 5 linear feet. The papers of William L. Dawson include biographical sketches, campaign material, speeches, correspondence, writings about William Dawson, legislative files, committee files, photographs, and memorabilia.

Chicago History Museum (Chicago, IL). *Papers*: 1943–1970, 0.5 linear feet. Correspondence, speeches, newspaper clippings, press releases, testimonials, and other papers relating to the career of William L. Dawson, a Chicago, Illinois, lawyer, alderman of the second ward, and U.S. Representative (Democrat from the 1st District of Illinois; 1943–1970). He succeeded Arthur W. Mitchell as the second African-American Democrat to represent the First District. Collection includes some material on the elections of 1944, 1948, 1952, and 1964, and a few letters from Presidents Harry S. Truman, John F. Kennedy, and Lyndon B. Johnson.

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Adam Clayton Powell Jr.

1908–1972

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1945–1967; 1969–1971

Democrat from New York



Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

An unapologetic activist, Adam Clayton Powell Jr. of New York left his mark on Congress during his 12 terms in the U.S. House of Representatives. Powell earned the support of many African Americans in his Harlem district and across the nation for his legislative battles against racial discrimination. Never one to shun the spotlight, the New York minister and politician relished his position as a spokesperson for the advancement of African-American civil and political rights. Powell fought tirelessly to pass civil rights legislation and harness the power of the federal government to combat segregation. Speaking in Chicago in 1965, Powell reflected on his position in the House, where he had become chair of the Committee on Education and Labor with jurisdiction over legislation related to schools, job programs, and anti-poverty efforts. "This is legislative power. This is political power." Powell insisted. "I use myself as an example because this is the audacious power I urge every black woman and man in this audience to seek."[1]

Adam Clayton Powell Jr. was born in New Haven, Connecticut, on November 29, 1908. At the age of six months, he moved to New York City with his older sister Blanche and his parents, Mattie and Adam Clayton Powell Sr., a Baptist preacher. The family relocated to New York when the elder Powell was assigned to serve as a minister at the century-old Abyssinian Baptist Church in midtown Manhattan. Under his leadership, the congregation grew into one of the largest in the United States, and Powell Sr. oversaw the move of the church to Harlem in the 1920s.[2]

After graduating from Townsend Harris High School in New York, Powell attended the City College of New York. In 1926, he transferred to Colgate University in Hamilton, New York. As an undergraduate, he often circumvented the socially accepted racial barriers of the period because many students and faculty assumed he was White. When he tried to join an all-White fraternity, the students inquired into his background and rejected him. Powell was criticized by the small number of Black students at Colgate for this attempt to pass as White. This experience led Powell to a personal reckoning about race and his place in American society.[3]

A year after graduating from Colgate in 1930, Powell earned a master's degree in religious education from Columbia University in New York City. In 1933, Powell married Isabel Washington, an actress. Powell later adopted Washington's son, Preston, from her previous marriage. After Powell and Washington divorced, Powell married musician, singer, and actor Hazel Scott in 1945; they had

a son, Adam Clayton Powell III. They divorced in 1960, and that same year Powell married Yvette Flores Diago. They had a son, Adam Clayton Powell IV.[4]

Powell used his position as assistant minister and business manager of the Abyssinian Church to press for change in the predominantly African-American community in Harlem. In the early 1930s, he organized mass meetings and a march to demand reforms at Harlem Hospital, which had a history of discriminatory practices towards Black doctors and nurses. Beginning in 1932, he administered a church-sponsored relief program that provided food, clothing, and temporary jobs for thousands of Harlem's homeless and unemployed. During the Great Depression, Powell established himself as a charismatic and commanding civil rights leader—directing mass meetings, rent strikes, and public campaigns that forced employers including restaurants, utilities, Harlem Hospital, and the 1939 World's Fair in New York City to hire or promote Black workers. Powell's early social activism earned him the steadfast support of Harlem residents and helped lay the foundation for his future political career.[5]

In 1937, Powell succeeded his father as pastor of Abyssinian Baptist Church. A popular community leader, he decided to run for local office. After earning the endorsement of New York City mayor Fiorello Henry La Guardia, the 33-year-old Powell easily won a seat on the New York City council in 1941. During World War II, Powell used speaking engagements and columns in *The People's Voice*, a weekly newspaper he published and edited from 1941 to 1945, to attract national attention, denouncing racial discrimination within the United States and calling for the end of segregation in the U.S. military. Powell gained additional political experience during the war years by serving on the consumer division of the New York State office of price administration.[6]

In 1942, following the 1940 Census, New York officials created a new congressional district that encompassed much of Harlem and was nearly 90 percent Black. Powell's local civil rights activism and city council service positioned him for a strong bid for the new House seat in 1944. His campaign platform focused on the advancement of African-American rights, including the promotion of fair employment practices and a ban on poll taxes and lynching. Powell received support from two influential organizations in the newly drawn district: the Abyssinian Church and the local Democratic machine, Tammany Hall. But Powell, who said that he would "never be a machine man," worked to put distance between his candidacy and the influence of Tammany. "I will represent the Negro people first," he said. "I will represent after that all the other American people." He later clarified his remarks, emphasizing that he would represent the people of his Harlem district "irrespective of race, creed or political affiliation."[7]

Powell's Republican opponent was Sara Pelham Speaks, a Harlem lawyer. Both Powell and Speaks took advantage of state election laws allowing candidates to run in multiple party primaries. But Speaks proved no match for Powell, who won the Democratic primary with more than 80 percent of the vote and the GOP primary with 57 percent. Powell also received the American Labor Party designation, allowing him to run unopposed in the general election and earn a spot in the 79th Congress (1945–1947). He was the first African-American Member of Congress to represent New York. Powell's demand for racial equality and his uncompromising demeanor resonated with his Harlem constituents, whose strong backing essentially guaranteed Powell a House seat for most of his career.[8]

When Congress convened on January 3, 1945, William L. Dawson of Illinois, the only other Black Representative, escorted Powell into the House Chamber for his first day in office. Powell and Dawson remained the only African-American Members of Congress from 1945 to 1955. During his first term on Capitol Hill, Powell served on the Committees on Indian Affairs, Invalid Pensions, and Labor. Powell was also a member of the Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs from the 84th through the 86th Congress (1955–1961). In 1947, the House merged the Education Committee and the Labor Committee, and Powell remained on the new panel for 11 terms. In the 87th Congress (1961–1963), Powell was named chair of the Education and Labor Committee, holding the gavel for three terms. He was the second Black Representative to chair a standing committee in the House—William Dawson had first achieved that honor in 1949.[9]

During Powell's first term, he introduced legislation to extend congressional representation and the right to choose presidential electors to District of Columbia residents. He also sponsored bills to outlaw lynching and the poll tax, to end segregation in the armed forces and public transportation, and to prohibit employment discrimination.[10]

Soon after his arrival in Washington, Powell challenged the informal regulations forbidding Black Representatives from using Capitol facilities reserved for Members. Following the

lead of Oscar De Priest, Powell often took Black constituents to the Whites-only House restaurant and ordered his staff to eat there. Powell also successfully campaigned to allow Black reporters in the House Chamber's press gallery in 1947.[11]

Powell's uncompromising stance on discrimination within Congress led to numerous confrontations with John Elliott Rankin, a Democrat from Mississippi and one of the chamber's most notorious segregationists. Even before Powell's election to Congress, Rankin disparaged attempts to integrate the Capitol. In 1943, Rankin condemned protesters as a "gang of communistic Jews and Negroes" trying "to storm the House restaurant, and went around here arm in arm with each other." When Rankin made known his intention to avoid sitting near African-American Members on the House Floor, Powell responded to the insult by sitting close to Rankin whenever possible. Powell noted he was "happy that Rankin will not sit by me because that makes it mutual. The only people with whom he is qualified to sit are Hitler and Mussolini." Powell's maiden speech on the House Floor condemned a racist attack Rankin had made on Jewish journalist Walter Winchell. "Last week democracy was shamed by the uncalled for and unfounded condemnation of one of America's great minorities." Powell continued, "I am not a member of that great minority, but I will always oppose anyone who tries to besmirch any group because of race, creed or color." Powell also denounced the racial slurs uttered in the House by Rankin and other southern Democrats, at one point demanding a parliamentary inquiry into whether the use of "disparaging terms" on the floor was acceptable under the House Rules.[12]

In 1945, Powell spoke out against the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR). DAR had refused to allow his wife, Hazel Scott, a jazz pianist and singer, to perform in the concert venue owned by the organization, Constitution Hall in Washington, DC. A few years earlier, DAR had barred Marian Anderson, an African-American singer, from performing in the concert hall. In response, First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt arranged for her to perform on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial instead. Hopeful that First Lady Bess Truman's reaction would be similar to Roosevelt's, Powell became enraged when she refused to intercede. His characterization of Bess Truman as the "last lady" of the land, in response to her decision to attend a previously scheduled DAR tea, instigated a lingering feud between President Harry S. Truman and the New York Representative that resulted in Powell's exile from the White House during Truman's years in office. Though the Truman administration eventually denounced DAR's decision to deny Scott the opportunity to perform, the disagreement also fueled a heated debate on the House Floor in which Rankin insinuated that Powell had directed "communistic attacks" at the President and the First Lady.[13]

In the 81st Congress (1949–1951), Powell introduced a fair employment practices bill, which would have prohibited discrimination in hiring and established a permanent Fair Employment Practices Committee. In 1949, Powell became the first Black Representative to chair a subcommittee when he was appointed to lead the Committee on Education and Labor's special subcommittee on the legislation. The subcommittee held extensive hearings in May 1949. Powell pushed against efforts to water down the bill in the House and Senate. The bill eventually passed the House but not before opponents had significantly altered it with amendments. Then the measure stalled in the Senate.[14]

One of Powell's lasting legislative contributions was an anti-discrimination clause he attached to federal spending bills to ensure that Congress did not direct public funds on organizations or programs that denied equal opportunity to all Americans. He deployed this rider so often it became known as the Powell Amendment. His first attempt to make use of this tactic, in an amendment added to a 1946 school lunch bill that prohibited federal funds to any states that discriminated in the disbursement of the money, became law. Significantly, Powell's first rider did not challenge segregation, rather Powell called for funds to be "allocated fairly" even within segregated school systems. Powell wanted to force his colleagues to reckon with disparities in federal funding and consistently introduced his rider into debate on appropriations bills. Working with the NAACP, he refined his amendment to include an anti-segregation clause. In the wake of the Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*, Powell added his amendment to ensure that no funds would support segregated schools to the Dwight D. Eisenhower administration's 1956 school construction bill. This proved controversial even among liberal anti-segregationists, some of whom feared that an uncompromising approach might jeopardize the bill. When the bill was defeated, Powell was accused of stalling school funding, but he stood firmly by his efforts. After nearly two decades of amendments, Powell's rider was included in Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act.[15]

Powell's commitment to using the federal treasury to ensure the equal treatment of Black Americans earned him the nickname "Mr. Civil Rights." Similar to the efforts of other civil rights leaders, Powell's stance came with certain risks in an institution not known for its tolerance. During a July 1955 meeting of the Education and Labor Committee, avowed segregationist and West Virginia Democrat Cleveland Monroe Bailey punched Powell in the jaw out of anger from what he perceived as Powell's continued efforts to undermine the committee's legislative efforts with his rider. The encounter, which drew national attention, apparently ended with a conciliatory handshake.[16]

Powell often framed the Black struggle for civil and political rights in the United States in an international context. In 1955, he attended the Bandung Conference in Indonesia, despite efforts by U.S. officials to dissuade him. Privately, U.S. Department of State officials expressed concern that Powell's presence at Bandung might be interpreted as a sign of tacit U.S. approval for the conference, which brought together non-aligned nations in the Cold War conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union. While Powell observed the meeting of newly independent African and Asian nations, reporters confronted him about the appalling conditions faced by African Americans. Acknowledging the existence of discrimination back home, Powell pointed to himself as an example of improved circumstances for minority groups in the United States. Upon his return, he urged President Eisenhower and other American policymakers to stand firm against colonialism and to pay greater attention to developing nations. To keep the issue in the public eye, Powell made speeches on the House Floor that celebrated the anniversaries of the independence of nations such as Ghana, Indonesia, and Sierra Leone.[17]

During much of his tenure in the House, Powell used his platform as a Member of Congress to attract headlines beyond Capitol Hill. He received national attention when he broke ranks with the Democratic Party to endorse President Eisenhower's re-election bid in 1956. Powell threw his support behind Eisenhower's Republican administration because he was dissatisfied with the Democratic nominee for President, Adlai Stevenson, and his choice for Vice President, Alabama Senator John Jackson Sparkman. Southern Democrats sought to retaliate against Powell, calling for Democratic leaders to strip him of his seniority. The NAACP defended Powell, persuading Speaker Sam Rayburn of Texas and Representative Emanuel Celler—dean of the New York delegation and chairman of the Judiciary Committee—not to take punitive action. Nevertheless, Powell's House enemies succeeded in firing two of Powell's patronage appointees. Of greater consequence to Powell's career, Education and Labor Committee Chair Graham Arthur Barden of North Carolina, a fervent segregationist, denied Powell one of the five subcommittee chairmanships, even though he was the third-ranking Democrat on the full committee.[18]

In 1958, Powell was indicted for income tax evasion by a federal grand jury. The 1960 trial ended with a hung jury, but the federal government continued to investigate his finances. Tammany Hall withdrew its support for Powell in the 1958 Democratic primary—a decision machine leaders claimed stemmed from the New York Representative's support for Eisenhower, not his legal problems—and backed Black candidate Earl Brown, a Harlem city councilman. Nevertheless, Powell easily captured the nomination for his Harlem district.[19]

In the 1960s, the New York Representative was criticized for taking numerous trips abroad at public expense, payroll discrepancies, and a high level of absenteeism for House votes. Asked to justify his erratic attendance record on the Hill, Powell replied, "You don't have to be there if you know which calls to make, which buttons to push, which favors to call in." For most of his career, Powell remained relatively unscathed by public criticism. He was re-elected with ease and lost little in terms of legislative clout on Capitol Hill.[20]

When Representative Barden retired after the 86th Congress (1959–1961), Powell, next in seniority, became chair of the Committee on Education and Labor, a position he held until January 1967. Powell's service as chair marked the most productive period of his congressional career. The committee approved more than 50 measures authorizing federal programs for increases in the minimum wage, education and job training opportunities for deaf Americans, school lunches, vocational training, student loans, and standards for wages and work hours, as well as aid for institutions of elementary and secondary education and public libraries. "We have been a more productive committee in the last year and a half than the New Deal," a committee member noted in 1965. "It has been under Powell's chairmanship and you've got to give him credit for that."[21]

The legislation introduced by Powell's committee helped shape much of the social policy agenda of the

John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson administrations. In particular, Powell worked closely on bills related to President Johnson's signature initiatives, the Great Society and the War on Poverty. From the 87th Congress to the 89th Congress (1961–1967), for example, Powell's committee held hearings on bills related to education and antipoverty programs. Powell also personally chaired the Ad Hoc Subcommittee on the War on Poverty Program in the 88th Congress (1963–1965), which held extensive hearings on the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964.[22]

By the mid-1960s, Powell faced criticism not only from longtime enemies but also from committee members dismayed by his irregular management of the committee budget. Those who often interacted with Powell as a committee chair were critical of his frequent absences and unpredictability. His actions off the Hill continued to elicit criticism from colleagues and the public. In 1963, for instance, Powell refused to pay compensation to New Yorker Esther James, who won a court-ordered slander judgment against Powell after he alleged she was transporting money from gamblers to corrupt police officers in Harlem. The public case, which lasted several years, irked Powell's colleagues and led to the New York Representative adopting a self-imposed exile from his district. For more than a year, Powell avoided arrest by making brief appearances in Harlem only on Sundays since state law prohibited serving civil contempt warrants on that day of the week.[23]

Amid mounting legal problems, questions about his wife's role on his congressional staff, and accusations that he had misused travel funds for personal business, the House confronted Powell in the 89th Congress (1965–1967). Lawmakers established a special subcommittee of the Committee on House Administration to investigate the accusations against the Harlem Congressman. Led by Wayne Levere Hays of Ohio, the subcommittee held hearings in December 1966 and, in its final report, substantiated the allegations against Powell and concluded that he had misused the finances of the Education and Labor Committee.[24]

The subcommittee compiled sufficient evidence to spur the House Democratic Caucus to strip Powell of his committee chair on January 9, 1967. Powell had won re-election easily, but on January 10, as the new Congress convened on the House Floor, Powell was told to step aside as Members were sworn in. The House then passed House Resolution 1, which created a select committee to determine if Powell should be seated. On February 23, the chair of the select committee reported its findings. Although the committee majority decided that Powell should be sworn in, it also advised that he be censured, fined, and stripped of seniority. One of the committee members, John Conyers Jr. of Michigan, cited precedent saying that punishment for past misconduct cases had never exceeded censure and that no other Member had been stripped of seniority.[25]

On March 1, 1967, the House rejected these proposals and voted 307 to 116 to exclude Powell from the 90th Congress (1967–1969). Powell was subsequently re-elected to fill his own vacancy on April 11, 1967, with 86 percent of the vote but refused to take his seat and spent most of the term on the island of Bimini in The Bahamas. "Keep the faith, baby," Powell said when questioned about his exclusion from the House, confident that his actions would be vindicated.[26]

After he was re-elected to a twelfth term in November 1968, the House allowed Powell to take his seat when he arrived for the 91st Congress (1969–1971), but his colleagues voted to deny him his seniority and to fine him for misusing payroll and travel finances. Powell also took the House to court, claiming it did not have the authority to keep him from taking his office in March 1967. In June 1969, the Supreme Court ruled the House had acted unconstitutionally by excluding Powell from the 90th Congress.[27]

Despite the legal absolution, Powell never regained his former influence or authority in Congress. Still confident he would earn another term in the House, Powell entered the Democratic primary in 1970 and declared, "My people would elect me … even if I had to be propped up in my casket." Some of his constituents, however, had grown tired of his legal troubles, negative publicity, and infrequent attendance in Congress. His strongest opponent in the primary, Harlem-based New York state assemblyman Charles B. Rangel, highlighted Powell's absenteeism, using campaign literature marking the major votes he had missed. Even in the face of a formidable primary challenge, Powell made few public appearances. Rangel, who benefited from redistricting that diluted Powell's base of power in Harlem by adding to the district a slice of the mostly White Upper West Side, won the primary by a slim 200-vote margin to become the Democratic candidate and the eventual Representative for his district. Powell contested the primary election results, but although the recount reduced the margin of victory from 203 to 150 votes, Rangel prevailed.[28]

Powell had been diagnosed with cancer in 1969, and his health declined after he left Congress in January 1971. He retired as minister of the Abyssinian Baptist Church and spent most of his time in Bimini. He died on April 4, 1972, in Miami, Florida.[29]

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Charles C. Diggs Jr.

1922–1998

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1955–1980

Democrat from Michigan



Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

Elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1954 at age 31, Charles C. Diggs Jr. was the first African-American lawmaker to represent Michigan in Congress. On Capitol Hill, Diggs was an ardent supporter of civil rights and an impassioned advocate of increased American aid to Africa. As a principal architect of home rule for the District of Columbia and a driving force behind the formation of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC), Diggs crafted an international legacy during his 25 years in the House. For Representative Diggs, aiding the development, independence, and self-rule of majority-Black African countries was part of a larger struggle for Black equality throughout the world that also encompassed the civil rights movement in the United States. "The destiny of Afro-Americans in the United States and of Africans in Africa is inextricably linked," he wrote.[1]

Charles Coles Diggs Jr., the only child of Charles Diggs Sr. and Mamie Ethel Jones Diggs, was born in Detroit, Michigan, on December 2, 1922. Prominent in Detroit, the Diggs family owned a local mortuary, a funeral insurance company, and an ambulance service. In the 1920s, Detroit, the hub of the U.S. automobile industry, underwent a massive transformation as African Americans moved from the South to the North in search of better opportunities. Between 1920 and 1930, Detroit's Black population tripled—growing at a faster rate than any other major northern city. Charles Diggs Sr. personified rising Black influence in Detroit and in 1936 became the first African-American Democrat elected to the Michigan state senate. After graduating from Detroit's Miller High School in 1940, Charles Diggs Jr. enrolled at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor. After two years, Diggs transferred to Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee. While still an undergraduate, he entered the United States Army Air Forces as a private on February 19, 1943. During World War II, Diggs, who worked in administrative roles, served alongside the famed Tuskegee airmen in Alabama. Commissioned a second lieutenant in 1944, Diggs was discharged from the military on June 1, 1945. Diggs resumed his academic career, enrolling in Detroit's Wayne University School of Mortuary Science. After graduating in June 1946, the newly licensed mortician joined his father's funeral business, serving as chairman of the House of Diggs, Inc. Diggs also delivered commentary on current affairs (interspersed with gospel music) as part of a weekly radio show sponsored by his business. Married four times, Charles Diggs Jr. had six children.[2]

In 1944, Charles Diggs Sr. became embroiled in a legislative bribery scandal and served 15 months in prison. Upon his release in 1950, Diggs Sr. sought to reclaim his position in the legislature. He won re-election, but in an unprecedented move, the Republican-controlled Michigan senate refused to seat him and another state senator-elect because of their criminal records. Outraged by the events that prevented his father from resuming his political career, Diggs Jr. interrupted his studies at the Detroit School of Law to enter the special election for his father's seat. Diggs won the election and served in the Michigan senate for three years before setting his sights on the United States Congress. Using the campaign slogan "Make Democracy Live," he defeated incumbent Representative George D. O'Brien by a two-to-one margin in the August 1954 Democratic primary in the Detroit district which had a majority-White population. Building on the momentum from the primary, Diggs easily defeated Republican Landon Knight—the son of John S. Knight, editor and publisher of the *Detroit Free Press*—in the general election, capturing 66 percent of the vote to become Michigan's first African-American Representative.[3]

After winning a seat in the 84th Congress (1955–1957), Diggs remarked, "This is a great victory for the voters of the Democratic Party, and it also settles deeper issues—the racial issue. This is proof that the voters of the Thirteenth District have reached maturity." Diggs rarely faced serious opposition in subsequent elections, typically winning by more than 70 percent in a working-class urban district that saw a rapid decline in population and a substantial rise in the percentage of Black residents due to the loss of job opportunities following the departure of auto factories from Detroit and the decision of White families to move out of the city and into suburbs as Black families moved into majority-White neighborhoods, a phenomenon known as White flight.[4]

Upon entering Congress, Diggs was assigned to the Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs and the Veterans' Affairs Committee. Unlike many Members, Diggs did not pursue seats on high-profile committees as he accrued seniority. Instead, Diggs chose assignments that allowed him to work on often overlooked but vital policies important to his African-American constituents, as well as on international human rights issues. In 1959, Diggs joined the Foreign Affairs Committee, remaining there until he left Congress in 1980. In 1969, Diggs became the chair of the Committee on Foreign Affairs' Subcommittee on Africa. In 1963, Diggs became a member of the Committee on the District of Columbia and remained there the rest of his tenure, becoming chair of the committee in 1973.[5]

Early in his career, Diggs, whose father was from Mississippi, used his platform to bring attention to the oppression of Black Mississippians and the growing civil and voting rights movements in the state. One of Diggs's first public speeches as a Representative was at a voting rights rally in the all-Black town of Mound Bayou, Mississippi. Diggs expressed confidence that African Americans in Mississippi could end Jim Crow in the state. Returning to his campaign slogan, he told the crowd that "if we keep up the fight to make democracy live, we will get the justice espoused by Almighty God and the Constitution of the United States." Then in September 1955, the first-year Michigan Representative garnered attention from the national media when he attended the trial in Sumner, Mississippi, of two White men accused of murdering Emmett Till, a 14-year-old African-American boy, for allegedly whistling at a White woman. In January 1956, Diggs inserted into the *Congressional Record* an article from *Look* magazine in which the two men, who had been found not guilty by an all-White jury, confessed to Till's murder. For Diggs the trial and the confession with immunity further illustrated the urgent need for civil and political rights for African Americans in Mississippi. When Diggs discovered that the county where the trial was being held had no registered Black voters, he suggested that Mississippi's representation in Congress should be reduced—echoing Members from earlier decades who called for the enforcement of Section 2 of the Fourteenth Amendment, requiring reduced congressional representation for states that discriminated against qualified voters. Two months later, Diggs proposed that President Dwight D. Eisenhower convene a special session of Congress to consider civil rights issues.[6]

In 1956, Diggs supported an amendment by Adam Clayton Powell Jr. of New York to prohibit federal educational funds for states that refused to abide by the 1954 Supreme Court decision *Brown v. Board of Education.* Powell included these anti-segregation riders into federal funding bills so often they became known as the Powell Amendment. A year later, however, Diggs refused to support the Powell Amendment when the Harlem Representative once again introduced it to the

same education bill that had been under debate during the previous Congress. The House had already passed civil rights legislation that year, and Diggs argued "the objective we seek to provide a remedy in school desegregation cases can best be achieved by means other than an appropriate amendment to this bill." In the late 1950s and early 1960s, as civil rights protests spread throughout the South, Diggs frequently introduced legislation that targeted various segregation laws and discriminatory practices. He introduced measures for voting rights, prohibitions against discrimination in federally funded hospitals, fair employment, antilynching, and the creation of a joint congressional civil rights commission. He also was a tireless advocate of the Civil Rights Act of 1957.[7]

In February 1965, Diggs and 14 other Representatives, including John Conyers Jr. of Michigan and Augustus F. "Gus" Hawkins of California, visited Selma, Alabama, during the ongoing voting rights campaign involving Martin Luther King Jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. The delegates went there to investigate the treatment of protesters by the police and study how Selma officials deprived African Americans of the right to vote. Four years later, in May 1969, Diggs marched with 12,000 people in Charleston, South Carolina, to support Black hospital workers who were seeking the right to organize and bargain collectively.[8]

As the number of African-American Representatives increased in the late 1960s, Diggs looked for ways to forge more effective working relationships with other Black Members. Diggs was especially disappointed with the way Adam Clayton Powell Jr. and William L. Dawson—the two most senior Black Members—rarely worked together. In 1969, Diggs organized the Democratic Select Committee (DSC) to promote the exchange of ideas between Black Members. Black Representatives newly elected to the 91st Congress (1969–1971)—Shirley Chisholm of New York, William Lacy "Bill" Clay Sr., of Missouri, and Louis Stokes of Ohio—embraced the idea of a network for African Americans in the House but pressed for a more formal organization with political clout. In February 1971, Diggs and the other 11 Black House Members reorganized the DSC into the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC). Diggs served as the CBC's inaugural chair from 1971 to 1973 and called the new caucus "the first departure from the individualistic policies that characterized black congressmen in the past."[9]

In 1973, nearly a decade after he joined the Committee on the District of Columbia, Diggs assumed the gavel when the former chair, South Carolina segregationist John Lanneau McMillan, failed to win renomination to the House. "I don't plan to be the unofficial mayor of Washington," Diggs said about his new position. "The city already has a mayor and City Council. I don't intend to become involved with the day-to-day operations of the city government." Instead, Diggs sought to increase the autonomy of the District of Columbia by advocating for home rule for the nation's capital, which had undergone a shift from a majority-White population to majority-Black after schools were desegregated in the 1950s. In 1973, he succeeded in bringing a bill to the House Floor authorizing partial self-government for Washington, DC. Before the House voted, he reminded his colleagues that "When we talk about self-determination for the District of Columbia we are not only talking about a matter of local interest, but because of the unique role of this capital community, it is of concern to each one of the Members of the 435 districts across this country." Behind Diggs's leadership, the House overwhelmingly passed the measure, which gave the District the ability to elect a mayor and city council for the first time since 1874, but allowed Congress to retain ultimate control of the city's budget and a veto on laws passed by the council. On December 24, 1973, President Richard M. Nixon signed the District of Columbia Self-Government and Governmental Reorganization Act into law. Despite Diggs's support for home rule, as chair he also supported legislation to delay transferring to the city council the power to revise the District's outdated criminal code. During his tenure as chair of the Committee on the District of Columbia, Diggs also helped establish the University of the District of Columbia.[10]

In addition to promoting a domestic civil rights agenda, Diggs focused on legislation shaping U.S. policy toward Africa. Diggs was dubbed "Mr. Africa" because of his dedication to and knowledge of African affairs. The Michigan Representative visited the continent often. In 1957, Diggs accompanied then Vice President Nixon as part of the official U.S. delegation to several newly independent African countries. Among the stops was Ghana, where the delegation observed the country's celebration of independence from British control. Diggs said that African countries, such as Ghana, that gained their independence in the post-World War II years helped "prove to the world the equal capabilities and potentialities

of the black man once he is freed of his yoke." A year later, he attended the All-African People's Conference in Ghana. In February 1969, he headed a fact-finding mission to civil war-torn Nigeria to investigate relief programs for civilians and to explore a possible cease-fire.[11]

After being named chair of the Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Africa in 1969, Diggs worked to prioritize Africa within America's larger diplomatic agenda. In his new leadership role, which he held for a decade, he emphasized the importance of increased American aid to the newly independent African countries and the end of racist policies in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) and South Africa.[12]

Diggs led the early charge by African-American Members of Congress to denounce the apartheid regime in South Africa. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, he advocated for an end to sugar import quotas that benefited South Africa. He also conducted a series of hearings to investigate how some American businesses and government programs helped the economy of South Africa, despite the official U.S. opposition to the country's racist policies. "Since the whole world abhors South Africa's racial policy," Diggs explained during the hearing, "businessmen should question whether they are using their considerable power to bring pressures to bear on the authority to alter policies." In 1971, he led a bipartisan congressional delegation to South Africa to observe firsthand its business practices and apartheid system. His aggressive stance and outspoken criticism of apartheid led the South African government to bar him from the country during a trip in 1975.[13]

Diggs also sought to overhaul America's trade relations with Rhodesia. In response to the United Nations' 1968 trade embargo against Rhodesia, Senator Harry Flood Byrd Jr. of Virginia drafted an amendment that exempted chrome and other materials deemed to be of national importance from the embargo. But since the bulk of U.S. trade with Rhodesia involved chrome, the Byrd amendment effectively stated that the United States would not abide by the embargo. Diggs supported an unsuccessful effort to derail the amendment in the House. At Diggs's urging, the CBC later filed suit against the American government for continuing to import Rhodesian chrome. Diggs and the CBC argued that the government had no basis for prioritizing chrome since American companies used it for consumer supplies rather than national security.[14]

In the early 1970s, during a brief stint as a member of America's delegation to the United Nations, Diggs emerged as the leading House critic of continued Portuguese colonialism in Angola and Mozambique. In October 1971, President Nixon appointed Diggs as a delegate to the United Nations. In this position, Diggs urged the United States to stop opposing U.N. resolutions condemning Portugal's policy. Just two months into his appointment, he resigned from the U.S. delegation to the United Nations to protest what he perceived as the continued "stifling hypocrisy" of U.S. government policy toward Africa. In 1975—after a new regime took power in Portugal—Angola and Mozambique won their independence. A short while later, a civil war erupted in Angola between Communist forces backed by Cuba and the Soviet Union and non-Communists (UNITA) supported by South Africa. After press reports revealed that the CIA had covertly assisted UNITA, Diggs used his position as chair of the Africa Subcommittee to help win House support to cut off funding for the CIA operation. In 1976, Congress approved an amendment offered by Senator Richard Clarence "Dick" Clark of Iowa that officially banned covert aid to Angola.[15]

Diggs's political fortunes declined when he became the focus of a federal investigation. In March 1978, a grand jury indicted Diggs on multiple charges, including taking kickbacks from his congressional staff. After a nine-day trial, he was convicted on October 7, 1978, in a Washington, DC, district court of committing mail fraud and falsifying payroll forms. Throughout the trial and the appeals process, he asserted his innocence, claiming he was a victim of "selective prosecution" because of his race. Despite his conviction, voters from Diggs's Michigan district re-elected him a month later with 79 percent of the vote. After his re-election, Diggs voluntarily relinquished his committee and subcommittee chairs as he appealed his legal case but voiced his determination to vote on the floor. Diggs's decision to serve out his term until his appeals were exhausted aroused the indignation of many in the House, especially first-term Representative and future Speaker Newt Gingrich of Georgia, who spearheaded an unsuccessful effort to expel Diggs from Congress. Following the release of a report by the Committee on Standards of Official Conduct, the House unanimously censured Diggs on July 31, 1979. After the Supreme Court refused to review his conviction, Diggs resigned from the 96th Congress (1979–1981) on June 3, 1980. One month later, he entered a minimum-security prison in Alabama; he served seven months of a three-year federal sentence. In a 1981 interview, Diggs stated,

"I considered myself a political prisoner during my incarceration. I was a victim of political and racist forces. I will go to my grave continuing to profess my innocence."[16]

After his release from prison, Diggs opened a funeral home in suburban Maryland and resumed his education, earning a bachelor's degree in political science from Howard University in 1983. Diggs launched a brief and unsuccessful political comeback in 1990, losing a bid for a seat in Maryland's house of delegates. On August 24, 1998, Charles Diggs Jr. died of complications from a stroke in Washington, DC. Following his death, John Conyers Jr. of Detroit, Diggs's House colleague of many years said, "Congressman Diggs paved the way for an entire generation of African American political leaders, not just in his home state, but throughout the nation."[17]

Manuscript Collection

Howard University, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center (Washington, DC). *Papers*: 1951–1964, approximately 965 linear feet. The bulk of the Charles C. Diggs Jr. collection covers 1954–1963. The papers include correspondence, speeches, photographs, constituent inquiries, personal, family and business papers (House of Diggs Funeral Home), materials documenting the founding of the Congressional Black Caucus, Diggs's work as chair of the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Africa, the National Black Political Convention, the United Nations, as well as Diggs's trial, conviction, and appeal. It also contains audiovisuals, awards, scrapbooks, and printed material. Finding aids are available for the 42 boxes of Subcommittee on Africa materials and photographs.

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Robert N.C. Nix Sr.

1898–1987

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1958–1979

Democrat from Pennsylvania

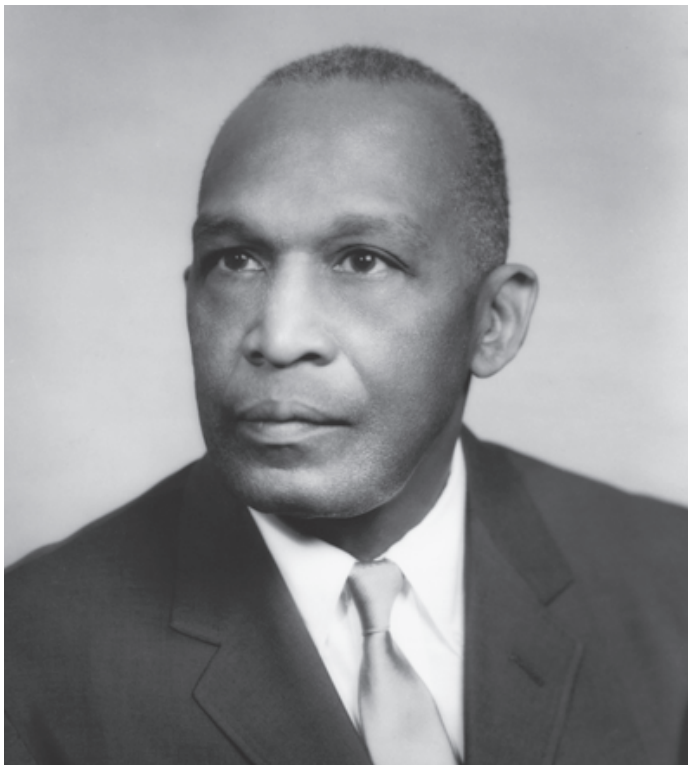

Image courtesy of the Library of Congress

In 1958, longtime Philadelphia Democratic powerbroker and state official Robert N.C. Nix Sr. won election to the U.S. House of Representatives, becoming the first Black lawmaker from Pennsylvania to serve in Congress. During his two decades in Congress, Nix also became only the fourth Black Member to chair a standing committee in the House. From his seat in Washington, Nix maintained influence back home in Philadelphia and also addressed a wider agenda, advocating for civil rights legislation. Nix called on his House colleagues to recognize the national crisis that resulted in the violent repression and disenfranchisement facing Black Americans in states like Mississippi, warning that "these crimes cry out for positive and courageous action, not tomorrow, but now."[1]

Robert Nelson Cornelius Nix Sr. was born on August 9, 1898, in Orangeburg, South Carolina, the third of four children of Nelson C. Nix and Sylvia Nix. His father was born enslaved and later became the dean of South Carolina State College. Nelson Nix was a longtime friend of former Black Representative Thomas E. Miller of South Carolina and spoke at his funeral in 1938.[2]

Robert Nix later moved to New York City to live with relatives. He graduated from Townsend Harris High School in New York City before enrolling in Lincoln University in Oxford, Pennsylvania. After earning a bachelor's degree in 1921, Nix continued his education at the University of Pennsylvania Law School, from which he graduated three years later. In 1925, Nix began practicing law in Philadelphia. He first became active in politics when he was elected a Democratic committeeman from the forty-fourth ward in 1932. He retained this position for 26 years, serving as chairman for the final eight. From 1934 to 1938, Nix worked for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania as a special deputy attorney general in the revenue department and as a special assistant deputy attorney general. Nix married Ethel Lanier, and they had one son, Robert N.C. Nix Jr., who became the chief justice of the Pennsylvania state supreme court in 1984.[3]

When five-term Democratic Representative Earl Chudoff resigned in 1958 to become a Philadelphia judge, Nix entered the special election to fill the vacant congressional seat encompassing sections of Philadelphia on both sides of the Schuylkill River. With solid backing from the local Democratic machine, Nix won the unexpired term, defeating Republican Cecil B. Moore, an African-American attorney, with 64 percent of the vote. House colleagues applauded

as Nix was sworn in to the 85th Congress (1957–1959) on May 20, 1958, joining Black Representatives William L. Dawson of Illinois, Adam Clayton Powell Jr. of New York, and Charles C. Diggs Jr. of Michigan. That same year, Nix was chosen unanimously as chair of Philadelphia's thirty-second ward, a position he held until his death in 1987.[4]

During his first two terms in the House, Nix served on two committees: Merchant Marine and Fisheries; and Veterans' Affairs. In the 87th Congress (1961–1963), Nix relinquished his initial assignments for a seat on the Foreign Affairs Committee, where he remained for the rest of his tenure in the House and where he eventually chaired the Foreign Economic Policy and Asian and Pacific Affairs Subcommittees. In the 88th Congress (1963–1965), Nix joined the Committee on the Post Office and Civil Service. After 14 years, Nix was named chair of the committee in the 95th Congress (1977–1979), his final term in office. Nix also served brief tenures on the Select Committee on Standards of Official Conduct during the 89th Congress (1965–1967) and the Select Committee on Crime during the 91st Congress (1969–1971).

In his first Floor speech, Nix participated in debate on a pending bill to limit the power of the U.S. Supreme Court to review the decisions of state courts. In effect, the bill would empower the state courts to interpret the law without the possibility of Supreme Court review. Nix spoke forcefully against the bill and called for the structure of appeals to remain in place. Nix argued that if this law passed, "state courts then could and would interpret [new laws] in a manner that would deny to minority groups the basic decencies."[5]

Throughout his House career, Nix remained closely connected to the political machine back home that helped him earn a spot in Congress. In line with the practices of the machine organization that prioritized constituent services, Nix held regular Saturday hours in his district office to listen to the concerns of his constituents. He also promoted urban development measures for his Philadelphia district. He sponsored a bill to appropriate funding to equip the Philadelphia Navy Yard for production of nuclear-powered ships. He also backed bills to set guidelines for urban renewal proposals and provide funding for projects and mass transportation.[6]

Nix also searched for ways the federal government might alleviate unemployment. In 1959, he introduced an early version of what would eventually become the Area Redevelopment Act of 1961, which focused federal funding on job training and loans to spur employment in the private sector. In 1966, Nix proposed a bill to establish a "senior service corps" to employ workers older than 60 who otherwise struggled to find work.[7]

As one of the few Black Members in the House during the 1950s and 1960s, Nix worked to transform the goals of the civil rights movement into federal legislation. In 1959, Nix introduced a measure to prohibit racial discrimination in public places against anyone wearing a U.S. military uniform. "To treat a man who wears that uniform with contumely merely because of the color of his skin is an insult to America and to everything for which our country stands," Nix said on the House Floor.[8]

In April 1963, Nix provided a timeline of violence in Mississippi against civil rights activists. He called for immediate, decisive action by the House to protect individual rights in the South. Seeking to enforce the second section of the Fourteenth Amendment, Nix authored a bill to reduce a state's representation in Congress when the rights of its voters were violated—echoing previous measures introduced unsuccessfully in the House for six decades.[9]

A week before the August 28, 1963, March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, Nix spoke on the House Floor in support of the goals of the demonstration. The march, Nix said, was part of "the struggle for freedom which dates from the time Negro slavery was first introduced in the American Colonies, in 1619." He provided a quick survey of the many times popular demonstrations had occurred in American history, linking the 1963 march to earlier protests which sought to leverage the power of the federal government to correct injustice. In the century since emancipation, Nix said, Black Americans had been "teased with mere tastes of freedom." But the March on Washington would demand the government extend and protect the civil and political rights articulated in the Constitution. "The promised land is here," he proclaimed, "now, awaiting only the complete and immediate removal, by our fellow Americans, of the racial fence which has surrounded it and kept Negroes out for 300 years."[10]

During the House debate on the Voting Rights Act of 1965, Nix countered critics who maintained that African Americans from his native state of South Carolina had ample opportunity to register to vote. He urged passage of the bill and highlighted the many levels of intimidation and the barriers that hindered significant Black representation in the state and throughout the South.[11]

For most of the 1960s, Nix followed the Democratic Party line by supporting the John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson administrations. Although some of his Democratic colleagues criticized America's involvement in the Vietnam War, Nix, a senior member of the Foreign Affairs Committee, consistently backed executive foreign policy initiatives. He introduced an amendment to the Foreign Military Sales Act requiring the executive branch to provide Congress with information on the identities of and fees received by agents who negotiated arms sales for American firms. Nix was able to make use of his foreign policy experience in 1973 when he was named a delegate to represent the United States at the fall session of the United Nations General Assembly. As chair of the Subcommittee on International Economic Policy, Nix led an investigation into the use of funds by defense contractors and other American multinational corporations to pay foreign consultants, agents, governmental officials, and political parties.[12]

Nix had the reputation as an institutionalist in Congress, but in 1965, he introduced a measure to lengthen the constitutional term of service in the House from two years to four so that Members could improve their legislative expertise and dispense with the constant campaigns for re-election. In 1967, he sought to prevent the House from denying Representative Adam Clayton Powell Jr. his seat in the 90th Congress (1967–1969). Nix argued that Powell "did not receive the fair and impartial trial guaranteed to every American citizen." Nix also made a legal argument against the process the House established for investigating and determining the fate of Powell. "The Congress of the United States is honor bound to admit its error, and to correct its wrong," he declared. In June 1969, the Supreme Court vindicated Nix's argument when it ruled that the House had acted unconstitutionally in refusing to seat Powell.[13]

Nix remained loyal to the local Democratic machine that helped begin his career on Capitol Hill, and Black critics in his district in the 1960s and 1970s, such as Cecil B. Moore, Nix's one-time opponent and president of the Philadelphia NAACP, accused him of not doing enough for the national interests of Black Americans. Others expressed concern that his behind-the-scenes efforts would not produce significant legislative gains. Nix, in response, took issue with the more confrontational methods of some of his Black House colleagues. "I've seen people come into this Congress feeling it was incumbent upon them to give everybody hell, talking about all the wrongs and fancied wrongs that happen everyday," he said. "They didn't correct a damn thing. … The legislation they sought to present to the House later on received little interest from any source." For Nix, building a rapport with his colleagues—even those who disagreed with him—was the starting point for constructive action. "In voicing your disapproval, you don't make your fellow member of Congress responsible for what you're condemning unless he is responsible. Nor do you condemn the whole white race."[14]

In 1971, Nix joined other Black Representatives in a boycott of President Richard M. Nixon's State of the Union Address after the President refused to meet a group of Black lawmakers to discuss the administration's policies. He was also a founding member of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC). By 1974, Nix was the second-most-senior Black Representative, behind Charles Diggs, but he typically deferred to less senior Members of the House within the CBC.[15]

In 1977, Nix's appointment as chair of the Post Office and Civil Service Committee provoked opposition from a group of younger Representatives who contended that he was not a good fit for the gavel. They contended that Nix had a "record of inactivity" and his age disqualified him from party leadership. The CBC thwarted the move to block his appointment, promising that Nix would be a skilled and committed chair. As chair, Nix introduced a bill to "require congressional approval of major policy changes" by the U.S. Postal Service in an effort to improve service. The measure passed the House with bipartisan support, 371 to 6, but faltered in the Senate. He also backed an initiative by President James Earl "Jimmy" Carter to restructure the civil service system. Portrayed as a plan to improve the efficiency of the federal government, the proposed reform was criticized by many veterans' groups and federal unions that feared the legislation would undermine the rights of civil service workers. President Carter signed the Civil Service Reform Act into law on October 13, 1978.[16]

Although his constituency remained overwhelmingly Democratic, Nix often faced primary challenges from African-American candidates who criticized his close relationship with the Philadelphia Democratic machine. In 1976, he barely survived a primary challenge from a young African-American minister, William H. Gray III, capturing only 48 percent of the vote. Gray accused Nix of being "invisible and unresponsive" to his constituents and

drew attention to the district's high unemployment rate.[17]

Two years later, Nix and Gray squared off in a Democratic primary rematch. The incumbent emphasized his congressional experience, contending that his chairmanship of a House standing committee was "the best weapon for helping this district." But Nix performed poorly at the polls, winning only 40 percent of the vote versus Gray's 58 percent.[18]

After leaving the House in January 1979, Nix remained active in politics as the leader of Philadelphia's thirty-second ward. In 1985, a federal building was named after him in Philadelphia. Nix remained a ward politician until his death in Philadelphia on June 22, 1987.[19]

Manuscript Collection

African American Museum in Philadelphia, Research Collections (Philadelphia, PA). *Papers*: less than one linear foot. Certificates, photographs, newspaper clippings and awards related to Robert N.C. Nix Sr.'s congressional career.

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9 *Congressional Record*, Appendix, 88th Cong., 1st sess. (4 April 1963): 5845–5848; *Congressional Record*, House, 88th Cong., 1st sess. (12 June 1963): 10741; H.R. 7005, 88th Cong. (1963).

10 *Congressional Record*, House, 88th Cong., 1st sess. (22 August 1963): 15618.

11 *Congressional Record*, House, 89th Cong., 1st sess. (12 May 1965): 10293.

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Augustus F. "Gus" Hawkins

1907–2007

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1963–1991

Democrat from California



Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

Augustus F. "Gus" Hawkins's political career spanned 56 years of public service in the California assembly and the U.S. House of Representatives. Elected to the U.S. House in November 1962 as the first Black Representative from west of the Mississippi River, Hawkins led countless efforts to improve the economic and educational opportunities of low-income and working-class Americans and to secure and expand the legislative victories of the civil rights movement. Known by colleagues as the "Silent Warrior," Hawkins worked effectively behind the scenes to accomplish his legislative goals. "The leadership belongs not to the loudest, not to those who beat the drums or blow the trumpets," Hawkins said, "but to those who day in and day out, in all seasons, work for the practical realization of a better world—those who have the stamina to persist and remain dedicated."[1]

Augustus Freeman Hawkins was born in Shreveport, Louisiana, on August 31, 1907. The youngest of five children, he moved to Los Angeles, California, with his parents, Nyanza, a pharmacist and business owner, and Hattie Hawkins, a homemaker, and his siblings in the early 1920s. After graduating from Los Angeles's Jefferson High School in 1926, he earned a bachelor's degree in economics from the University of California at Los Angeles in 1931. Although he planned to study civil engineering in graduate school, Hawkins's lack of financial support, exacerbated by the Great Depression, forced him to alter his career path. He opened a real estate company with his brother Edward and took classes at the University of Southern California's Institute of Government. Hawkins and a group of like-minded friends from college organized an insurgent political club in opposition to local political leaders including Frank Roberts, a Black Republican and 16-year veteran of the California assembly who controlled their district. In 1935, Hawkins, who had accused Roberts of staying in office too long, defeated the incumbent to win a spot in the California state assembly. While serving in the state assembly, Hawkins married Pegga Adeline Smith on August 28, 1945. After she died in 1966, he married Elsie Taylor on June 30, 1977.[2]

As a member of the California assembly from 1935 to 1963, Hawkins compiled a substantial legislative record that centered on the interests of his predominantly African-American and Latino Los Angeles district. In addition to chairing the joint legislative organization committee, he introduced a fair housing act, a fair employment practices act, legislation for low-cost housing and disability insurance, and provisions to make housekeepers eligible for workmen's

compensation. In 1959, Hawkins lost a bid to become assembly speaker—widely considered the second-most-powerful elected office in the state behind the governor—to Ralph M. Brown. Two years later, Brown named Hawkins chair of the influential rules committee.[3]

In 1962, Hawkins entered the Democratic primary to represent a newly created majority-Black congressional district encompassing central Los Angeles. Looking back on his decision to run, Hawkins remembered thinking, "I felt federal policies, including civil rights, just meant so much." With an established legislative record and the endorsement of President John F. Kennedy, Hawkins easily defeated his three primary opponents with more than 50 percent of the vote. He won the general election by a landslide, capturing 85 percent of the vote against an African-American attorney, Republican Herman Smith, to earn a spot in the 88th Congress (1963–1965). After the election, Hawkins remarked, "It's like shifting gears—from the oldest man in the Assembly in years of service to a freshman in Congress." Even though the California state legislature reapportioned the Los Angeles-area congressional district four times after Hawkins's initial election, it remained predominantly African American and Latino and consistently supported Hawkins, who won each of his general elections by more than 80 percent of the vote.[4]

During his first term in Congress, Hawkins sat on the Education and Labor Committee, which was chaired by Adam Clayton Powell Jr. of New York. Hawkins eventually rose to chair of the committee himself, a position he held from the second session of the 98th Congress (1983–1985) until his retirement at the end of the 101st Congress (1989–1991). He also served on the House Administration Committee from the 91st through the 98th Congress (1969–1985), serving as chair for the final two terms. Hawkins also chaired the Joint Committee on the Library during the 97th Congress (1981–1983) and the Joint Committee on Printing during the 96th and 98th Congresses (1979–1981; 1983–1985). He left all three panels when he assumed the chair of the Education and Labor Committee. The California Representative also served on the Joint Economic Committee from the 97th Congress to the 101st Congress (1981–1991).

In August 1965, in just his second term, Hawkins was thrust into the political spotlight when widespread looting, arson, and violence erupted in his district, sparked by an arrest of a Black man for drunk driving that resulted in a confrontation with police in Watts, an underserved and largely segregated Los Angeles neighborhood. Hawkins challenged his fellow lawmakers to help his constituents, saying, "The trouble is that nothing has ever been done to solve the long-range underlying problems." While he did not condone the civil violence, he believed it expressed a sense of desperation, partially due to the absence of long-promised federal antipoverty funds.[5]

From the beginning of his career on the Hill, Hawkins worked to secure civil rights legislation. As a member of the General Subcommittee on Labor of the Committee on Education and Labor, Hawkins influenced the writing and passage of a nationwide equal employment law and the creation of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC)—a federal agency to prevent discrimination in the workplace—in Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The landmark act also prohibited discrimination based on race, color, ethnicity, or religion in public accommodations and in municipal, state, and federal services. In 1963, Hawkins sponsored an equal employment bill and worked closely with James Roosevelt of California—chair of the General Subcommittee on Labor who had also introduced an equal employment bill—to shepherd legislation through the committee and into the Civil Rights Act. Hawkins believed targeting discrimination in the workforce was essential to the advancement of civil rights. Although pleased with the passage of the legislation, he called the civil rights bill "only a beginning." He added, "It is incomplete and inadequate; but it represents a step forward." In 1964, following the passage of the Civil Rights Act, he toured the South with Representatives Phillip Burton of California, William Donlon "Don" Edwards of California, and William Fitts Ryan of New York to champion African-American voter registration and to observe discrimination firsthand. Praising the civil rights activists who risked their lives to fight oppression, Hawkins recalled: "Being congressmen didn't exempt us from the constant terror felt by anyone challenging established racial practices." Later in the decade, Hawkins took the lead in advocating for improvements to the equal employment law. Beginning in 1966, Hawkins introduced legislation to give the EEOC cease-and-desist powers to compel offending employers to cooperate. In 1972, President Richard M. Nixon signed the Equal Employment Opportunity Act, a compromise bill that allowed the EEOC to sue employers in federal court.[6]

As a Member of the Education and Labor Committee Hawkins was heavily involved in the writing of much of President Lyndon B. Johnson's Great Society legislation, but he found fault with the administration's foreign policy in Southeast Asia. In 1969, Hawkins argued the Vietnam War was a "mistake in our foreign policy," caused in part by "believing we can impose our way of life on other people." Hawkins's criticism of the war escalated throughout the 1960s and continued into the Nixon administration. Serving on a select committee to provide specialized information to the House about U.S. involvement in Vietnam, Hawkins and 11 congressional colleagues set off on a fact-finding mission to Southeast Asia in June 1970. During the trip, Hawkins and Democratic Representative William Robert Anderson of Tennessee toured a South Vietnamese prison for civilians and reported witnessing prisoners, men, women, and children locked in small stone or cement rooms, known as "Tiger Cages," and suffering from extreme malnutrition. They drafted a House Resolution urging Congress to "condemn the cruel and inhumane treatment" of prisoners in South Vietnam. The two Representatives also pressured President Nixon to send an independent task force to investigate the prison and "prevent further degradation and death."[7]

In Congress, Hawkins also worked to overturn historic injustices. In 1972, he succeeded in obtaining an honorable discharge for 167 Black soldiers who were dismissed from the 25th Infantry Regiment of the U.S. Army after being falsely accused of a public disturbance in Brownsville, Texas, in 1906. A year later, he proposed legislation to compensate the surviving members of the 25th Infantry Regiment and their descendants for their loss of pension and as a reward for their unjust discharge from the military. "Great harm has been done to these men and their families —much of it irreparable," Hawkins explained in a hearing. "Yet, money compensation will, at least in part, do some concrete justice in this matter."[8]

Throughout his career, Hawkins was determined to use his position as a Member of Congress to curb unemployment in the United States. In 1975, an economic downturn caused unemployment to soar to 8.5 percent—the highest rate in a generation. The joblessness rate for non-Whites—nearly 14 percent—was especially devastating to African Americans. From 1974 to 1978, Hawkins worked with Senator (and former Vice President) Hubert H. Humphrey Jr. of Minnesota to draft legislation making the federal government responsible for maintaining a low unemployment rate. Hawkins first introduced full employment legislation in 1974, that would have created federal programs to provide "to every adult American," he explained, "the fundamental human right to useful employment at fair rates of compensation." During four years of deliberation and negotiation, Hawkins's ambitious legislation was reshaped and pared back. Introduced in 1976, the ultimately successful full employment legislation took two years until passage. On the House Floor, Hawkins rebuked his colleagues for allowing the measure to lose momentum and urged immediate action, saying both chambers of Congress had "a serious responsibility for coming to grips with the formulation of a national economic policy." The Full Employment and Balanced Growth Act of 1978, also known as the Humphrey–Hawkins Act, called on the President to provide a yearly report to Congress detailing how the federal government would work to reduce the unemployment rate to 4 percent by 1983. But the final version of the bill, which only vaguely resembled Hawkins's first draft, contained few substantive guidelines for reaching the target level. At the White House signing ceremony in October 1978, President James Earl "Jimmy" Carter observed that the legislation was a tribute to Senator Humphrey, who had died earlier that year. Hawkins, who received a standing ovation for his role in the bill, recalled, "the legislation was clearly symbolic"—a judgment shared by many experts.[9]

Hawkins dedicated much of his career to enacting legislation concerning education, job training, and equality in the workplace. In 1974, he authored the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act, which coordinated federal efforts to reform the juvenile justice system and provided resources to states to help keep young people in school and prevent them from running away from home. Three years later, Hawkins sponsored the Pregnancy Discrimination Act that amended Title VII of the Civil Rights Act to make discrimination against pregnant employees illegal. In an impassioned plea to his colleagues, he said, "We have the opportunity to ensure that genuine equality in the American labor force is more than an illusion and that pregnancy will no longer be the basis of unfavorable treatment of working women." A Senate version of the legislation became law. In 1978, Hawkins sponsored and served as floor manager for a measure to reauthorize the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act, legislation to provide occupational

training and create public service jobs to counter increasing unemployment during economic recessions. Hawkins's legislation targeted funding for training and employment to "economically disadvantaged" Americans, ensured states used funds to create new jobs, and reduced fraud and abuse related to administering the program. The Senate tabled the bill in favor of a version of the reauthorization that originated in that chamber; President Carter signed the bill into law in October 1978.[10]

In 1984, Hawkins became chair of the Education and Labor Committee a month after the death of the former chair, Representative Carl Christopher Perkins of Kentucky. Hawkins, who was known for his behind-the-scenes legislative work, believed that his top priority as chair was to ensure his committee's work became law. "You try to get things accomplished through negotiations. … When seniority and leadership bring certain responsibilities, you're at the top and not trying to establish any sensational new record," he said. As chair, Hawkins continued his aggressive pursuit of increased educational opportunities for the country's underprivileged communities. In 1988, Hawkins helped secure the passage of the Augustus F. Hawkins–Robert T. Stafford Elementary and Secondary School Improvement Amendments of 1988, which updated the landmark 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act authorizing federal aid to U.S. schools. The Hawkins–Stafford bill was an omnibus education package that reauthorized funding for disadvantaged students and children of immigrants, programs for adult education and dropout prevention, and rewards for educational improvements. As chair, he also shepherded through the House legislation to renew school lunch and child nutrition programs and a bill that would have outlined a series of national educational goals for states to enact.[11]

During his final term in office, Hawkins suffered a series of legislative setbacks. In the face of increased opposition from both Republicans and Democrats, Hawkins continued to support federally funded education and employment programs. Hawkins was unable to push through a federal childcare program, and the House failed to override a veto by President George H.W. Bush of a substantial increase in the minimum wage. Most significantly, in 1990, President Bush also vetoed a major civil rights bill sponsored by Hawkins. Passed by both the House and Senate, the Civil Rights Act of 1990 sought to increase protection from employment discrimination for minorities and women. Even with a presidential veto looming, Hawkins declined to compromise, declaring, "We have had enough input from all parties on the bill." Hawkins portrayed the President's decision as a "national retreat from civil rights," and when the Senate failed to overturn the veto, Hawkins's legislation did not become law. In 1991, following Hawkins's retirement, a revised version of his civil rights legislation passed both chambers of Congress and was signed into law by President Bush.[12]

Hawkins's frustration with the tenor of the institution and his age led him to retire at the end of the 101st Congress in 1991. For many years afterward he lived on Capitol Hill. Hawkins died on November 10, 2007, just months after his 100th birthday, in Bethesda, Maryland. "He passed on a new tradition," noted former House colleague Yvonne Brathwaite Burke of California, "that African Americans can be elected, get high position in committees and set the tone and become leaders."[13]

Manuscript Collection

University of California, Los Angeles, Department of Special Collections (Los Angeles, CA). *Papers*: 1935–1990, 137 linear feet. The Augustus F. "Gus" Hawkins collection consists of materials documenting Hawkins's U.S. House of Representatives service from 1963 to 1990, including his chairmanship of the House Education and Labor Committee from 1984 to 1990. A small portion of the collection relates to his service in the California assembly. The collection is arranged in the following series: legislative files; subject files; correspondence files; district office files; Education and Labor Committee files; California state assembly files; and miscellaneous material. Subjects covered include civil rights, employment, equal opportunity, education, job training, and child care. A finding aid is available in the repository and online.

Notes

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John Conyers Jr.

1929–2019

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1965–2017

Democrat from Michigan



Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

John Conyers Jr. of Michigan served in the U.S. House of Representatives for 52 years—which, at the time of his retirement, amounted to nearly one-fifth of the House's existence. During his career he set a number of milestones. He was the first African American to serve on the Judiciary Committee. He was one of a handful of African-American Members to head two standing committees: Government Operations and then Judiciary. And in his fiftieth year of service, he became the first African-American Dean of the House, the Member with the longest continuous service. Conyers pursued an ambitious domestic agenda in Congress, including a commission on reparations for descendants of enslaved Black Americans; universal, single-payer health care; and criminal justice. "I have been a champion of justice for the oppressed and the disenfranchised. I have never wavered in my commitment to justice and democracy," Conyers said during his farewell address to the House.[1]

The eldest of four brothers, John Conyers Jr. was born in Detroit, Michigan, on May 16, 1929, to John and Lucille Conyers. His father was an auto worker and an official for the United Automobile Workers union. His father's work with the union spurred Conyers's interest in politics. "I was drawn to the struggle because my dad was a labor organizer," he recalled. Conyers attended Detroit public schools and graduated from Northwestern High School in 1947. He served in the National Guard from 1948 to 1950 before enlisting in the U.S. Army and attending officer candidate school. Conyers was commissioned a second lieutenant with the Army Corps of Engineers and served in Korea on combat duty for a year. In 1954, he was honorably discharged and served three more years in the Army Reserves. Taking advantage of the GI Bill's educational benefits, Conyers earned a bachelor of arts from Wayne State University in 1957 and, a year later, earned a bachelor of laws from the Wayne State Law School. In June 1990, Conyers married Monica Ann Esters. They had two sons: John III and Carl. Esters launched her own political career when she won a seat on the Detroit city council in 2005.[2]

Conyers's first political experience came in college, where he joined the Young Democrats and served as a precinct official for the local Democratic Party. After college, Conyers joined the staff of Michigan Representative John David Dingell Jr. as his legislative assistant from 1958 to 1961. Conyers passed the Michigan bar in 1959 and cofounded a law firm. Michigan Governor John Burley Swainson

appointed him as a labor mediation referee for the Michigan workmen's compensation department in 1961, and he also served as general counsel for several labor union locals. In 1963, President John F. Kennedy appointed Conyers to the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under the Law, which promoted racial toleration in the legal profession.[3]

In the early 1960s, following a series of Supreme Court rulings that codified the idea of "one man, one vote," states were forced to reapportion their congressional districts. In Michigan the state legislature merged two House districts that stretched across a section of Detroit inhabited by White and Black middle- and upper-middle-class families. Conyers's childhood neighborhood fell within this new jurisdiction, and he decided to run in the district's Democratic primary in 1964. At the time of the election, the district was about 50 percent Black, though the percentage increased over the next decade. Conyers was 35 years old and struggled to secure the support of local Democratic leaders, who considered him young and inexperienced. He ran an insurgent campaign under the slogan "Jobs, Justice, and Peace," that tapped into his labor union contacts, the Black legal community, and his opposition to the Vietnam War. In the closely contested primary Conyers defeated his opponent by 45 votes.[4]

Detroit was a heavily Democratic city, and winning the Democratic nomination was tantamount to winning the general election. That November Conyers won with 84 percent of the vote. Along with the re-election of longtime House incumbent Charles C. Diggs Jr., also from Detroit, it marked the first time that either the city or state sent two African-American Members to Congress simultaneously.[5]

Conyers served on three standing committees during his House career: the Judiciary Committee (1965–2017), becoming the first African-American Member to serve on the panel which had jurisdiction over civil rights legislation; Government Operations Committee (1971–1995), the House's major oversight and investigative body; and the Small Business Committee (1987–1995). On Judiciary, Conyers eventually headed the Subcommittee on Crime (1973–1981) and the Subcommittee on Criminal Justice (1981–1989). In 1989, Conyers became chair of the Government Operations Committee and the panel's Subcommittee on Legislation and National Security and served until Republicans won the House majority in 1995. That year, instead of staying on Government Operations, he chose to serve as the ranking member of Judiciary and dropped his two other committee assignments. When Democrats regained control of the House in 2007, Conyers became chair of the Judiciary Committee. After the House majority flipped again, Conyers served as the committee's ranking member from 2011 until his retirement in 2017.[6]

Conyers arrived on Capitol Hill in 1965 amid major debates about both foreign and domestic policy. Early in his first term he expressed his opposition to U.S. military involvement overseas, becoming one of seven Members to vote against supplemental appropriations to fund military actions in Vietnam and the Dominican Republic. As a new Member on the Judiciary Committee, he participated in the debate and passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. By February, only a month into Conyers's first term, more than 2,000 protesters—including Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.—had been arrested in Selma, Alabama, amid voting rights demonstrations. Diggs and Conyers organized an unofficial fact-finding mission of 15 Representatives to investigate local efforts to block African Americans from registering to vote. Just days after King's assassination in April 1968, Conyers introduced a bill for a Martin Luther King Jr. national holiday. He introduced the same bill in every Congress until it became law in 1983.[7]

In 1967, because of Conyers's work on behalf of civil rights, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, which was led by King, chose Conyers as recipient of the Rosa Parks Award. Parks, who had helped galvanize the modern civil rights movement after being arrested in Alabama for refusing to give up her seat on a public bus, had moved to Detroit and served in Conyers's district office from 1965 until her retirement in 1988. When Parks died in 2005, Conyers introduced the resolution that led to Parks lying in repose in the Rotunda of the U.S. Capitol.[8]

In 1967, Conyers played a part in deciding the fate of the House's then-most prominent African-American Member, Adam Clayton Powell Jr. of New York, the chair of the Education and Labor Committee. After a series of legal problems and complaints about his unpredictable committee leadership, Powell was investigated by the House Administration Committee, which determined that Powell used Education and Labor funds for private business. At the beginning of the 90th Congress (1967–1969), Conyers was appointed to a select committee headed by Emmanuel Celler of New York, the chair of the Judiciary Committee, to determine whether to sanction Powell. The select committee recommended that the House allow Powell

to take his seat under the condition that he be censured, fined, and stripped of his committee seniority. Conyers filed a dissent that favored seating and censuring Powell but proposed that the House either fine the long-serving New York Democrat or strip him of his seniority, but not both. The House ultimately rejected the committee's recommendation and decided not to seat Powell at all.[9]

As the number of Black Members increased to nine in 1969 and 12 in 1971, African-American Members of Congress looked to exert more legislative influence across Capitol Hill. In 1971, Conyers was one of the founding members of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC), which brought together African-American legislators to work on a number of policies. Before the opening of the 92nd Congress (1971–1973), Conyers led a campaign to challenge the seating of members of the Mississippi delegation, who had supported presidential candidate and segregationist George C. Wallace of Alabama in 1968. When the Democratic Caucus decided to seat the Members-elect, Conyers led a symbolic challenge to Majority Leader Carl Albert of Oklahoma for the Speakership during the Democratic Caucus's organizational meeting. The caucus voted 220 to 20 in favor of Albert, and Conyers gained the votes of only some of the 11 other African-American Members. Conyers's follow-up motion to strip the Mississippi Democrats of their committee seniority failed 111 to 55—though in this case every Black Member voted for his measure. Conyers challenged Albert for Speaker again in the next Congress, accusing House Democratic leadership of "stagnation and reaction" when confronting the Republican administration of Richard M. Nixon. As in his previous attempt, Conyers lost by a wide margin, 202 to 25.[10]

Conyers was actively involved in the House's oversight of the Nixon administration. In 1972, Conyers and four colleagues introduced a resolution to impeach President Nixon for the President's escalation of the Vietnam War, which, the five Members claimed, exceeded congressional authorization. On the Judiciary Committee, Conyers also played a central role during the Watergate crisis that ended Nixon's presidency in 1974. Conyers supported the House impeachment effort against Nixon from the start and was such a consistent opponent of the administration that he was included on Nixon's notorious "enemies list" twice: once as an individual Member and again as a member of the CBC. When Vice President Spiro T. Agnew resigned in disgrace in 1973, President Nixon nominated House Republican Leader Gerald R. Ford of Michigan to serve as Vice President. Under the provisions of the Twenty-fifth Amendment, Ford's nomination had to be approved by the House, and Conyers pushed the Judiciary Committee to act on Nixon's impeachment before considering Ford's nomination. Conyers's effort to remove Nixon before confirming Ford failed, but when the Judiciary Committee later voted for three impeachment articles against Nixon in 1974, Conyers sponsored a fourth article charging Nixon with conducting an illegal and secret war in Cambodia. Conyers's article was voted down, but the campaign to oust Nixon had its intended effect: Nixon resigned rather than risk being removed from office.[11]

Conyers often criticized the direction of the national Democratic Party. Believing President James Earl "Jimmy" Carter to be too moderate, he endorsed Massachusetts Senator Edward Moore "Ted" Kennedy in the 1980 Democratic presidential primary. In 1984 and 1988, he backed the Reverend Jesse Jackson's bids for the Democratic presidential nomination. Conyers claimed that he had devoted more days to supporting Jackson's 1988 campaign than any other African-American Member of the House.[12]

As the chair of the Judiciary Committee's Crime and Criminal Justice Subcommittees, Conyers sought to redirect the priorities of federal crime fighting programs. He criticized the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (LEAA), which provided federal funding to state and local police departments, because LEAA grants were used to fund prison construction and police technology. Conyers believed that such funding should be redirected to crime prevention programs. Stressing the need for alternatives to mass incarceration, Conyers said, "Incarceration, especially of juveniles, virtually guarantees an individual will live a life of crime." He introduced legislation to replace the LEAA with a Bureau of Criminal Justice Assistance. The new Bureau would award grants to fund programs to address community-based crime prevention, alternatives to traditional incarceration, juvenile delinquency, and white-collar crime. In 1988, Conyers sponsored the Racial Justice Act, which would have allowed for racial statistics of those executed by a particular jurisdiction to be taken into consideration during capital punishment cases. A similar bill passed the House as part of the 1994 crime bill but was later dropped from the final version due to Senate opposition.[13]

In 1987, the Judiciary Committee faced an unusual workload, conducting three impeachment investigations into alleged misconduct by federal judges. Rather than send all three cases to the Civil and Constitutional Rights Subcommittee, which traditionally handled impeachment issues, Judiciary Committee Chairman Peter Wallace Rodino Jr. of New Jersey assigned the case of Alcee L. Hastings, an African-American U.S. judge for the Southern District of Florida, to Conyers's Criminal Justice Subcommittee. Though Rodino made the assignment to distribute the unexpected workload, he also suspected that Conyers would be sensitive to any racist motives behind the case against Hastings. After two months reviewing files and holding hearings, Conyers's subcommittee reported 17 articles of impeachment against Hastings, which the House adopted 413 to 3. Though Conyers admired Hastings's judicial career, he explained, "A black public official must be held to the same standard" as any other. "A lower standard would be patronizing, a higher standard would be racist." Conyers went on to serve as one of the House managers at Hastings's trial before the Senate.[14]

In 1989, Conyers became chair of the Government Operations Committee, the premiere investigative body in the House responsible for conducting oversight of the executive branch. In 1990, following a series of scandals in the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development involving fraud and the diversion of funds to supporters of the Ronald Reagan administration, Conyers sponsored a bill to require Cabinet-level and other major agencies to hire a chief financial officer to report to the Office of Management and Budget, which was tasked with creating a financial management improvement plan across the federal government.[15]

The Judiciary Committee again confronted the crisis of presidential impeachment while Conyers was the ranking Democrat in the 1990s. As House Republicans investigated whether President William J. Clinton had committed perjury before a federal grand jury and obstructed justice amid a sexual harassment lawsuit filed against him, Conyers spearheaded the opposition and worked to prevent efforts to impeach Clinton. "This does sometimes to some people begin to take on the appearance of a coup," he said. "It's frightening, it's staggering, this is not in a developing country, we're talking about a polite, paper-exchanging, voting process in which we rip out the forty-second president of the United States." The House eventually impeached Clinton, but the Senate did not remove him from office.[16]

As ranking member on Judiciary, Conyers often cooperated with his GOP counterparts. In 1996, he joined Republican Judiciary Chairman Henry John Hyde of Illinois in advancing new hate crime legislation after several African-American church burnings. Conyers managed to maintain his working relationship with Hyde even through the contentious Clinton impeachment; he and Hyde later cosponsored a measure on civil forfeitures and, in 2000, defeated a Senate bill that would have penalized newspapers for divulging classified material. In the aftermath of the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, Conyers and the new Judiciary chair, Frank James Sensenbrenner Jr. of Wisconsin, crafted the USA PATRIOT Act, a landmark anti-terrorism bill.[17]

When Democrats regained the House majority in 2007—following 12 years of Republican rule—Conyers was elected chair of the Judiciary Committee after more than four decades of service on the panel. As Judiciary Committee chair, Conyers prioritized hearings to review what he believed to be an unfair disparity in criminal penalties for possession of powder cocaine and crack cocaine. Under the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986, mandatory minimum sentences of five years were imposed on those who possessed at least 500 grams of powder cocaine, or only five grams of crack cocaine, a cheaper substance that was more prevalent in low-income communities of color, which were disproportionately targeted by the police as a result. Conyers supported the Fair Sentencing Act of 2010, which raised possession limits of crack cocaine needed for mandatory minimum sentences and eliminated minimum sentences for first-time offenders. Conyers also cosponsored the Second Chance Act, a recidivism reduction measure that funded mentorship, drug treatment, and vocational training for those who had served time in prison.[18]

For nearly three decades, Conyers called for reparations for the descendants of enslaved Africans in the United States. From 1989 to 2017, Conyers repeatedly introduced legislation to create a commission to study and develop proposals to remedy the legacy and impact of slavery and racial discrimination in the United States since 1619. In 2007, he presided over a Judiciary subcommittee hearing to consider his bill. In April 2021, a year and a half after his death, the reparations commission bill, then sponsored by Sheila Jackson Lee of Texas, was approved by the committee and sent to the full House for the first time.[19]

Outside of his committee service, Conyers frequently introduced legislation to create a national health insurance program to provide comprehensive medical care for all Americans. "Universal health care is practiced more or less successfully in every other industrialized country," said Conyers. "To have so many millions of people without any ability to afford health care is immoral, indefensible."[20]

At different times during his career, Conyers ran afoul of House ethics standards and rules. In the early 1990s, Conyers was among hundreds of Members who made overdrafts of their accounts with the House "bank," an internal financial service managed by a House officer, which allowed Members to deposit their pay checks and provided overdraft protection for Members without penalty. Conyers's 273 overdrafts were among the highest. Although the repeated withdrawals did not technically violate House Rules at the time, the lack of oversight and accountability generated significant public backlash and led to major institutional reforms. In November 2003, the *Detroit Free Press* published an extensive investigation detailing the use of Conyers's congressional staff in political campaigns for his House races and his wife's Detroit city council election. Following an Ethics Committee investigation, the committee reached an agreement with Conyers in December 2006 to take "a number of additional steps to ensure that his office complies with all rules and standards regarding campaign work by congressional staff."[21]

For many years, Conyers won easy re-election to the House and showed little public interest in seeking other offices. But he surprised many when he decided to challenge Coleman A. Young for Detroit mayor in 1989. Young won the Democratic primary with 51 percent of the vote while Conyers came in third place with 18 percent. After Young retired four years later, Conyers again ran for mayor of Detroit and came in well behind with only eight percent of the primary vote.[22]

Conyers experienced the closest elections of his House tenure late in his career. Beginning with the 1980 Census, Michigan began losing House seats with each reapportionment, and in 2012 Michigan's Republican state legislature significantly redrew Conyers's district to include communities he had never represented. In a crowded Democratic primary, opponents charged Conyers with weak constituency service, and he received a lackluster endorsement from the *Detroit Free Press*: "Our backing of Conyers has reflected the arc of his career: first enthusiastic, then ambivalent, and now nearly agitated as his energy and effectiveness are clearly on a downward slope." Conyers won his primary with only 55 percent of the vote. In 2014, Conyers nearly missed appearing on the primary ballot after state and local officials ruled that many of the signatures on his campaign petition were invalid. Eventually, a federal judge ruled that Conyers could appear on the ballot, and he won the primary with 74 percent of the vote.[23]

In the fall of 2017, news reports revealed that two years earlier Conyers had used funds from his congressional office in a confidentiality agreement to settle a sexual harassment charge brought by a former woman staff assistant. The disclosure came amid the #MeToo movement, as women across the country used Twitter and other media platforms to speak about their experiences as victims of sexual harassment and assault. As a result, Conyers stepped down as ranking member of the Judiciary Committee before resigning from the House on December 5, 2017. Conyers died in Detroit on October 27, 2019.[24]

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Permanent Interests

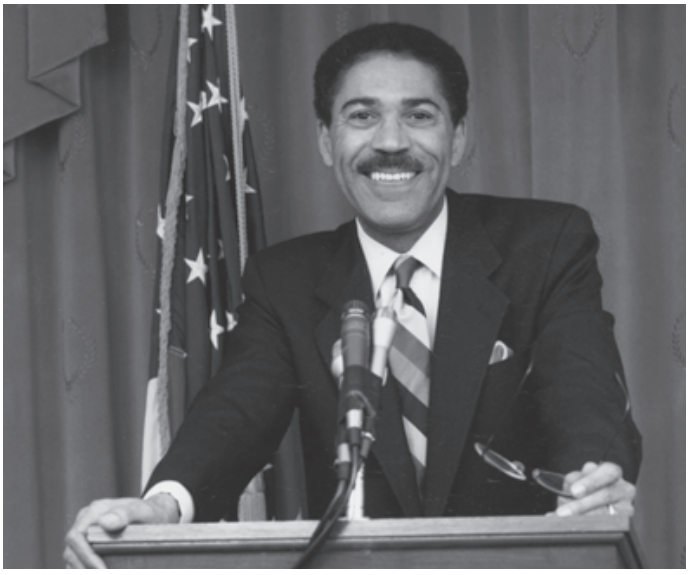
1965–1990

On the evening of Friday, January 22, 1971, President Richard M. Nixon presented his second annual State of the Union Address to a packed audience in the chamber of the U.S. House of Representatives. Members of both houses of Congress, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Supreme Court Justices, and Cabinet secretaries gathered to hear Nixon call for "a New American Revolution—a peaceful revolution in which power was turned back toward the people—in which government at all levels was refreshed and renewed, and made truly responsive." Absent from the Capitol that night were the 12 Black Members of the House (Edward W. Brooke, a Black Senator from Massachusetts did attend). Led by Louis Stokes of Ohio and William Lacy "Bill" Clay Sr. of Missouri, the Black Representatives boycotted the speech because, as they explained, the President had "consistently refused" to meet with them to discuss the White House's legislative agenda. On several occasions during the previous year, Black Members had tried to sit down with the President, but the administration repeatedly rebuffed their requests. To the Black Members, Nixon's refusal was symptomatic of the administration's lack of interest in the issues facing Black Americans. "Your consistent refusal to hear the pleas and concerns of 'black Americans' dictates our decision to be absent," the Members explained in a letter to the President.[1]

In 1970, groundbreaking New York first-term Member Shirley Chisholm campaigned for future California Member Ronald V. Dellums. Their role in the creation of the Congressional Black Caucus was one of their lasting impacts on the institution.

Bob Fitch photography archive, © Stanford University Libraries

The boycott worked. Following substantial media coverage, Nixon agreed to meet with the group of Black Members, who first organized in 1969 as the Democratic Select Committee but soon renamed themselves the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC). On March 25, all 13 members of the caucus—12 Representatives and Walter E. Fauntroy, who had recently won a March election to become the Delegate from Washington, DC—met with Nixon at the White House. The Members explained that they were there not just as the representatives of their districts, but as representatives of Black Americans everywhere. "Even though we think first of those we were directly elected to serve, we cannot, in good conscience think only of them—for what affects one black community, one urban community, affects all." The Black Members of Congress and, they suggested, African Americans across the country, were intent on expanding and ensuring the rights and protections that the civil rights movement had won only years earlier in the 1960s. "Our people are no longer asking for equality as a rhetorical promise. They are demanding from a national administration, and from elected officials without regard to party affiliation, the only kind of equality that ultimately has any real meaning—equality of results." The group presented Nixon with a list of 61 policy proposals, including an expansion of affirmative action, a public works program, the protection of federal social welfare programs, more federal support for minority-owned businesses, criminal justice reforms, and increased aid to Africa.[2]



A founding member of the Congressional Black Caucus, William Lacy "Bill" Clay Sr. of Missouri helped shape the organization's legislative direction.

Image courtesy of the U.S. House of Representatives Photography Office

In the days following the meeting at the White House, Ethel Payne, a groundbreaking Black journalist, took stock of what she saw as a new era of Black congressional influence. The Black Members who attended the meeting, Payne wrote, "carry with them the hopes and aspirations of the estimated 25 million blacks in the country and they have now become the voice for that segment of the population." "It was clear," Payne continued, "that the establishment was rocked, not so much by the rhetoric of the statement, but at the evidence of the rising tide of determination expressed by the 13."[3]

In the ensuing two decades, the Black Members of Congress profiled in this section strived to realize the potential that Ethel Payne had recognized in the boycott. From 1965 to 1990, the number and influence of African Americans in Congress increased significantly. Black Representatives worked to win seats on powerful committees, and some attained roles in Democratic leadership. While important ideological and political differences existed among the Black men and women elected in this period, by and large they shared similar legislative goals. These Members often led legislative efforts to end civil and human rights abuses abroad. They sought to leverage the power of the federal government to alleviate social ills. And, most significantly, they worked tirelessly to expand and protect the civil, economic, and political rights won by Black Americans in the 1960s. Navigating national and international economic and political transformations, Black Members in the 1970s and 1980s led efforts to desegregate America's schools, bolster voting rights, guarantee equal employment, and improve fair housing laws.

Shortly after the boycott in 1971, Bill Clay spoke about a new era he saw developing on Capitol Hill: what he called a "new black politics of confrontation." The lesson Congress needed to heed was clear; he said that "what is good for minorities is good for the nation." The CBC was at the helm of this transformation. Its members wanted to build on the civil rights movement's legislative foundations as they confronted new political and economic challenges. "We have no permanent friends, no permanent enemies," Clay said, "just permanent interests."[4]

A NATION TRANSFORMED

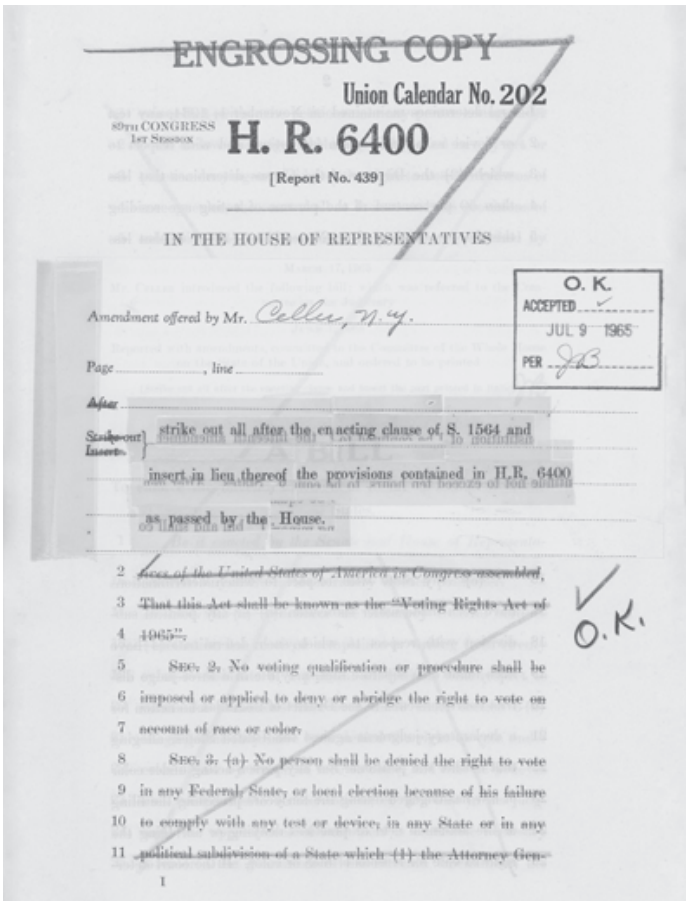
The passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1964 and the Voting Rights Act in 1965 were moments of triumph for the long Black freedom movement. These were era-defining laws, some of the most remarkable and transformative pieces of legislation to come out of the United States Congress.

The Civil Rights Act prohibited racial discrimination in public accommodations and state and federal services and banned racial and sex discrimination in employment. In nearly all aspects of American life—housing being the one glaring exception—racial discrimination had been declared illegal and punishable by law. New educational and employment opportunities, along with a growing economy and expanded government benefits, helped cut African-American poverty rates dramatically. The Black middle class almost doubled in size over the next quarter century.[5]

The Voting Rights Act was similarly momentous. Accompanied by the Twenty-fourth Amendment, which outlawed poll taxes in federal elections, the law banned voting discrimination and gave the federal government tools to enforce the prohibition. The effect on American politics was immediate. The number of Black voters increased exponentially, and the number of Black elected officials in the South skyrocketed from 72 in 1965 to more than 1,500 just a decade later. Nor did this era see gains only in the South. Across the country, a confluence of factors—the reforms of the Voting Rights Act, the Supreme Court's "one person one vote" rulings, and the concentration of African-American voters in cities—led to a fourfold increase in the number of Black Members of Congress, from six in the 90th Congress (1967–1969) to 24 in the 101st Congress (1989–1991).[6]

Nevertheless, while the Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act went some ways towards finally providing the benefits of full citizenship to African Americans, the Black Members of Congress discussed in this section recognized there was still much work to do. Indeed, there remained a chasm between the promise of the legislation and the reality of persistent racial disparities and racial oppression.

The civil unrest that swept through American cities in the late 1960s and early 1970s placed the slow progress of Black freedom in stark relief. After a confrontation with police in August 1965, looting, arson, and violence broke out in Watts, a Los Angeles, California, neighborhood in Augustus F. "Gus" Hawkins's congressional district. Nearly two years later, violence and looting erupted in Detroit, Michigan, which was represented by Charles C. Diggs Jr. and John Conyers Jr. At one point, Conyers climbed atop a car with a bullhorn to address a crowd of hundreds, but the crowd soon became angry at the presence of nearby police and began to throw objects at both Conyers and the officers. Conyers was unhurt, but later his second-floor district office was burned down, likely unintentionally, after someone firebombed the store underneath.[7]



ENGROSSING COPY

Union Calendar No. 202

89TH CONGRESS 1st Session

H. R. 6400

[Report No. 439]

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

O. K. ACCEPTED JUL 9 1965 PER

Amendment offered by Mr. Celler, N.Y.

Page ..., line ...

After ...

Strike out / Insert: strike out all after the enacting clause of S. 1564 and insert in lieu thereof the provisions contained in H.R. 6400 as passed by the House.

~~Acts of the United States of America in Congress assembled,~~

~~That this Act shall be known as the "Voting Rights Act of 1965".~~

~~SEC. 2. No voting qualification or procedure shall be imposed or applied to deny or abridge the right to vote on account of race or color.~~

~~SEC. 3. (a) No person shall be denied the right to vote in any Federal, State, or local election because of his failure to comply with any test or device, in any State or in any political subdivision of a State which (1) the Attorney Gen-~~

1

O.K.

Signed into law on August 6, 1965, the Voting Rights Act protected the right of all citizens to vote and made methods used to obstruct voter registration, such as poll taxes and literacy tests, illegal.

Image courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration

As violence continued in Detroit, President Lyndon B. Johnson created the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders to investigate the unrest in America's cities. Among the members of the Commission was first-term Massachusetts Senator Edward Brooke, the first Black U.S. Senator since 1881. The Kerner Commission, named after its chairman, former Illinois Governor Otto Kerner Jr., released its final report in 1968, laying out in frank terms how anti-Black racism shaped American society and created the conditions for the unrest. "Our Nation," the commission memorably reported, "is moving towards two societies, one black, one white—separate and unequal."[8]

The challenges Black lawmakers faced only intensified during the 1970s as the economic growth that defined much of the previous two and a half decades had come to a halt. The defining economic feature of the period was stagflation, the combination of high unemployment and high inflation. Even as the national economy improved, lost



Created in response to civil unrest throughout the United States, the Kerner Commission studied causes of the violence and provided recommendations to prevent future challenges. The first meeting convened on July 31, 1967. Standing, left to right: Ohio Representative William Moore McCulloch; Oklahoma Senator Fred Roy Harris; Vice President Hubert H. Humphrey; Kentucky commissioner of commerce Katherine Graham Peden; Atlanta, Georgia, chief of police Herbert Jenkins; Massachusetts Senator Edward W. Brooke; and diplomat Cyrus Vance. Seated, left to right: Illinois governor and commission chair Otto Kerner; President Lyndon B. Johnson; New York mayor and commission vice chair John Vliet Lindsay; and United Steelworkers president I.W. Abel.

Image courtesy of the Library of Congress

jobs and White flight from America's urban neighborhoods combined to wreak financial havoc on American cities.[9]

These developments ensured that, for many African Americans, the inequality described by the Kerner Commission continued in the succeeding decades. In 1980, civil unrest, violence, and looting broke out in the Liberty City neighborhood of Miami, Florida. Louis Stokes recognized the same characteristics in the Miami upheaval as he had seen in the unrest of the late 1960s. "The long hot summer of 1967 and the conditions that brought it on are fuming again. Miami was not unique," he said. "The same thing could happen in Washington, DC, Cleveland, New York, or any other major urban area." The federal government, Stokes insisted, was not doing enough. "The poor, the unemployed, the disadvantaged, minorities, and the downtrodden have all but been forgotten by the Nation." Poverty, limited access to health care, poor housing, crime, violence, addiction, high rates of incarceration, educational inequities, and over-policing remained all too common in urban Black neighborhoods in the decades after the passage of the Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act.[10]

As Black Members of Congress responded to the effects of the growing urban crises in their districts, they did so while navigating a changing political terrain. Among both Republicans and Democrats, it became common in the 1970s and 1980s to argue that federal deficits were too large, taxes were too high, regulations were too burdensome, and the federal government was too big, and in general, a lag on the economy. As families and jobs moved out of the cities, political power and federal priorities turned further away from urban and social investment.[11]

Confronting these political and economic headwinds, Black Members of Congress were some of the most determined defenders of the social safety net and government involvement in the economy. The policies and ideas that came under attack—welfare and other social services, contested desegregation measures such as affirmative action and busing, and the general belief that government and the federal budget should be used to help the most vulnerable Americans—had been embraced by Black Members and their constituents, who were often from the communities most affected by the social, economic, and cultural changes of the era.

Although the Black lawmakers who served between 1966 and 1990 composed only a small share of the House and were almost entirely absent from the Senate, they searched for creative ways to employ the levers of power on Capitol Hill to improve the lives of Black Americans and other often overlooked groups across the country. Black Members in this period vowed to be, in the words of Ronald V. Dellums of California, "the conscience of Congress."[12]

PRECONGRESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

For many lawmakers in this generation, the civil disobedience demonstrations of the civil rights movement served as proving grounds for their future in electoral politics. Some were nationally prominent movement activists. John Lewis of Georgia, who was elected to the House in 1986, had cofounded and led the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). He was a pillar of the movement: staging sit-ins in segregated stores, participating in the Freedom Rides of 1961, and helping to organize the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. In March 1965, Lewis led a peaceful protest march across the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama, where he and many others were attacked by state troopers in one of the era's galvanizing moments. Andrew Young of Georgia, elected in 1972, was a principal aide to Reverend Martin Luther King Jr., serving as executive director and executive vice president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). King also tapped

a young Washington, DC, minister, Walter Fauntroy, to serve as director of the city's SCLC bureau. As the SCLC's congressional lobbyist, Fauntroy honed his coalition-building skills and was elected the District of Columbia's Delegate in the House in 1971.[13]

Other Members played important roles in the civil rights movement at the local level. Bill Clay, a Representative from St. Louis, Missouri, who was elected in 1968, helped found a local youth chapter of the NAACP and, in 1963, spent 105 days in jail after leading a picket against a bank that refused to hire Black employees. Major R. Owens, a New York Representative, was the chairman of the Brooklyn branch of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) between 1964 and 1966. As a member of CORE, Owens helped lead a series of rent strikes and initiated a voter registration drive inspired by the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party. Charles A. Hayes of Illinois was another lawmaker who rose from the activist ranks. As an official in the powerful United Packinghouse Workers Union District 1 in Chicago, he participated in civil rights demonstrations in his city and provided financial and moral support to the southern civil rights movement. Other Black Members aided the civil rights movement as lawyers. Representative George W. Crockett Jr. of Michigan spent years working as a lawyer fighting for fair employment and volunteered his services to activists in Mississippi in 1964. Louis Stokes was a lawyer for the local Cleveland branch of the NAACP and led a successful court challenge to the state redistricting plan that ultimately created the majority-Black district which would elect him to the House in 1968.[14]

The Members profiled in this section were at the vanguard of the growth of electoral representation for Black Americans in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. In fact, of the 35 African Americans who entered Congress during this period, 30 held prior positions in government. Thirteen of these Members served as state legislators. Of these, a few held leadership roles in their respective chambers, including Barbara Jordan, who served as president pro tempore of the Texas senate, and Harold E. Ford, the majority whip of the Tennessee house of representatives.

Experience in local and municipal elective office also typified this post-1965 cohort. Eleven Members profiled in this section served in municipal positions, including as city councilor, county commissioner, borough president, and recorder judge. Multiple members held high-ranking state or territorial positions: Edward Brooke was the attorney general of Massachusetts; Mervyn M. Dymally served as lieutenant governor of California; and Melvin H. Evans was elected governor of the U.S. Virgin Islands.[15]

BUILDING "AUDACIOUS POWER" ON CAPITOL HILL

While the civil rights movement was the transformative experience for many Members, lawmakers elected in this era were also influenced by a different and, at times, competing political culture. By the late 1960s and early 1970s, many African Americans had begun to question the usefulness of the push for integration and the nonviolent, civil disobedience methods of the civil rights movement. "Black Power" began to compete with the previous decade's "Freedom Now" philosophy.

Black Power had different meanings among its supporters, yet advocates shared a common set of beliefs, including racial and cultural pride, community self-improvement, Black institutional control, international perspectives, and the right of Black self-determination. "When black people lack a majority, Black Power means proper representation and the sharing of control," wrote two of the movement's most influential thinkers. "It means the creation of power bases, of strength, from which black people can press to change local or nation-wide patterns of oppression—instead of from weakness."[16]

The phrase "Black Power"—and the movement behind it—was controversial from the moment SNCC



Baton-wielding Alabama state troopers wade into a crowd of peaceful civil rights demonstrators led by Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee chair John Lewis (on ground left center, in light coat) on March 7, 1965, in Selma, Alabama. Images of the violent event, later known as "Bloody Sunday," shocked millions of Americans and built momentum for the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

Image courtesy of the Library of Congress



This 1965 picture of civil rights leaders includes, from left to right, activist Bayard Rustin, future Representative Andrew Young of Georgia, Representative William Fitts Ryan of New York, activist James Farmer, and future Representative John Lewis of Georgia. Farmer lost a 1968 House race to Shirley Chisholm in a newly created majority-Black district in Brooklyn, New York.

Image courtesy of the Library of Congress

leader Stokely Carmichael demanded it at a Greenwood, Mississippi, rally in June 1966. John Lewis, who resigned from SNCC in July 1966, viewed Carmichael's provocative rhetoric as divisive, saying it created tensions "both within the movement itself and between the races. It drove people apart rather than brought them together."[17]

The struggle for greater political power was one area in which the interests of the civil rights movement and the Black Power movement aligned. Protecting and expanding voting rights was central to the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s. At a speech following the March from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama, in March 1965, Martin Luther King Jr. explained that the "denial of the right to vote" was the "very origin, the root cause, of racial segregation in the Southland." "Let us march on the ballot boxes," he continued, "until we send to our city councils, state legislatures, and the United States Congress, men who will not fear to do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with thy God." Black Members of this era were both participants and beneficiaries of the struggle to expand Black political power in the 1960s. And as these men and women entered Congress, they brought with them ideas, strategies, and goals developed by both the civil rights and Black Power movements.[18]

Speaking on the House Floor on March 29, 1966, Adam Clayton Powell Jr. of New York outlined what he called his "Black Position." In many ways Powell anticipated the balance between civil rights and Black Power that would influence future Black congressional politics. In this speech, Powell called on "Black leadership" to "differentiate between and work within the two-pronged thrust of the black revolution: economic self-sufficiency and political power." Powell wanted Black Americans to develop their own institutions. "We must turn inwardly toward our homes, our churches, our families, our children, our colleges, our neighborhoods, our businesses, and our communities," he said. But he also recognized the need for Black political integration into the existing establishment. "As chairman of the House Committee on Education and Labor, I control all labor and education legislation. This is legislative power." "Black people," Powell wrote, "must seek audacious power." A year later, in 1966, Powell, attempting to harness the popularity of the Black Power movement, held a Black Power conference in the Rayburn House Office Building, but nothing came of any larger Powell-led movement.[19]

Following Powell's lead, several of the newly elected Black Members of Congress adopted the rhetoric and practices of the Black Power movement. Often these lawmakers defined Black Power in expansive terms. During a speech at Howard University shortly after she took office, Shirley Chisholm of New York echoed the message in Powell's "Black Position" thesis. "Consolidating and using our power and our efforts to move up and we want the world to know that it is 'black power' because we have learned what other groups have been learning and doing for a long time," explained the first Black woman elected to Congress. "Until we can organize to create black unity with an economic base. Until we can develop a plan for action to achieve the goals to make us totally independent and not have to look to the man in order to live, we are not liberated." Bill Clay was quick to distance himself from Black nationalists who argued for racial separation, but he also explained that "Black Power is a combination of black pride and black politics. I've devoted my life to this and to the causes of freedom."[20]

It was a tragic coda to the Black freedom movement of the 1960s that Black politicians gained political power in American cities at the moment that public and private disinvestment devasted the economic base of many city neighborhoods. Those same difficult circumstances, however, helped set the direction and tone of Black politics, encouraging lawmakers to blend ideas of Black institutional control, pride, and self-reliance with their other objectives of full American citizenship. It shaped their approach to their place in Congress as well.

THE RISE OF THE CONGRESSIONAL BLACK CAUCUS

While they had many common concerns, it was not foreordained that Black legislators would seek to form an alliance. When Charles Diggs entered the House of Representatives in 1955, he joined William L. Dawson of Illinois and Adam Clayton Powell Jr. to form the largest delegation of African Americans on Capitol Hill since Reconstruction. But "in Congress, there was little, if any communication between Dawson and Powell," Diggs noted. "Their styles were different. In terms of exercise between them, there was not any."[21]

As the number of African Americans serving in Congress grew, however, a long-desired movement to form a more unified organization among Black legislators coalesced. Frustrated that Black Representatives lacked a forum to discuss common concerns and issues, Diggs proposed the organization of the Democratic Select Committee (DSC) at the opening of the 91st Congress (1969–1971). He maintained that the DSC would fill a significant void by fostering the exchange of information among the nine African Americans serving in Congress at the time, as well as between Black Representatives and House leadership. "The sooner we get organized for group action, the more effective we can become," Diggs remarked.[22]

Newcomers Bill Clay, Louis Stokes, and Shirley Chisholm embraced the idea. In his 1992 history of Black congressional representation, Clay wrote that the three first-year Members saw the organization as a way to empower Black lawmakers to "seize the moment, to fight for justice, to raise issues too long ignored and too little debated." Representatives Clay and Stokes also formed a fast and enduring friendship, which boosted momentum to craft a permanent issues caucus on the Hill, one that could speak even for those beyond their district boundaries. "The thrust of our elections was that many black people around America who had formerly been unrepresented, now felt that the nine black members of the House owed them the obligation of also affording them representation in the House," Stokes explained. Clay also observed that he, Chisholm, and Stokes "considered ourselves, along with other black representatives, to have a mandate to speak forcefully and loudly in behalf of equitable treatment of minorities by government."[23]

By the late 1960s, Black groups within larger institutions, such as labor unions, churches, and professional associations, had become increasingly common; Black caucuses already existed in the California and New York state legislatures. In her memoir *Unbought and Unbossed*, Shirley Chisholm expressed a common sentiment at the time that unified Black political action was a necessity. "There is no longer any alternative for black Americans but to unite and fight together for their own advancement as a group," she said.[24]

In its early years, the DSC was loosely organized and targeted a wide range of issues. In September 1969, the group testified before the Senate against the confirmation of Clement F. Haynsworth Jr. to the Supreme Court because, they said, his "record on civil rights clearly demonstrates his infidelity to the principles of racial equality." In part due to the efforts of Edward Brooke, who was the first Republican to publicly oppose President Richard Nixon's nominee, the Senate rejected Haynsworth's confirmation. Then, in December 1969, the group expanded its scope and led an unofficial investigation and hearing on the murders of Illinois Black Panther Party members Fred Hampton and



Louis Stokes of Ohio chaired three committees during his 30-year House career and was one of the founding members of the Congressional Black Caucus.

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Mark Clark by local police officers in Chicago. The group also participated in hearings, attended by White Members of Congress, that investigated an incident in which police shot into a dorm at Jackson State College, a historically Black college in Mississippi, killing two and wounding 15.[25]

With the opening of the 92nd Congress (1971–1973), the number of Black Members of Congress rose to 12. The DSC met on February 2, 1971, and accepted a recommendation put forth by Clay to create a formal nonpartisan caucus for African-American Members. Charles B. Rangel of New York, who had narrowly defeated Adam Clayton Powell Jr. in 1970, thought of a new name for the group: the Congressional Black Caucus. The CBC elected Diggs, the veteran legislator from Detroit, as its first chair, only days after the lawmakers had garnered national attention by boycotting Nixon's State of the Union Address. Bill Clay saw the creation of the CBC as a chance for Black Members to finally have sustained influence in the legislative process, thereby ensuring that Washington addressed their constituents' many material needs. "Our mission was clear," he remembered years later. "We had to parlay massive voting potential into concrete economic results."[26]

Like their predecessors in the nineteenth century, African-American Members of Congress who served after 1965 perceived themselves as representatives for Black America. In the CBC's 1971 meeting with President Nixon, Representative Diggs said, "Our concerns and obligations as members of Congress do not stop at the boundaries of our districts, our concerns are national and international in scope. We are petitioned daily by citizens living hundreds of miles from our districts who look on us as Congressmen-at-large for black people and poor people in the United States." The CBC faced formidable challenges, including its small enrollment and an initial lack of seniority among its Members in the House. Despite these limits, the caucus sought to fulfill its role as Congressmen-at-large for all Black Americans. The CBC collected and disseminated information on the policy preferences of African Americans, assisted individual Black Americans with a range of requests by providing casework services, and spoke on behalf of special interest groups within Black communities.[27]



On March 25, 1971, two months after 12 Black House Members boycotted his State of the Union Address, President Richard M. Nixon met with the Congressional Black Caucus. In attendance at the meeting were Augustus F. "Gus" Hawkins, Bill Clay, Ronald Dellums, presidential counselor Robert Finch, U.S. Secretary of Housing and Urban Development George Romney, Ralph H. Metcalfe, George W. Collins of Illinois, Robert N.C. Nix Sr., presidential senior assistant Clark MacGregor, John Conyers Jr., Louis Stokes, Charles B. Rangel, presidential assistant Donald Henry Rumsfeld, U.S. Secretary of Labor James Hodgson, Parren J. Mitchell, Shirley Chisholm, Charles C. Diggs Jr., and Walter E. Fauntroy.

Image courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration

Its claims to represent every Black American were part of the CBC's attempt to fill the leadership vacuum in the Black freedom movement created by the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. Yet there was no consensus among Black Members on how the CBC would lead. Representative Diggs, who had broad ambitions for the caucus, called for the creation of a National Black Political Convention, to be held in Gary, Indiana, in early March 1972. Black activists and politicians across the ideological divide called for a mass meeting of African Americans to create a unified message in anticipation of the upcoming presidential election. Ultimately, however, the CBC declined to sponsor the event for fear it would lead to future obligations in which the caucus would not have direct oversight.[28]

The CBC faced similar challenges during Shirley Chisholm's contemporaneous run for the Democratic presidential nomination in 1972, splitting on whether to endorse her candidacy and disagreeing about the general direction of Black leadership in Congress. The only woman among the CBC's founders, Chisholm felt that her gender, in addition to her willingness to form coalitions with liberal Whites, Hispanics, and women of all races and ethnicities, irritated her CBC colleagues. Eager to strengthen their position in the Democratic Caucus and committed to individual political alliances that could be compromised by supporting Chisholm's quest for the nomination, many CBC members were not willing to back her. While a few Black Members cautiously supported her campaign early on, only Ron Dellums and Parren J. Mitchell of Maryland officially endorsed Chisholm for President.[29]

When Louis Stokes succeeded Diggs as CBC chair in 1972, he pushed members of the CBC to concentrate

their time as lawmakers on increasing their effectiveness and influence in Congress. "We had to analyze what our resources were, what we should be doing, and how best to do it," he explained. "And our conclusion was this: if we were to be effective, if we were going to make the meaningful contribution to minority citizens in this country, then it must be as legislators. This is the area in which we possess expertise—and it is within the halls of Congress that we must make this expertise felt." For Stokes, the importance of the CBC was that it could "give a black perspective" on legislation. Stokes encouraged members to shape major legislation touching on a variety of issues—from communications regulations to health care to economic development—in ways that would specifically help Black Americans.[30]

Stokes also made room for larger reform efforts, and the CBC continued to express a collective vision of the Black political agenda. In 1972, the CBC issued a "Black Declaration of Independence" that included a "Black Bill of Rights" intended to "create a society which is truly founded upon the principles of freedom, justice and full equality." The CBC's demands, meant to influence the Democratic Party platform and presidential nominee selection process, encompassed issues ranging from national health insurance to a guaranteed annual income system and federal contracts for Black-owned businesses to increased foreign aid to Africa.[31]

Beginning in 1975, the caucus offered its own legislative agenda every year for the next five years, the cornerstone of which was the passage and enforcement of full employment legislation. The caucus also looked to make better use of institutional knowledge and power to help advance its preferred legislation. It reorganized staff to aid Members in passing bills and worked to place Members on key committees. The CBC pointed to the passage of the Voting Rights Act Amendments of 1975 as proof of its new influence in Congress.[32]

During this period, the CBC also confronted questions about its identity and core values. In 1975, Fortney Hillman "Pete" Stark Jr., a White Member representing a congressional district in Oakland, California, with a substantial African-American population, asked to join the all-Black caucus. After intense deliberation, the group rejected Stark's application. "The caucus symbolizes black political development in this country," CBC chair Charles Rangel explained. "We feel that maintaining this symbolism is critical at this juncture in our development." The CBC retained its unwritten rule restricting membership to African-American legislators, but 13 years later briefly allowed White Members to join as nonvoting associates. In 1988, 41 White Representatives joined the CBC when the caucus instituted its new policy.[33]



The Congressional Black Caucus poses for a photograph after an August 1974 meeting with President Gerald R. Ford. Standing from left to right: Ronald Dellums, Robert Nix, John Conyers, Shirley Chisholm, Andrew Young, presidential assistant Stan Scott, Ralph Metcalfe, Walter Fauntroy, Barbara Jordan, Louis Stokes, Charles Diggs. Seated left to right: Gus Hawkins, Cardiss Collins, Charles Rangel, Yvonne Brathwaite Burke, Bill Clay, and Parren Mitchell.

Image courtesy of Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University

Although the CBC's membership was overwhelmingly Democratic, the group sought to be bipartisan. Edward Brooke, the only Black Republican in Congress in the CBC's early years, did not join the caucus. But Melvin Evans, who served as a Republican Delegate from the U.S. Virgin Islands, did so for his one term in the House from 1979 to 1981. After Evans's election, CBC chair Parren Mitchell welcomed him into the caucus, explaining that the CBC "cannot afford to be partisan about this. Black people have problems in common—housing, education, jobs, and all the rest—whether they are Republicans or Democrat."[34]

INSTITUTIONAL ADVANCEMENT

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Black Members regularly criticized what Shirley Chisholm called the "petrified, sanctified system of seniority" embraced by their party's leaders, which enabled White southern Democrats to control many of the House's important committees. In challenging the prevailing Democratic committee practices, Black Members found common cause with other reform-minded, often ideologically liberal, lawmakers seeking to overturn the committee system that rewarded the long tenure of southern Democrats who opposed their policy goals. Together, they animated the reform movement



Louis Stokes, George Collins, Charles Diggs, and Shirley Chisholm gather at a May 24, 1971, Congressional Black Caucus meeting to discuss the Nixon Administration's response to the caucus's policy recommendations.

Image courtesy of the Library of Congress

that decentralized power in the House. In 1970, Shirley Chisholm, then in her first term in Congress, was a member of a Democratic Caucus committee, chaired by Julia Butler Hansen of Washington, that recommended implementing reforms to allow committee chairs to be chosen without regard to the seniority ladder. These early committee reforms, while significant, did not threaten many established committee chairs, who were confident that they would not be challenged by public votes in the caucus.[35]

Black Members also worked independently of the Democratic Party to topple entrenched committee chairs. Since the mid-1960s, home rule—the right of the residents of Washington, DC, to elect their own local government—had been a top priority of civil rights activists and civic reformers in the majority-Black city. But the longtime chair of the Committee on the District of Columbia, John Lanneau McMillan of South Carolina, was a segregationist and an ardent opponent of home rule. In 1972, the District of Columbia's Delegate to the House, Democrat Walter Fauntroy, supported a primary campaign against McMillan, working behind the scenes to quietly assist McMillan's Democratic challengers. White lawmaker John Wilson Jenrette Jr. ultimately defeated McMillan in the primary before losing to the Republican candidate in the general election. McMillan's defeat was a victory for Fauntroy and home rule supporters. Charles Diggs, a supporter of home rule, became the DC committee chair, and he ensured that like-minded committee members became subcommittee chairs. Fauntroy's campaign did more than elevate another Black Member of Congress to a committee chair. The very next year, Diggs, in his new role, shepherded the passage of a bill conferring partial self-government on the District. Thanks to his efforts, and for the first time in almost a century, the people of this now majority-Black city were able to elect their own mayor and city council.[36]

In this and other instances, Black Members and other reform-minded lawmakers succeeded in ending the reign of southern conservative chairs and swept through a series of significant changes to House committees. These reforms gave the CBC even more leverage to advocate for the placement of Black Members on important committees. As part of a major reform package agreed to in 1974, control of the Democratic Party's committee assignment process was given to the Democratic Steering and Policy Committee, which was chaired by the party leader. The CBC used the opportunity to pressure House leaders, including Speaker Carl Albert of Oklahoma, to place African-American lawmakers on prominent committees. As a result, each of the most significant House committees included at least one African-American Member on its roster during the 94th Congress (1975–1977), a level of Black prominence without precedent in House history.[37]

Between 1971 and 1975, Black Members eclipsed long-standing barriers on several elite House committees: Appropriations, which originates all federal spending bills; Ways and Means, with power over taxation and revenue measures; and Rules, which reviews and structures bills passed by various committees in preparation for debate by the full House. In 1971, Louis Stokes won a seat on the Appropriations Committee, becoming the first of five African-American Members to serve on the panel (the first Black woman, Yvonne Brathwaite Burke of California, joined the committee in 1975). The first African-American lawmaker to lead an Appropriations subcommittee was Representative Julian C. Dixon of California, who chaired the District of Columbia Subcommittee beginning in the 97th Congress (1981–1983). Stokes, too, would later chair an Appropriations subcommittee. In 1975, at the beginning of the 94th Congress, Charles Rangel became the first African-American legislator on the Ways and Means Committee; a few months later, in September 1975, Harold E. Ford of Tennessee joined Rangel on the committee. Rangel eventually became chair of Ways and Means in 2007. A Black woman would not be appointed to Ways and Means until Stephanie Tubbs Jones of Ohio broke that barrier in 2003. Andrew Young became the first African-American Member on the Rules Committee in 1975, and

two years later, Shirley Chisholm became the first Black woman to serve on the panel. In 1971, Ralph H. Metcalfe of Illinois became the first Black Member on the Interstate and Foreign Commerce Committee. Ten years later, in 1981, Cardiss Collins became the first Black woman to join the panel, which by then had been renamed the Energy and Commerce Committee.

Once they took their seats on powerful committees, Black Members took advantage of their relatively safe districts to climb the seniority ladder. Incumbency success rates for Members of Congress rose throughout the twentieth century for the entire congressional population. Since the 1970s, incumbency rates have remained consistently at 95 percent or greater. While the career longevity of all Members of Congress has increased, the tenure of African-American legislators has exceeded the norm.[38]

The average length of service for African-American Members elected between 1964 and 2004 reached 10.1 years—higher than the 8.65-year average for the entire congressional population during that time span. Of the Black Members who entered Congress after 1965, Charles Rangel had the longest span of service: nearly 46 years when he retired at the end of the 114th Congress (2015–2017). In the history of African Americans in Congress, Rangel ranked second only to John Conyers, a Member for nearly 53 years when he resigned in December 2017. During this era, John Lewis (33 years), Bill Clay (32 years), Edolphus Towns (30 years), and Louis Stokes (30 years) also accumulated three decades of service.[39]

Seniority boosted the influence of Black Representatives and the CBC. Having won a place in the House by challenging entrenched lawmakers, Black Members discovered virtue in longevity. "When I first came to Congress, I was opposed to the seniority system," District of Columbia Delegate Walter Fauntroy remarked in 1987. But, as he said, "The longer I am here, the better I like it." Seniority was essential to defending Black gains. "We don't really think that racism in this country has so diminished that given the opportunity to vote on individuals based on their experience and ability that we could overcome that without the assistance of the seniority system," Representative Rangel acknowledged.[40]

By the 99th Congress (1985–1987), African Americans chaired an unparalleled five standing committees, two select committees, and 15 subcommittees. For the CBC this meant its members had influence at key points in the legislative process. "We don't have to go hat in hand begging anybody," Representative Clay observed. "In fact, it's just the reverse. Now a lot of people have to come hat in hand (to us) asking for favors."[41]

During this era, Black Members also made history by seeking and attaining posts in Democratic Party leadership. John Conyers made the first effort to win a leadership seat by challenging then Majority Leader Carl Albert for the Speakership in 1971. Conyers lost the Democratic Caucus vote 220 to 20 in what was widely described as a symbolic undertaking. But African-American Members made inroads in other leadership posts during this era. Barbara Jordan, Ralph Metcalfe, and Harold Ford, for instance, were early appointees to the Democratic Steering and Policy Committee, which set the party's legislative agenda in addition to parceling out committee assignments. Shirley Chisholm held the position of Democratic Caucus secretary in the 95th and 96th Congresses (1977–1981). In 1983, Speaker Thomas P. "Tip" O'Neill Jr. of Massachusetts chose Representative Charles Rangel as a deputy majority whip, and John Lewis later served as chief deputy whip. After winning the position of Democratic Caucus chair in December 1988, William H. Gray III made history six months later when his colleagues elected him Majority Whip. Gray was the third-ranking Democrat in the House and the first African American to hold the post.[42]



After defeating incumbent Adam Clayton Powell Jr. in 1970, Charles Rangel began an historic 46-year career representing a New York House district.

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More women joined the first Black Congresswoman, Shirley Chisholm, on Capitol Hill during the early 1970s. To Chisholm's right are Cardiss Collins and Yvonne Burke.

Image courtesy of Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University

"TO FIGHT DOUBLY HARD"

In November 1968, Shirley Chisholm became the first Black woman elected to Congress. In the period covered in this section, four more women—Cardiss Collins, Barbara Jordan, Yvonne Burke, and Katie Hall of Indiana—won election to the House of Representatives.

Black women had sought congressional office for decades before Chisholm won her election. In the 1930s and 1940s, Layle Lane, a teacher and union activist, ran for Congress in New York City three times on the Socialist Party ticket. Then, in 1944, Sara Pelham Speaks, a Harlem-based lawyer, ran as the Republican candidate against Adam Clayton Powell Jr. in his first successful campaign. Twenty years later, in 1964, Brenetta Howell, a journalist and activist, ran against Thomas Joseph O'Brien for a Chicago House seat.[43]

In the 1960s, several Black women ran for Congress in southern districts. In Alabama, Amelia Boynton, a voting rights activist, ran against incumbent Kenneth Allison Roberts in the Democratic primary. Boynton gained national prominence a year later for her activism during the Selma voting rights campaign. In 1965, Sarah E. Small, a member of the civil rights organization CORE and a local chapter of SCLC, ran in a special election for a North Carolina seat eventually won by Walter Beaman Jones Sr. By the late 1960s, more and more women were running for Congress. In 1968, when Chisholm notched her historic victory, future Representative Eva M. Clayton ran unsuccessfully for an eastern North Carolina seat in the U.S. House, and Janet Roberts Jennings, a teacher and former campaign staffer for Senator Everett McKinley Dirksen of Illinois, ran unsuccessfully as the Republican opponent against longtime Chicago Representative William Dawson.[44]

The five women profiled in this section were trailblazers, working to pass significant legislation and rising through the ranks of party and House leadership. Several gained influential committee positions: Chisholm on Rules, Burke on Appropriations, and Jordan on Judiciary. Yvonne Burke also chaired the Select Committee on the House Beauty Shop, while Cardiss Collins became the first Black woman to chair a subcommittee when she headed the Manpower and Housing Subcommittee of the Committee on Government Operations in 1977. Collins later rose to ranking minority member of the same committee, then renamed the Committee on Government Reform and Oversight. Both Burke and Collins also were elected to terms as chair of the CBC.

This ascent paralleled Black women's movement into Democratic Party leadership. In 1975, Cardiss Collins won appointment as Democratic whip-at-large, and in 1977, Shirley Chisholm was elected secretary of the Democratic Caucus. Barbara Jordan, who was one of the most widely respected Members of the House during her tenure, served on the powerful Democratic Steering and Policy Committee.

While Burke and Collins both led the CBC, Chisholm and Jordan, among the best-known Members of Congress in their day, approached their work with the caucus differently. Neither Chisholm nor Jordan believed that the caucus was the most important vehicle for their success as politicians and legislators. From the beginning of her career, Jordan demonstrated her independence from the CBC. Before she was sworn in, the CBC, as part of its effort to place Black Members on important House committees, advocated for Jordan to be put on the Armed Services Committee. While Jordan did not oppose this assignment, she preferred a seat on Judiciary. The Texas Representative reached out to former President Lyndon B. Johnson, and his eventual recommendation on her behalf got Jordan placed on her preferred committee. Additionally, sexism and the professional jealousy of some male CBC members made the caucus an occasionally uninviting space for Black women members. Chisholm recalled seeing "the unhappy looks on the other members' faces" because of the publicity she received for being the first Black woman in Congress. The reactions of some of her male colleagues caused Chisholm to avoid the press sometimes, "in order to stay more in the background," she said.[45]

All five women were active lawmakers and worked to build on the legislative victories won by the civil rights movement in the 1960s. Both Collins and Burke pushed for legislation that mandated racial minority- and women-owned businesses receive set-asides from federally funded projects. Jordan sponsored legislation denying federal funding to law enforcement agencies that practiced employment discrimination. And Indiana Representative Katie Hall successfully shepherded through Congress the law creating Martin Luther King Jr. Day, legislation that had stalled in Congress for 15 years.[46]

Though they represented different parts of the country, their common experiences as Black women shaped their legislative priorities. Often, these Members focused on legislation directly aimed at concerns of women, and more specifically, Black women, who rarely had legislators working on their behalf. In 1973, Chisholm, Burke, Jordan, and Collins wrote to Caspar W. Weinberger, the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, criticizing federal guidelines on a contraceptive medicine that could leave women infertile. Citing the cases of two Black teenagers who received the drug from an Office of Economic Opportunity-funded clinic in Alabama, the lawmakers argued the language in the guidelines left women of color and poor women especially at risk. Several of the women lawmakers took the lead in advocating for bills that would expand the coverage of federal social aid legislation to better support women. Chisholm worked to successfully amend the Depression-era Fair Labor Standards Act to provide a minimum wage to domestic workers, who were predominantly women of color. Jordan, taking over an initiative begun by former Michigan Representative Martha Wright Griffiths, sponsored legislation to allow women who did not have a direct source of income—what the legislation called homemakers—to receive Social Security benefits. Burke proposed similar legislation and sponsored a bill to fund job training facilities for "displaced homemakers," who had lost income provided by a spouse because of divorce, death, or job loss.[47]

During the 1970s, Black women made up a higher percentage of Black Members of Congress than White women did among all White Members, yet the number of Black women in Congress in this era remained miniscule. And between 1985, following Katie Hall's defeat for re-election, and 1991, the only Black woman in Congress was Cardiss Collins. Early in her congressional career, Shirley Chisholm acknowledged her unique position as a Black woman in Congress and how difficult it was to reach such a position. "My rise has been constantly fighting," she explained. "And I have had to fight doubly hard because I am a woman. I am a very different sort of person than usually emerges on the political scene."[48]

LEGISLATIVE INTERESTS

With a few exceptions, the Black Members covered in this section represented majority- or near-majority-Black congressional districts in urban areas experiencing population and job loss and a corresponding turn of political power and federal priorities away from urban and social investment. In the face of these challenges, they shared a commitment to advancing voting rights; improving access to housing, education, and economic opportunity; defending human rights abroad; and opening access to better health care. Working creatively and determinedly, Black Members shaped some of the era's most significant legislation.



Following her husband's death, Cardiss Collins embarked on a more than two-decade career in the House.

Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives



In 1976, Barbara Jordan, a captivating public speaker, became the first woman and the first African American to deliver a keynote address at a Democratic National Convention.

Image courtesy of the Library of Congress

Voting Rights

Voting rights—which Barbara Jordan once referred to as the "frontispiece" of the civil rights movement—continued as a legislative pillar for African-American Members of Congress in the 1970s and 1980s. Because the 1965 Voting Rights Act included several sections that required periodic legislative renewal, Black lawmakers worked to extend the protections outlined in the original law. The first amendments to the law came in 1970, but amendments made in 1975 and 1982 were of particular importance.

The 1975 extension, which passed the House 341 to 70, was signed into law on August 6, the tenth anniversary of the first Voting Rights Act. It continued several key provisions established by the original act, including "preclearance," which prevented states with a history of discriminatory voting practices from altering their election procedures without approval from the courts or the U.S. Department of Justice.[49]

The 1975 act also expanded preclearance coverage to include counties in the North and West. And it was extended beyond African-American voters to protect "language minorities," including Spanish speakers, Native Americans, and Asian Americans. The law required bilingual elections in areas where there were large numbers of voters whose English literacy was below the national average.[50]

African-American Members played a prominent part during debate on the 1975 extension. Representative Jordan, whose Houston district had a large Latino population, sponsored an amendment to expand the definition of literacy tests to include election registration materials printed only in English in areas with large non-English-speaking populations. "The voting rights act may have overcome blatant discriminatory practices," Jordan said, testifying before the House Judiciary Subcommittee on Civil Rights and Constitutional Rights. But, she added, "it has yet to overcome subtle discriminatory practices." Charles Rangel agreed that the law remained essential to preserving democratic government in the South. "Malevolent local government must not be exposed to any temptation to take back the political rights and powers that have so recently come to southern blacks," he said. Andrew Young pointed to the seven southern states covered by the original 1965 act, highlighting vastly improved voter registration rates and an increase in the number of elected Black officials in the South. "The remarkable effect of this act is that it has a preventative effect," Young observed. "There are some reports that the threat of suing examiners has a deterrent effect—that local registrars began to register black voters so that federal examiners would be kept out."[51]

Seven years later, the 1982 Voting Rights Act extension provided another victory for the civil rights movement and multiracial democracy. During debate in the House, several Black Members of Congress spoke in support of the bill. Representative Clay explained what was at stake for the country: "Are we willing to continue our forward momentum in America's bold and noble attempt to achieve a free and just democratic society? Or, will we embrace the politics of reversal and retreat; the super rich against the wretchedly poor, the tremendously strong against the miserably weak?"[52]

Examples from American history helped drive these legislative efforts. Black lawmakers during this era had studied the White supremacist overthrow of Reconstruction and the ensuing rollback of the political, civil, and social rights that African Americans had won in the years immediately following the Civil War. The negation of Black freedom had happened once, and it could happen again. Walter Fauntroy made exactly this connection at a hearing for the Voting Rights Act of 1982, explaining that "without the extension of it [the Voting Rights Act] we may have a repeat of the post-reconstruction period of 100 years ago, which would see large numbers of blacks and other

minorities denied full participation in the electoral process, as well as representation in bodies like this."[53]

The 1982 bill extended the Voting Rights Act's major provisions for 25 years. It also established a procedure by which jurisdictions that maintained a clean voting rights record for at least a decade could petition a panel of judges to be removed from the preclearance list. The bilingual election materials requirements established in the 1975 act were also extended for another decade. Mickey Leland, who succeeded Representative Jordan in her Houston district, addressed the House in Spanish to make a point about the need for extending those provisions. "Many of you cannot understand me," Leland said in Spanish. "And even though you cannot understand me when I speak Spanish maybe you can begin to understand the hypocrisy of our political system which excludes the participation of Hispanic-Americans only for having a different culture and speaking a different language."[54]

The Voting Rights Act of 1982 also ensured that certain voting rights violations could be proven as the result of changes to local regulations, even if the intent to discriminate could not be established. That section of the bill overturned the 1980 Supreme Court decision in *Mobile v. Bolden* requiring prosecutors to prove that a jurisdiction intended to discriminate when it changed its voting regulations. This legislative instrument provided the basis for the creation of majority-Black districts following the 1990 Census, particularly in southern states, paving the way for the expansion of African-American representation in Congress.[55]

Fair Housing

For most if not all Black legislators, the advance of voting rights legislation took place against an inhospitable economic backdrop. Between 1940 and 1980, roughly 5 million African Americans moved from the rural South to the urban North. As African Americans moved to cities, many White families decamped to America's booming suburbs. Racial animus against African-American families played a significant role in the decision of White urban dwellers to leave. White flight, as the phenomenon was called, often left cities less populated and with less tax revenue. This process quickened as African Americans increased their local political power and as court-mandated school desegregation finally occurred in the late 1960s. Discriminatory housing practices kept many Black families out of the suburbs, while real estate practices such as redlining—the practice of denying financial services, including mortgages and insurance, to buyers based on their racial or ethnic background—severely undervalued the housing supply in predominantly Black city neighborhoods. Deindustrialization, the effects of economic recession, and the federal government's disinvestment all helped create an "urban crisis" that had its most severe impacts on Black Americans. As Martin Luther King Jr. put it in 1967, "the suburbs are white nooses around the black necks of cities." While appearing to surface after the riots, the hollowing out of city life was well advanced by the time this cohort was elected to Congress.[56]

Black Americans' long-standing demand for access to housing surged to the forefront of a national discussion on urban policy, particularly after violence erupted in majority-Black neighborhoods in cities such as Los Angeles, Detroit, and Newark, New Jersey, in the mid-1960s. In his 1966 State of the Union Address, President Johnson recommended "outlawing discrimination in the sale and rental of housing." Although House Democrats failed to pass a fair housing bill in the summer of 1967, the House did pass a narrow civil rights bill on August 15, 1967. The law established federal protections for civil rights workers and federal penalties for anyone who forcibly interfered with their civil and political rights.[57]

When the Senate finally began to debate the legislation in February 1968, Senator Edward Brooke joined with Senator Walter F. Mondale of Minnesota to draft an amendment designed to prohibit discrimination in the sale or rental of 91 percent of all housing in the nation. On the Senate Floor, Brooke described how segregated neighborhoods, typically far from employment opportunities, placed severe financial burdens on African-American communities. Black families, he noted, often paid similar prices as those in White neighborhoods without similar investments in the quality of housing, social services, and schools. Brooke added that he could "testify from personal experience, having lived in the ghetto," that these limitations have a significant "psychological impact" on the majority of African Americans searching for a home. "In the hierarchy of American values there can be no higher standard than equal justice for each individual," Brooke declared. "By that standard, who could question the right of every American to compete on equal terms for adequate housing for his family?" A compromise bill, which reduced the amount of housing covered, passed the Senate and returned to the House on March 11, 1968.[58]

Before the Senate's housing bill could be debated by the full House, it needed to make it past the Rules Committee and its chair, William Meyers Colmer, a Democrat from Mississippi. Since the 1950s, the Rules Committee and its southern chairmen had blocked civil rights initiatives. Colmer sought to keep the Senate housing bill off the floor by sending the civil rights legislation passed by the House in 1967 to a conference committee to be reconciled with the Senate's version that included the fair housing provision. House supporters of the Senate's bill wanted that legislation to be sent directly to a vote on the House Floor because they feared a conference committee would revise or simply stall the fair housing legislation. On April 4—the day before the Rules Committee was scheduled to vote on whether to direct the bill to the House Floor or send it to conference—Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee, where he was campaigning in support of striking sanitation workers. The Rules Committee postponed its vote. A violent weekend ensued in cities across the nation, leaving 46 people dead, thousands injured, and millions of dollars in property damage. Washington, DC, suffered extensive damage, and federal troops patrolled the Capitol when the Rules Committee met the following week. Unexpectedly, but no doubt sensing the gravity of the moment, a majority of the committee defied Colmer and voted to send the bill to the floor.[59]



In 1975, Edward Brooke's impassioned support of the need to extend the landmark 1965 Voting Rights Act by seven years helped ensure the measure's success.

Image courtesy of the Library of Congress

Less than a week later, the House approved the Senate bill by a vote of 250 to 172, and President Johnson signed it into law on April 11, 1968. The measure extended federal penalties for civil rights infractions, protected civil rights workers, and outlawed discrimination by race, creed, national origin, or sex in the sale and rental of roughly 80 percent of U.S. housing by 1970. The enforcement mechanism of the fair housing provision, however, proved relatively weak because it required private individuals or advocacy groups to file suit when claiming to have suffered housing discrimination. Meanwhile, working and middle-class White families continued to flee to the suburbs, leaving cities less populated, poorer, and with smaller tax bases to address their many needs.[60]

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, Black Members worked to improve the enforcement of the act. Because complaints proceeded through private civil action—rather than through government reconciliation processes—fair housing lawsuits were expensive and time consuming. The Fair Housing Act, Shirley Chisholm argued on the House Floor in 1980, "has remained a statement of goals, rather than an active force against discrimination in the housing market." For Chisholm, John Conyers, and other Black Members of Congress, housing discrimination was a fundamental cause of persistent racial inequality. Conyers explained to his colleagues that "there is no way that we can enjoy any of our other rights as long as racial discrimination in housing is as flagrant as it is." In 1988, after many years of trying, Congress amended the Fair Housing Act to allow administrative judges in the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to hear discriminatory housing lawsuits.[61]

School Desegregation

Given that residential location generally determined a child's school placement, segregated housing markets and educational segregation went hand in hand. As Black legislators fought to end real estate practices that promoted segregation, they debated their position on busing, the policy of transporting students beyond their neighborhood school to aid the desegregation of America's educational system. Busing was one of the most controversial domestic issues of the early 1970s. By and large, courts set busing policy, but it was a political fight that played out at all levels of government. In the House of Representatives, a coalition of Republicans and Democrats—including many Members from northern districts who had supported civil rights legislation in the 1960s—worked to end busing.

In 1972, for example, opponents of busing successfully passed an education bill that restricted federal funds available to districts that bused students to integrate their schools. While the House and Senate passed several other bills limiting federal funding for busing, opponents never successfully banned the practice outright. In 1974, the Supreme Court banned busing across school jurisdictions, from cities to suburbs, for instance. Without metropolitan busing plans, White flight out of America's cities meant that by the 1980s urban schools were overwhelmingly Black and suburban schools were overwhelmingly White. As a result, busing no longer held the same political salience for many White families.[62]

Not all Black Americans supported busing initiatives. Some Black policymakers and educators argued that busing Black children to majority-White schools would decrease the employment opportunities for Black teachers and Black school administrators. In Atlanta, Georgia, the local NAACP created a desegregation plan with the city that, according to one historian, "minimized pupil desegregation" through busing while expanding employment opportunities for Black educators and administrators. For other African Americans, busing to White schools seemed to imply that Black children could only succeed around White children. Instead, these Black opponents of busing argued that money should be invested in schools run by Black administrators and Black teachers for the benefit of Black communities.[63]

In Congress, Black Members often took the lead in protecting the use of busing to achieve school integration. Despite disagreements among Black Representatives about whether busing was an effective and worthwhile policy, they largely agreed to oppose antibusing legislation. While no Black Representative supported antibusing measures, there was a spectrum of opinion in the House about how to handle the volatile issue.

In the early 1970s, Gus Hawkins took a strong stand against antibusing measures from his seat on the Committee on Education and Labor. For Hawkins, the organized resistance to busing was nothing less than an attempt to turn back the clock on school desegregation itself. The California Representative likened the push for antibusing legislation to "a mob spirit" and viewed a 1972 antibusing proposal as an attempt "to bring back the condition which existed in this country under the separate but equal doctrine." Seven years later, CBC chair Cardiss Collins took the lead in opposing a constitutional amendment banning busing. "I am not proud that some of my colleagues have forgotten the legacy of enforced segregation and slavery which still tells too many black children that they must have the worst school buildings, the worst textbooks, the worst school personnel and the worst learning opportunities."[64]



Students ride a school bus in Charlotte, North Carolina. In a 1971 case regarding desegregation of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg County school district, the Supreme Court ruled that busing Black and White children between majority-Black and majority-White schools was an appropriate tool to help achieve racial integration.

Image courtesy of the Library of Congress

In the Senate, Edward Brooke supported busing as a means to integrate schools and often led the opposition to legislation that sought to overturn court-ordered busing requirements. His stance came with substantial political risk. In the mid-1970s, Boston, Massachusetts, was perhaps the epicenter of American antibusing protest. But for Brooke, busing was a legitimate, court-sanctioned remedy to help Black Americans achieve their constitutional right to equal opportunity. "It is not necessarily the best way," Brooke explained to a reporter, "but in certain instances busing is the *only* way to achieve desegregation." In 1974, Brooke led opposition to an amendment to a Housing, Education, and Welfare appropriations bill that aimed to bar the department from cutting funds to schools that disobeyed integration orders. That amendment, added by Maryland Representative Marjorie Sewell Holt, would have effectively ended the federal government's role in school desegregation. Had it passed, Brooke argued, the Senate would have done "everything humanly possible to abolish the civil rights laws of this country."[65]

Shirley Chisholm argued that antibusing proposals were little more than "political expediencies" that focused on "highly emotional issues." "Busing," she insisted, "is not the issue." Chisholm opposed antibusing legislation



On May 20, 1975, Vice President Nelson A. Rockefeller addresses a Congressional Black Caucus full employment forum. Shirley Chisholm and Vice President Rockefeller greet each other as Walter Fauntroy and Charles Rangel look on.

Image courtesy of the Library of Congress

and argued that Congress should instead focus on both the "distribution of funds for all kinds of schools in this country" and "integrated housing." Chisholm believed these policies would get to the root of the problems of continued segregation and racial inequality, and would, in her words, create "an open society which in the final analysis will redound to all children." On one occasion, Chisholm explained that, busing aside, some of her constituents believed their children were getting a better education from schools controlled by their Black and Puerto Rican communities. Chisholm told a reporter that she found it "difficult to argue with parents who for the first time, have some faith in the educational process."[66]

The CBC thus attempted to balance the push for integration with the protection of Black community-controlled education. In its 1972 "Black Bill of Rights," the CBC called for "federal, state, and local authorities to fully comply with the Supreme Court's recent school desegregation decision that busing will be employed as a suitable means to ensure quality education for all American children." But in the same document, the caucus called busing a "sterile issue." The CBC instead called for "the development of mechanisms for black control of schools where black children are educated." "The basic issue," the CBC announced, was the "redistribution of educational wealth and control."[67]

Equal Employment

As their housing and school initiatives demonstrated, Black lawmakers recognized the economic dimensions of their civil rights struggle. Inequities in real estate markets and educational opportunity persisted, increasing the urgency of resolving long-standing patterns of discrimination in the labor market.

Supporters of the equal employment clause in Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 recognized early on that the law had weak enforcement mechanisms. The law had created the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), which sought to investigate complaints of racial and sex discrimination, but the commission lacked the power to compel offending employers to cooperate. In 1965, Adam Clayton Powell Jr. sponsored an Equal Employment Act that provided the EEOC with the power to issue cease-and-desist orders to force employers to end discriminatory practices. In 1966, the bill, now sponsored by Gus Hawkins, easily passed the House; but the Johnson administration made no effort to support it, and the Senate did not act on it. Then, in 1970, the Senate passed similar equal employment legislation, but the House Rules Committee chair, Democrat William Colmer, prevented the legislation from reaching the House Floor. The EEOC, Parren Mitchell lamented in 1971, "too often turns out to be a paper tiger."[68]

That year, House Democrats, led by Hawkins, made passing the Equal Employment Opportunity Act a priority for the 92nd Congress. The CBC declared "an all-out war" to combat job discrimination. "Too long already," the CBC argued, "have we delayed the implementation of the National Policy of equal employment. We will hold accountable those who oppose such implementation of the Civil Rights Act, or who use ingenious devices to protect job discrimination while proclaiming themselves friends of civil rights."[69]

The CBC's comments were directed at a substitute to the Hawkins bill, sponsored by Illinois Republican John Neal Erlenborn and supported by the Nixon administration, that would deny the EEOC cease-and-desist powers and instead grant the commission the ability to sue employers in federal court. The CBC opposed Erlenborn's court solution because of the time and money litigation required.

Thus, while a bipartisan consensus had emerged that the EEOC should be granted new powers to enforce equal employment law, what form that enforcement should take remained uncertain. Democratic leadership backed the CBC and liberal Democrats in supporting an EEOC with

cease-and-desist powers, while Republicans and southern Democrats supported the Erlenborn substitute. After two days of debate in September 1971, the House decided to table the CBC's bill and move forward with Erlenborn's substitute; it passed the House 285 to 108. While Hawkins ultimately decided to support the legislation's final version, five CBC members voted against it. After several weeks of debate in the Senate, followed by a conference committee, President Nixon signed the Equal Employment Opportunity Act into law on March 24, 1972.[70]

The battle was not over, however. Eighteen years later, Gus Hawkins, now chair of the Education and Labor Committee, once again led the fight in the House to reform equal employment law. In 1989, a series of Supreme Court decisions upended 20 years of employment law in ways that civil rights advocates argued made it far more difficult for women and minorities to sue employers for discrimination. According to Cardiss Collins, the Supreme Court had "disregarded both the letter and the spirit of Congress' efforts, thus doing damage to the legitimate rights of millions of Americans." In response, Hawkins proposed a new civil rights bill.[71]

Hawkins's 1990 Civil Rights Act sought to return the burden of proof in employment discrimination cases to the employer rather than the plaintiff. It also sought to redefine the standards courts could use to judge whether employers were guilty of practices that led to discrimination, whether the discrimination was intentional or not. The law allowed all victims of employment discrimination, including women, to win monetary compensation from lawsuits—previously only available in instances of racial discrimination under an 1866 law. Donald M. Payne, the first Black Member to represent New Jersey, explained that the bill sought to "restore the important protections that have helped make our society more fair and just since the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964."[72]

The George H.W. Bush administration and its Republican congressional allies agreed that employment law should be revised in light of the Supreme Court rulings. But they opposed Hawkins's bill and sought to undermine it by labeling it a "quota bill" that mandated minority hiring. Despite an amendment to the bill that explicitly banned quotas, the President's Office of Management and Budget still argued that it would require "employers to adopt surreptitious quotas" or risk being sued.[73]

Despite the threat of a presidential veto, Democrats, led by Hawkins in the House and Edward Moore "Ted" Kennedy of Massachusetts in the Senate, refused to concede on the main points of the bill. Hawkins's legislation passed both the House and the Senate but was vetoed by President Bush. It fell 12 votes shy of the number that was required to override the veto in the House and one vote short in the Senate.

In 1991, with Gus Hawkins now retired, Democrats again attempted to pass employment legislation. Once again, Black Members were nearly unanimous in their denunciation of the Bush administration's allegations of quotas. Craig A. Washington of Texas argued that the quota debate was a "red herring" and that the legislation was "never the subject of honest intellectual discussion." Congress ultimately passed a veto-proof compromise employment bill that accomplished much of what Hawkins and the CBC hoped to achieve. In cases of indirect job discrimination, the burden of proving that employment decisions did not have a disparate and adverse impact on women or racial minorities was returned to the employer. However, the CBC did not approve of the compromise language that gave employers more room to prove that hiring practices that may have resulted in a disparate impact were a "business necessity." President Bush signed the bill into law on November 21, 1991.[74]

Economic Opportunity

In addition to deepening Washington's role in the fight against job discrimination, Black legislators argued for an expanded idea of the social safety net, one that would make the federal government a guarantor of economic opportunity for all Americans. Black Members shared the belief that promoting economic opportunities for African Americans was essential to furthering the civil rights advances won in the 1960s. The first imperative listed in the CBC's 1972 "Black Bill of Rights," for instance, was the demand for "Jobs and Income." The CBC declared that all Americans had a "right to live" and called for a full employment plan and a guaranteed national income. Many Members supported programs designed to advance African-American economic equality, including job training programs, urban renewal projects, affirmative action programs, and so-called "empowerment zones"—urban and rural areas designated by the federal government to receive grants and loans for job training and tax incentives for minority-owned businesses.[75]

These initiatives took on special urgency as the urban crisis deepened, and Black unemployment rates increased dramatically during the tumultuous economic restructuring



The Humphrey–Hawkins Full Employment Act of 1978 attempted to resolve persistent unemployment in the United States. The Congressional Black Caucus placed its support behind the bill. Joined by Delegate Walter Fauntroy and Representatives Yvonne Burke and Bella Savitzky Abzug of New York, civil rights activist Reverend Jesse Jackson Sr. (center) marched in Washington, DC, to draw attention to the legislation.

Image courtesy of the Library of Congress

of the 1970s and 1980s. And while members of both parties increasingly took to blaming Washington for the country's economic woes, Black Members steadfastly defended the social safety net and the federal government's role in bringing about a more equitable economy.[76]

It was in that spirit that the CBC prioritized legislation that mandated the federal government work toward achieving full employment. From 1974 to 1975, Representative Gus Hawkins and Senator Hubert H. Humphrey Jr. of Minnesota drafted a measure to drastically cut unemployment in the United States. The bill Hawkins introduced in 1974 redefined full employment as "useful and rewarding employment opportunities for all adult Americans." It also proposed "community job boards" to plan and coordinate employment projects, a "Job Guarantee Office" to fund local projects, a "Standby Job Corps" to offer temporary jobs if a project was not available, and the option for a person to sue in federal court if "deprived of his or her job rights." Hawkins's proposed Equal Opportunity and Full Employment Act was a radical rethinking of the American labor market. As Hawkins sought support for his legislation, including from President James Earl "Jimmy" Carter, many of the more controversial aspects of the bill, including the right to sue for a job and the Job Guarantee Office, were removed.[77]

Each member of the CBC cosponsored the final version of the legislation, which became known as the Humphrey–Hawkins Full Employment and Balanced Growth Act of 1978. As Yvonne Burke, then chair of the CBC, explained in a 1976 speech, the full employment legislation was "the heart of our program to improve the economic conditions for Black Americans and for all Americans." By the time the legislation was put to a vote in 1978, it declared the federal government's intention to promote full employment, produce real income gains, achieve price stability, and outline a balanced budget, but it did not fund any new programs or instruments to help create jobs. The concessions made in the final bill, which President Carter signed into law on October 27, 1978, led some analysts to describe the legislation as "an empty symbol." "The bill," Edward Brooke explained, "was somewhat emasculated, if not totally emasculated." But the CBC's ability to persuade President Carter to publicly support a bill linked so closely to the caucus resulted in a symbolic victory. "We would never have struggled so hard to get this act passed if we did not consider it significant," declared Representative Parren Mitchell.[78]

While full employment legislation sought to help vulnerable members of society get by, Black legislators also wanted to help people of color and women get ahead. Baltimore's Parren Mitchell rallied a network of allies to help push through legislation aimed at business development in African-American communities. Primarily interested in promoting economic opportunities in majority-Black city neighborhoods, Mitchell assembled a "brain trust" of national advisers—mostly entrepreneurs, lawyers, bankers, and economists—to make recommendations on policy and legislation. The CBC embraced Mitchell's approach, often asking policy experts for help crafting legislation. Known as the "Little General" for his ability to organize and coordinate support for key legislation, the Representative attached an amendment to a $4 billion public works program that required state and local governments applying for federal contracts to reserve 10 percent of the money for minority-owned companies. In the Senate, Edward Brooke introduced the same amendment, and it was signed into law in 1977. The measure was a significant legislative victory for the CBC and helped the caucus build coalitions for future efforts.[79]

During the 1970s, the CBC presented legislative agendas urging increased spending on domestic programs. In 1981, however, when President Ronald Reagan called for alternatives to his fiscal plan, which emphasized defense spending, the CBC drafted a detailed budget that underscored its contrasting priorities. The CBC plan, which included increased federal funding for domestic programs, cuts to defense spending,

and increased taxes on the wealthiest Americans, received national attention, though little backing in the House. Although the CBC's budget did not gain traction, it quickly became an annual event. Nearly every year going forward, the CBC offered an alternative budget. "Even in defeat we have a responsibility to fight the fight," Ron Dellums explained. "We have to articulate the alternative."[80]

District of Columbia

Another issue of great importance to Black Members of Congress was the matter of representation and self-government, or "home rule," for the District of Columbia. Following the passage of the Residence Act of 1790 and the creation of the city of Washington, the nation's capital had been administered by a patchwork of governing bodies: an appointed mayor and elected city council (both a board of aldermen and common council); briefly, a territorial government in 1871, when the city was designated the "District of Columbia"; a presidentially appointed commission; and congressional committees. As a result of the same processes of Black in-migration and White out-migration that occurred in other urban areas at the same time, Washington was by 1960 a Black-majority city. Congressional debates about representation and the administration of the District resonated with Black Americans across the country.[81]

From his seat on the Committee on District of Columbia, Charles Diggs became an advocate for political representation for Washington, DC. Diggs had chaired a Committee on the District of Columbia subcommittee before taking over the full committee as chair in 1973, marking the end of the exclusive history of White congressional control over the capital. In 1970, with Diggs's support, the House had passed the District of Columbia Delegate Act, which reinstituted the post of Delegate to represent the city in the House. The next year, District residents elected minister and activist Walter Fauntroy as the city's first congressional Delegate since 1875.[82]

Fauntroy and the CBC tirelessly advocated home rule in the District. Fauntroy oversaw a lobbying campaign aimed at building support for the cause from White Members who represented southern districts with substantial Black constituencies. And following the success of the campaign to oust the District Committee's chair, Representative John McMillan, from the House, the effort prevailed. In December 1973, Congress passed a compromise measure—the District of Columbia Self-Government and Governmental Reorganization Act—that gave the District limited self-rule, permitting citizens to elect a mayor and a city council.[83]

Based partially on the successful "Fauntroy strategy," the CBC created the Action-Alert Communications Network (AACN) to mobilize support from non-Black legislators on a range of policy issues affecting African Americans. Encompassing the National Black Leadership Roundtable and the Black Leadership Forum, the AACN tapped into a network of national Black organizations willing to wage grassroots campaigns to apply pressure on White officials whose communities included large numbers of African-American voters. "We are organizing ourselves to impact the political process, to reach out on a very careful basis in coalition with those whose interests coincide with ours," Fauntroy remarked.[84]

Other African-American Members played key roles in congressional oversight of Washington, DC. Julian Dixon, a District native who held a Los Angeles-area House seat, became chair of the House Appropriations Committee's Subcommittee on the District of Columbia in 1980. During the next two decades, Dixon was a primary congressional ally of Washington, DC. In November 1990, after Fauntroy announced his retirement from the House, Eleanor Holmes Norton won election as Delegate. An advocate for full

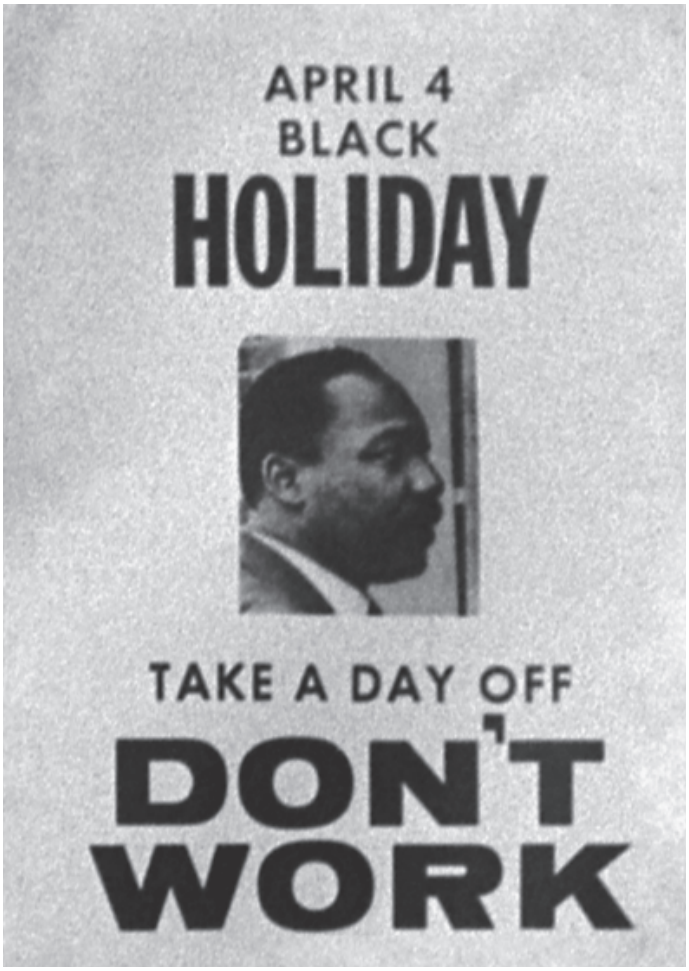


Charles Diggs began his congressional career on January 3, 1955. Throughout his more than two decades in the House, Diggs demonstrated his commitment to ending racial discrimination.

Image courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration

congressional voting rights and statehood for the District, Norton, who along with Maxine Waters of California is the longest-serving Black woman in House history, has represented the District since the 102nd Congress (1991–1993).

By the 1980s, residents of Washington, DC, continued their quest for what Diggs called "self-determination" by advocating for statehood. In the 100th and 101st Congresses (1987–1991), Walter Fauntroy sponsored H.R. 51—the bill number symbolizing Washington, DC, becoming the fifty-first state—to provide statehood to the District of Columbia. The legislation did not receive a hearing in either Congress. When Holmes Norton succeeded Fauntroy, she continued the push for statehood. In the 103rd Congress (1993–1995), H.R. 51 received a vote on the House Floor but was defeated. In 2019, the House passed H.R. 51, once again introduced by Holmes Norton, for the first time, but the bill stalled in the Senate. The House passed the bill again in April 2022.[85]



Congress enacted legislation in 1983 to commemorate the birth date of Martin Luther King Jr. as a national holiday—marking a major legislative triumph for the Congressional Black Caucus. This hand bill, noting the anniversary of King's 1968 assassination, sought to rally public support for the creation of the holiday.

Image courtesy of the Library of Congress

Commemorative Legislation

Black lawmakers often used their influence to pass legislation commemorating people and events from the civil rights movement and to call attention to unrecognized Black contributions to American history. In 1976, Ralph Metcalfe introduced the first resolution to recognize February as Black History Month. Ten years later, the designation of February as "National Black History Month" became law. Led by John Conyers, some Black Members also wanted Congress to apologize for the institution of slavery and to study remedies, including financial reparations, for the harm done to generations of African Americans by slavery and subsequent racial discrimination.[86]

One landmark achievement was the designation of Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday as a national holiday. Only days after King's death in 1968, Representative Conyers introduced legislation to establish a federal holiday in the movement leader's honor. When it became clear that Conyers's bill would lose a vote in the House, Senator Edward Brooke offered a compromise measure in the Senate to mark King's birthday as a "day of commemoration." But Brooke's alternative measure also failed to make headway in the Senate. Conyers sponsored similar measures in each successive Congress for the next 15 years. By the mid-1970s, the CBC had made the King holiday a major legislative priority. The caucus directed a successful campaign to build congressional support and to increase public knowledge of the bill. In 1979, the legislation came close to passing the House, but the CBC withdrew the bill when an amendment called for the holiday to be observed on a Sunday rather than the proposed observance of January 15, King's birthday. Supporters of the Sunday amendment pointed to the cost of shutting down the federal government during the years in which King's birthday occurred during the workweek.[87]

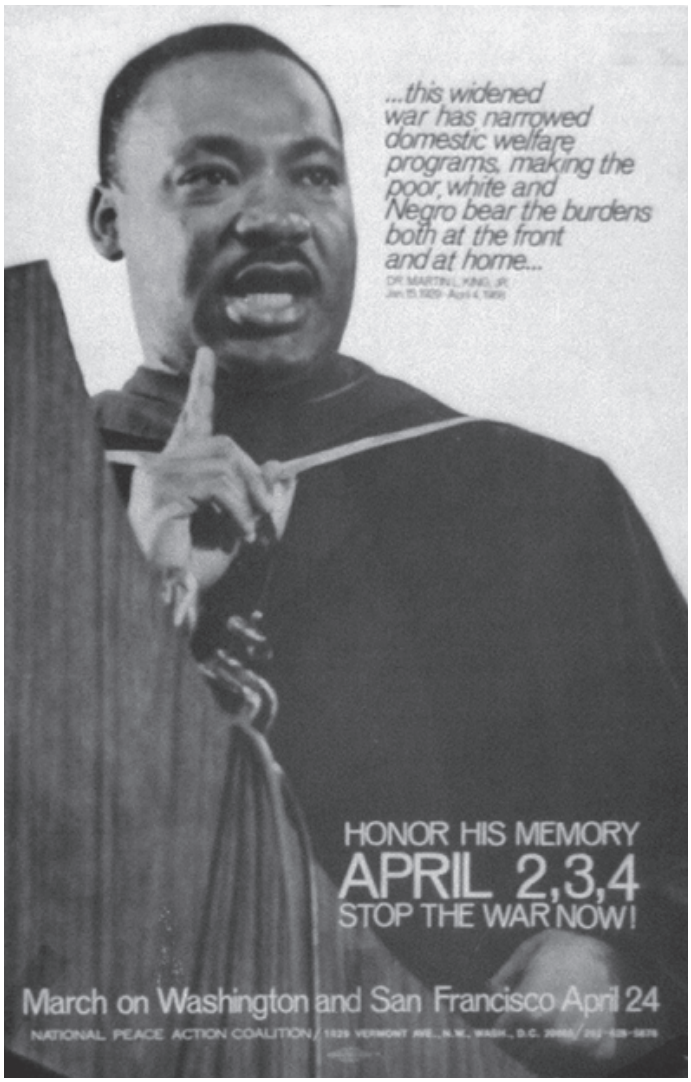
In the 98th Congress (1983–1985), the CBC tapped first-term Representative Katie Hall, chair of the Post Office and Civil Service Committee's Subcommittee on Census and Population—the panel with jurisdiction over the bill—to introduce and manage the measure as it made its way through the legislative process. Hall courted detractors by moving the public holiday to the third Monday of January to prevent government offices from opening twice

in one week, thereby saving money. The House passed her version of the King holiday bill by a vote of 338 to 90; the Senate followed suit, 78 to 22. President Reagan, who initially opposed the legislation, signed the bill into law on November 2, 1983. The bill's success was an important triumph for the CBC, which had marshaled public support and worked Congress's inside channels to overcome enormous opposition in the Senate and White House.[88]

Foreign Policy: Vietnam, Africa, Apartheid, and Beyond

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the Vietnam War drew much of Congress's attention. Among Black Members there was little consensus on the war. In his first term in 1965, John Conyers was one of just seven Representatives who voted against a supplemental appropriations bill funding the war. Representative Gus Hawkins also opposed the war, based partly on his experience visiting South Vietnam in 1970, where, he observed, the South Vietnamese government routinely violated the human rights of its prisoners. Others, such as Pennsylvania Representative Robert N.C. Nix Sr., a member of the Foreign Affairs Committee, supported the foreign policies of Democratic Presidents—John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson—who broadened the U.S. military commitment and mission in Southeast Asia. As a Senate candidate in 1966, Edward Brooke was initially skeptical about the war. But after an official visit to Vietnam, he concluded there was no prospect of meaningful negotiations with North Vietnamese officials and asserted that the military policy of the Johnson administration was prudent. In 1970, Brooke opposed the Nixon administration's policy of attacking communist sanctuaries in Cambodia. He eventually voted for the Cooper–Church Amendment of 1970, which limited the deployment of U.S. armed forces in the region to Vietnam.[89]

Several Black Representatives elected in the late 1960s and early 1970s were vocal opponents of the Vietnam War. Shirley Chisholm used the occasion of her first House speech to decry the continued involvement of the United States in the conflict. For Chisholm, the war wasted resources that could better be used fighting poverty back home: "We cannot squander there the lives, the money, the energy that we need desperately here in our cities, in our schools." Ron Dellums was elected from a district encompassing Berkley, California, an epicenter of the antiwar movement, in part because of his vocal opposition to the war. In 1971, against the wishes of his party's leadership, Dellums convened informal hearings on American war crimes in Vietnam.[90]



On April 24, 1971, citizens in Washington, DC, and San Francisco, California, rallied to end the Vietnam War. Before his death in 1968, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. raised awareness about the injustice of the war and its impact on working-class and low-income people of all races and ethnicities.

Image courtesy of the Library of Congress

After Vietnam, the same Black Members of Congress wary of the war also questioned Congress's annual budgetary outlays that funded America's decades-long struggle against the Soviet Union. Representatives Dellums and Mitchell, both military veterans, warned that continued excessive spending on Cold War initiatives was especially detrimental to minority groups, postponing or eliminating long-delayed domestic social programs and urban renewal projects.[91]

In the 93rd Congress (1973–1975), Dellums joined the Armed Services Committee. He viewed his work on



Charles Rangel, Bella Abzug, Ronald Dellums, and Parren Mitchell appear at one of the 1971 ad hoc hearings on the Vietnam War that Dellums convened.

Bob Fitch photography archive, © Stanford University Libraries

the committee as an opportunity to offer an alternative perspective on the use of American military force—inspired in part by Martin Luther King Jr., who was also a vocal opponent of the Vietnam War. From the Armed Services Committee, Dellums sought to raise questions about "the role of non-intervention, the role of peace, the role of arms control, the role of appropriate priorities."[92]

No single foreign policy issue united African Americans in Congress more than their efforts to overturn the South African government's system of apartheid, the country's strict program of racial segregation that began in 1948 and was imposed by the nation's White minority, descendants of colonial settlers. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the CBC oversaw a groundswell of activism to enact economic sanctions against South Africa.

Charles Diggs, who became the first Black Member to travel to Africa in 1957 and the first to serve on the Foreign Affairs Committee in 1959, was known as "Mr. Africa" because of his knowledge of sub-Saharan issues. Diggs's interest in Africa occurred just as Black self-government was returning as a result of successful independent movements across the continent. When the Detroit-area Representative was appointed chair of the Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Africa in 1969, he used his position to draw attention to the continent. "I think if I had any one priority, it is to try to put Africa in proper perspective, to try to get the attention of policy makers in the government, the attention of the American investors in Africa and the attention of the American public, in general, and to arouse the substantive interest of black Americans," Diggs remarked.[93]

During his tenure on the Foreign Affairs Committee, Diggs held a series of hearings on South Africa and led fact-finding missions to highlight what he described as "an appalling amount of racial injustice in South Africa—a blatant, ever-present, and all-pervasive discrimination based on race, color, and creed." From 1969 to 1971, he worked to stop federal officials from renewing a special U.S. sugar quota for South Africa. Although the quota went ahead as planned, Diggs kept apartheid in the congressional spotlight with his criticism of the labor conditions of American companies in South Africa. He faulted NASA and major U.S. carmakers for the discriminatory practices in their South African facilities. In 1971, he introduced a measure to implement fair employment practices for U.S. firms operating in South Africa and eligible for government contracts. Diggs also urged an end to new American investment in South Africa to protest apartheid.[94]

With the establishment of the CBC in 1971, Diggs cultivated the group's international agenda. From its inception, the CBC took an active stance in the anti-apartheid movement and other anti-colonial struggles. CBC members were critical of the U.S. government's economic aid and trade agreements with the White minority government in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) and Portugal, which was clinging to its imperial control of Angola, Mozambique, and Portuguese Guinea (now the Republic of Guinea-Bissau).[95]

In December 1971, Representatives Dellums and Conyers cosponsored the first bill imposing economic sanctions against South Africa. Three months later, in February 1972, they introduced it on behalf of the CBC. The anti-apartheid bill emerged from a petition drafted by employees from a major U.S. camera and film company, who demanded that the corporation cease operations in South Africa. The company, which produced photographs for the mandatory identity passbooks Black South Africans were forced to carry and which were a major symbol of the racial oppression prevalent in the country, eventually bowed to public pressure and withdrew its business.[96]

At a 1976 CBC conference, caucus members established an organization to shape American foreign policy in Africa and the Caribbean. The new lobbying group, renamed TransAfrica, was independent from the CBC but worked closely with the caucus, and began operations in Washington, DC, in 1978. Heading the organization was Randall Robinson, a former staffer for Bill Clay and Charles Diggs. The group called for tough economic sanctions against

South Africa and refused to accept donations from U.S. corporations with business ties to the apartheid government.[97]

On November 21, 1980, just weeks after Ronald Reagan's landslide victory in the U.S. presidential election, Randall Robinson, Walter Fauntroy, and Mary Frances Berry from the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights staged a sit-in at the South African Embassy in Washington, DC. The resulting arrests of the high-profile protesters garnered national attention and sparked a new "direct action" approach by TransAfrica and the CBC. Fauntroy described the demonstration as an act of "moral witness" and indicated that a "national campaign" against apartheid would follow. A few days after the incident, Robinson, Fauntroy, and Berry formed the Free South Africa Movement (FSAM) to publicize racial inequality in South Africa and pressure the incoming Reagan administration to toughen its stance toward the apartheid regime.[98]

The FSAM orchestrated a series of demonstrations outside the South African Embassy that tapped into America's own civil rights tradition of nonviolent protest. Charles Hayes, Clay, and Dellums were among the first Representatives to be arrested. The movement drew Black and White Americans from all walks of life: national and local leaders, celebrities, teachers and students, and even Members of Congress who had once expressed ambivalence about the issue. "It was very interesting to see colleagues from both sides of the aisle and of all races, who had previously paid little attention to our efforts, scramble to get arrested in front of the South African embassy and introduce sanctions when the [effects of the] movement hit home in their districts," Dellums later observed. The protests eventually spread to other American cities and kept apartheid in the public eye.[99]

Between the 92nd and 99th Congresses, Black Representatives introduced more than 100 pieces of South Africa legislation—often the same bill multiple times in a single Congress—encompassing issues such as diplomatic relations, economic sanctions, and trade restrictions. Representative William Gray, chair of the House Budget Committee, compared the situation in South Africa to the history of segregation in the United States. "It took us 200, 300 years to eradicate apartheid here by law," Gray observed. "People forget that only 20 years ago, when I came here to Washington, DC, as a boy, I couldn't go into the downtown hotels… . We are only 20 years away from our own story, and that plays a part in our [Americans'] double standard" toward South Africa, he said.[100]

In 1985, Gray introduced a bill endorsed by House leadership banning new loans and implementing limited economic sanctions in South Africa to "stop the future financing of apartheid." The House, which approved the Anti-Apartheid Act of 1985 by a vote of 295 to 127, soundly defeated a stronger disinvestment substitute put forth by Dellums and backed by the CBC. The next month the Senate overwhelmingly passed a weaker version of the House anti-apartheid bill by a vote of 80 to 12. Wary of the mounting public pressure for action against South Africa, President Reagan avoided a direct confrontation with Congress and a potential veto override by signing an executive order in September that included some of the sanctions approved by Congress. Gray described Reagan's decision as "an ill-disguised and ill-advised attempt to circumvent an overwhelmingly bipartisan consensus in Congress."[101]

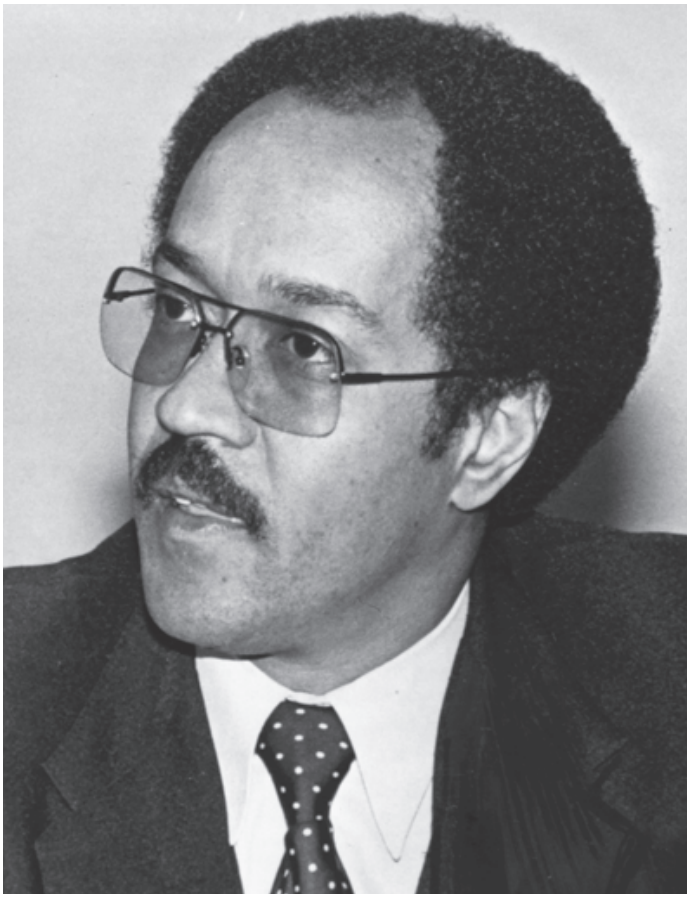
The push for a comprehensive sanctions bill against South Africa reached a crescendo in the second session of the 99th Congress. Gray's anti-apartheid bill made it to the House Floor again for a vote, where it was expected to pass.



During the 1970s and 1980s, the Congressional Black Caucus raised public awareness about the apartheid government in South Africa. Their efforts culminated in U.S. sanctions in 1986.

Image courtesy of the Library of Congress

For a second time, Dellums offered a stronger substitute. The House then unexpectedly approved Dellums's measure by a voice vote. The bill called for a trade embargo and total disinvestment. Stunned and elated, Dellums proclaimed, "We haven't simply altered the debate on apartheid, we've changed the environment. Whatever the dynamics of that moment, its effect can't be changed." A Senate bill sponsored by Richard Green Lugar of Indiana, which passed 84 to 14, resembled Gray's more modest anti-apartheid legislation. In the interest of securing passage of a sanctions bill, CBC members, including Dellums, supported Lugar's measure, which passed the House in September 1986 by a 308 to 77 vote. President Reagan vetoed the anti-apartheid legislation, but on October 2, 1986, the Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act (CAAA) became law when the Senate, following the House, overrode the veto. Mickey Leland observed, "This is probably the greatest victory we've ever experienced. The American people have spoken and will be heard around the world."[102]



Representative William H. Gray III of Pennsylvania championed foreign aid for Africa throughout his career in the House.

Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

After the passage of the CAAA, Black Members continued their fight to abolish apartheid. In 1986, Gray led a delegation of Representatives to observe the effects of the sanctions in South Africa. Leading the anti-apartheid movement on the Hill, Dellums persisted in introducing legislation for comprehensive economic sanctions. When President Bush considered rescinding sanctions against South Africa, Dellums and the CBC remained firm in their conviction that "sanctions should be lifted only when the oppressed people of South Africa say they should be lifted." With the release of Nelson Mandela in 1990 and the establishment of majority rule in South Africa in 1994, the CBC achieved its longtime goal of contributing to the abolishment of apartheid.[103]

OPPORTUNITIES AND OBSTACLES

As African-American Members entered Congress during this era, they encountered an institution that, like American society generally, was becoming more accessible and offered more opportunities for minority participation. Though there were exceptions, the culture of overt racism of earlier decades—discrimination in the House Restaurant and barbershop, insulting floor tirades by pro-segregationist Members, and other unspoken slights—had largely vanished. African-American Members focused on accruing seniority, winning better committee assignments, and entering House and Senate leadership. But this era also brought with it new challenges over coalition building, collective action, and legislative strategies on Capitol Hill.

While most Black Members embraced their role as representatives for Black Americans, including those beyond their districts, there was no consensus on how to pursue legislation important to their broad constituency. "We all have basically the same goals," Mickey Leland observed. "The question is how to attain those goals." Cardiss Collins, one of the few women members of the CBC in its early years, agreed. "Our main goal is to have greater influence. It's that simple," she said. "When we represent black people in our districts, we are representing all black people because their needs are very similar."[104]

Barbara Jordan used more traditional routes to influence in the House and was careful not to align herself too closely with the agenda of any interest group, including the CBC and the Women's Caucus, both of which she joined. "I sought the power points," she once said. "I knew if I were going to get anything done, [the congressional and party leaders] would be the ones to help me get it done." "I am

neither a black politician nor a woman politician," Jordan said in 1975. "Just a politician, a professional politician."[105]

Even those who came to Congress from the world of activism often adapted their advocacy to work within the legislative process. Ron Dellums was a prime example. Soon after entering the House, he introduced legislation to investigate alleged U.S. war crimes in Southeast Asia. Dellums declared, "I am not going to back away from being called a radical. If being an advocate of peace, justice, and humanity toward all human beings is radical, then I'm glad to be called a radical." To further his goals, Dellums worked his way onto the Armed Services Committee largely to try to curb vast Pentagon expenditures. But in a blatant sign of contempt, committee chair Felix Edward Hébert of Louisiana made Dellums, the first Black Member to serve on the committee, share a single seat with Patricia Scott Schroeder of Colorado, a first-term Member who had won election on an antiwar platform. On Armed Services, Dellums forged a reputation as an effective coalition builder; in the early 1980s, for instance, he allied with fiscal conservatives to halt production of the controversial B-2 bomber. Dellums remembered coming to the realization that he was no longer an activist, that as a Member of the House it was time to "take my seat at the table, and say, 'I'm here to join in governing and in representing the half million people that sent me here to represent them.' " In 1993, Dellums became the committee's senior Democrat and assumed the chair of the Armed Services Committee.[106]

Mickey Leland, a self-described "revolutionary," explained that many of his Black colleagues could now bargain for legislative goals from a position of strength. "We understand that in order to get our point across we don't have to jump up and down on the table or shoot off fireworks to get the attention of the leadership," Leland remarked. "We go in and negotiate."[107]

As Black Members found success in Congress, some came to believe that they were singled out for unjust scrutiny of their conduct. Concerns about public corruption became commonplace in the post-Watergate era as the number of Americans who trusted their government declined. Throughout this period, African-American officeholders, including a significant number of Black Members of Congress, observed that federal investigations into political corruption unfairly and disproportionately targeted Black politicians. Between 1980 and 1992, one-third of all members of the CBC came under federal investigation; only two were ever indicted, and none were convicted.[108]



Mickey Leland of Texas successfully lobbied Congress to create the Select Committee on Hunger in 1984. Leland was killed in a 1989 airplane crash while ferrying relief supplies to Ethiopia.

Image courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration

Black Members of Congress believed they were held to higher standards than their White counterparts. Some, like Bill Clay, interpreted such scrutiny as a coordinated effort to silence Black officeholders by "diluting [their] influence and credibility." Clay maintained that the legal problems encountered by Adam Clayton Powell Jr. and Harold Ford were examples of a "pattern" of hostile investigatory practices and "harassment." Clay claimed that federal investigations and political corruption probes into the careers and personal lives of Black officeholders were often part of a long-standing "conspiracy to silence dissent." Nor was Clay alone in this belief. In a 1983 letter to Judiciary Committee Chair Peter Wallace Rodino Jr. of New Jersey, Detroit Representative George Crockett expressed similar sentiments when he claimed federal investigations were "used to besmirch the good name of Black leaders in an effort to destroy their political potential." Some prominent Black officials, including Georgia Representative John Lewis, publicly disputed this viewpoint. An official from

a Black political organization succinctly described the relationship between the new role Black legislators had in the political process and the increased scrutiny they faced: "White folks are in a fishbowl; they get to swim. Black folks are in a test tube; they have to go straight up or down."[109]

While some Black Members believed they were unfairly targeted, others took the lead in policing ethical conduct in the House. Black Members were appointed to chair the House Committee on Standards of Official Conduct, now known as the Ethics Committee, more often than any other congressional panel. Unique among House committees, the Ethics Committee divides seats equally between the two parties. Formed in the late 1960s, the committee created a procedure for adjudicating claims on Member misconduct. Adam Clayton Powell Jr.'s well-publicized ethical issues and the House's refusal to seat Powell in the 90th Congress helped convince the House of the need for the establishment of a code of conduct and a set of procedures for investigating cases of ethical misconduct among Members. In the 1980s and 1990s, respected lawmakers such as Representatives Louis Stokes and Julian Dixon chaired the Ethics Committee. Dixon in turn led a highly sensitive investigation into alleged violations by Speaker Jim Wright of Texas. In 1992, Stokes stepped down from his second stint as chair of the Ethics Committee after his involvement in the House banking scandal. That year, the press publicized General Accounting Office and House internal investigations revealing that some 220 former and current Members had overdrawn their accounts at the informal House "bank" run by the House Sergeant at Arms. Nine African-American Members revealed that they had written checks without sufficient funds, and five were on the list of the "worst offenders" that was released by the House Ethics Committee. The occurrence of the scandal in an election year, with the economy in recession, magnified voters' discontent with incumbent lawmakers. Yet only one Black incumbent linked to the scandal, Charles Hayes, lost his primary re-election in the Chicago district he had represented for a decade; his name appeared on a list that was leaked days before the contest.[110]



Mississippi Representative Mike Espy's reputation as a moderate won over Black and White constituents and earned him an appointment as U.S. Secretary of Agriculture in President William J. Clinton's administration.

Image courtesy of the Mike Espy Collection, Congressional and Political Research Center, University Libraries, Mississippi State University

"THE CONSTANT SEARCH FOR COMMON GROUND"

By the end of the 1980s, although internal debate and division occasionally emerged, the CBC remained a relatively cohesive group when it came to policy decisions. "Like coalition building in any context, holding the Black Caucus together required fluidity and flexibility, the constant search for common ground, and no rigid tests of membership," Representative Dellums later noted, "otherwise the fate of other caucuses and coalitions that had arisen during the same period would have befallen the CBC as well."[111]

Increasing geographic and demographic diversity among the constituencies of Black Members meant that some Members promoted policy positions that put them at odds with their CBC colleagues. For instance, Mike Espy was elected from a rural farming district in 1986 with considerable cross-over support from White voters. He was the first Black Representative from Mississippi since John R. Lynch left office in 1883. Espy belonged to a group of centrist Democrats; he opposed gun control measures and supported the death penalty—positions that largely contradicted those of Black Representatives from urban areas. Espy demonstrated his independence from the CBC's traditional politics when he only voted "present" for the caucus's 1989 alternative budget. "I come from a conservative district and I didn't want to vote for that large a tax increase."[112]

While the institutional headway made by African-American Members during the 1970s and 1980s strengthened the collective authority of the CBC, it posed

new challenges to the cohesiveness of the organization. Its success advancing Black Representatives into the upper echelons of the institutional establishment raised expectations for the group and for individual Members to produce immediate, tangible results for African Americans. Moreover, Black Members experienced conflicting pressures between their allegiance to the CBC, their responsibilities on committees, and their commitments to party leaders. The career of Representative William Gray provides an illustration. As chair of the House Budget Committee for the 99th and 100th Congresses (1985–1989), Gray often charted his own course. "I am not here to do the bidding of somebody just because they happen to be black. If I agree with you, I agree with you. I set my policy." Once he assumed the Budget Committee's gavel, Gray encouraged the CBC to continue submitting an alternative budget, although he did not publicly support it. His decision to vote "present" when the CBC measure came to the House Floor disrupted the public solidarity of the organization and frustrated some of his Black colleagues, who thought Gray was placing personal interests ahead of caucus goals.[113]

Even more controversially in the eyes of a few CBC members, Julian Dixon, who chaired the CBC in the 98th Congress, refused to bring the caucus's alternative budget to the House Floor for a vote. In addition to leading the CBC, Dixon also chaired an Appropriations subcommittee, and House leaders asked him to pledge his support for the Budget Committee's budget proposal to attract the votes of rank-and-file Democrats for the measure and to prevent conservative Democrats from introducing an alternative budget that had the potential to pass. A majority of the CBC voted with Dixon to withhold their alternative budget, but some were critical of the decision. John Conyers called the agreement between the CBC and Democratic leadership "an insult to the black people, the working people and those who have looked for some inspiration from the alternative budget of the Congressional Black Caucus." Dixon defended the compromise, "Our purpose, hopefully, is not to go down to defeat with honor. Our purpose is to have some success."[114]

A SHARED PURPOSE

In May 1955, the Reverend George Lee, a Black NAACP leader and voting rights activist in Belzoni, Mississippi, was shot and killed while driving home from a meeting of local activists. Although his assailant was unknown, many suspected Lee was murdered for his voting rights work. Lee



On April 26, 1978, Parren Mitchell, chair of the Congressional Black Caucus, speaks at a press conference after meeting with President James Earl "Jimmy" Carter. Mitchell is flanked by Shirley Chisholm, Cardiss Collins, Ralph Metcalfe, and Charles Rangel.

Image courtesy of the Library of Congress

was likely the first African American in Belzoni to register to vote since the late nineteenth century. He was one of a growing cohort of Black Mississippians risking everything to fight back against the discriminatory laws, economic coercion, and violence that White Mississippians deployed to ensure that, as of the mid-1950s, less than 5 percent of the state's 500,000 eligible Black voters were registered.[115]

Just a month before his murder, George Lee had spoken at a voter registration rally in the town of Mound Bayou, Mississippi, at an event headlined by first-term Representative Charles Diggs. The audience in the all-Black town heard Lee speak hopefully of the day when Black Mississippians in the Delta would elect a Black Congressman, presumably someone who could speak for them as Diggs spoke for his Black Detroit constituents. Asked later by a reporter if he actually thought Mississippi would ever elect a Black Representative, Lee said "Some day. Maybe my grandchildren will."[116]

Because of the bravery and sacrifices of men and women like Reverend Lee, the efforts and example of Charles Diggs, and the passage of the Voting Rights Act in 1965, the dream of a Black Congressman from Mississippi was finally realized in 1986 with the election of Mike Espy to the U.S. House of Representatives.

Espy's victory in Mississippi was one more marker of the progress that Black Members of Congress and Black electoral politics more generally had made in the era after the passage of the Voting Rights Act in 1965. That year, a decade after George Lee's murder, there were six Black Members of Congress, all from majority-Black, northern urban districts. Twenty-four years later, at the beginning

of the 101st Congress in January 1989, there were 24 Black Members of Congress, four Black Representatives served as chairs of standing committees, two chaired select committees, and 15 chaired subcommittees.[117]

The inception and growth of the CBC marked the principal institutional development in the story of African Americans in Congress. The caucus acquired stature rapidly, transforming itself into an effective bloc for advocating issues and promoting African Americans to positions of power within Congress. The CBC set a new standard for organizational politics in the late twentieth century, one that would be followed by other groups of lawmakers, including the Congressional Caucus for Women's Issues, the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, and the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus.

Even as the number of Black Members grew in both size and seniority, the caucus remained small and could only influence debate in the House so much. The election of more Black Members brought more diverse perspectives, ideologies, interests, and constituencies. Nevertheless, William Gray recognized a shared "sense of identity and purpose born of our heritage of discrimination and neglect" among the Black Members of Congress in this era. "They recognized, and acted on," Gray continued, "the premise that our Constitution had never been fully realized for all Americans." This was the product of a shared history of oppression and resistance, one that had also motivated Black civil rights activists such as George Lee, and that would animate new generations.[118]

Notes

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2 "What Black Caucus Wants: Group's Preface Sets Grim Stage," 31 March 1971, *Chicago Daily Defender*: 8; *Congressional Record*, House, 92nd Cong., 1st sess. (30 March 1971): 8710–8714.

3 Ethel Payne, "Black Caucus Sets New Political Mood," 30 March 1971, *Chicago Daily Defender:* 4.

4 *Congressional Record,* Extensions of Remarks, 92nd Cong., 1st sess. (19 February 1971): 3352–3353.

5 On the growth of a Black middle class, see Gerald David Jaynes and Robin M. Williams Jr., eds., *A Common Destiny: Blacks and American Society* (Washington, DC: National Academy Press, 1989): 169; Michael C. Dawson, *Behind the Mule: Race and Class in African-American Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994): 9, 29–33. On the effect of civil rights legislation on poverty rates in the South, see Gavin Wright, *Sharing the Prize: The Economics of the Civil Rights Revolution in the American South* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press: 2013): 235–236. For a more general discussion of African-American poverty rates in the period covered in this section, see Jaynes and Williams, *A Common Destiny*: 277–282.

6 *Congressional Record*, House, 94th Cong., 1st sess. (2 June 1975): 16241.

7 The National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1968); Elizabeth Hinton, *America on Fire: The Untold History of Police Violence and Black Rebellion Since the 1960s* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2021); Thomas J. Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty: The Forgotten Struggle for Civil Rights in the North* (New York: Random House, 2008): 325–334; Jennifer Chambers, "Conyers on '67: 'They Just Couldn't Take It Any Longer,'" 20 July 2017, *The Detroit News*, https://www.detroitnews.com/story/news/politics/2017/07/20/john-conyers-detroit/103843760/; Wayne Thomis, "Detroit Holocaust: Why Wheels Stopped in Motor City," 28 July 1967, *Chicago Tribune*: 4.

8 *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*: 1.

9 On the economy in the 1970s and 1980s, see Judith Stein, *Pivotal Decade: How the United States Traded Factories for Finance in the Seventies* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010); Kim Phillips-Fein, *Fear City: New York's Fiscal Crisis and the Rise of Austerity Politics* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2017); Meg Jacobs, *Panic at the Pump: The Energy Crisis and the Transformation of American Politics in the 1970s* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2017).

10 *Congressional Record,* Extensions of Remarks, 96th Cong., 2nd sess. (12 June 1980): 14585.

11 Michael B. Katz, *Why Don't American Cities Burn?* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012): 82.

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University Press, 2009); Martin Luther King Jr., "Our God Is Marching On," 25 March 1965, Montgomery, Alabama, https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/our-god-marching.

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27 *Congressional Record*, House, 92nd Cong., 1st sess. (30 March 1971): 8710; Clay, *Just Permanent Interests*: 36; Carol M. Swain, *Black Faces, Black Interests: The Representation of African Americans in Congress* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993): 38.

28 Robert C. Smith, *We Have No Leaders: African Americans in the Post-Civil Rights Era* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996): 32–56; Leonard N. Moore, *The Defeat of Black Power and the National Black Political Convention of 1972* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2018); Marguerite Ross Barnett, "The Congressional Black Caucus," *Proceedings of the Academy of Political Science,* 32, no. 1 (1975): 37–38; Singh, *The Congressional Black Caucus*: 76.

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30 Paul Delaney, "Rep. Stokes Heads the Black Caucus," 9 February 1972, *New York Times*: 23; Barnett, "The Congressional Black Caucus": 39; Robert J. Donovan, "Rep. Stokes on Black Militancy: 'Out of the Streets and Into the System,'" 26 October 1973, *Los Angeles Times*: E7; "Louis Stokes Oral History Interview, March 14, 1973": 3–4.

31 *Congressional Record,* Extensions of Remarks, 92nd Cong., 2nd sess. (5 June 1972): 19754–19756; Austin Scott, "Black Caucus Warns Democrats," 2 June 1972, *Washington Post*: A6; Paul Delaney, "House Caucus Lists 'Black Bill of Rights,'" 2 June 1972, *New York Times*: 22; Barnett, "The Congressional Black Caucus": 39–41.

32 Austin Scott, "A Realistic Black Caucus: Idea of Being All Things Now Discarded," 28 September 1975, *Washington Post*: A1; Barnett, "The Congressional Black Caucus": 48; Singh, *The Congressional Black Caucus*: 38. The internal structure of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) remained consistent throughout this period, and it developed a considerable administrative staff. Established in 1976, the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation (CBCF), a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization, complemented the CBC by conducting research and technical assistance and promoting the political participation of African Americans. The CBCF grew more important when, in 1981, the Committee on the House Administration wrote new regulations stipulating that Legislative Service Organizations (LSOs), including the CBC, using House office space, supplies, and equipment could no longer receive funding from outside sources such as corporations or nonprofit foundations. However, LSOs could continue to use tax-exempt foundations for research and other caucus activities. The CBC responded to the rule change by transferring most of its responsibilities to the CBCF. Singh, *The Congressional Black Caucus*: 63, 68; Dorothy Collin, "Time of Growth for Black Caucus," 19 September 1982, *Chicago Tribune*: A3; Lynn Norment, "Our Team on Capitol Hill," *Ebony* 39 (August 1984): 44; David C. Ruffin and Frank Dexter Brown, "Clout on Capitol Hill," *Black Enterprise* 15 (October 1984): 100. See also the CBCF website at http://www.cbcfinc.org/.

33 "Congress Caucus for Blacks Only," 22 June 1975, *Chicago Tribune*: 30; Paul Houston, "Black Caucus Won't Let White Congressman Join," 19 June 1975, *Los Angeles Times*: B18. The question of membership qualification has arisen from time to time. See Josephine Hearn, "Black Caucus: Whites Not Allowed," 24 January 2007, *Roll Call*: n.p.; Swain, *Black Faces, Black Interests*: 38; Singh, *The Congressional Black Caucus*: 102. This development roughly paralleled the decision by the Women's Caucus to admit dues-paying male members on a nonvoting basis in 1982. See Office of the Historian, U.S. House of Representatives, *Women in Congress, 1917–2020* (Washington, DC: Government Publishing Office, 2020): 394. The Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus allowed lawmakers who were not Asian American to become full-fledged members of the caucus from its founding in 1994. Office of the Historian, U.S. House of Representatives, *Asian and Pacific Islander Americans in Congress, 1900–2017* (Washington, DC: Government Publishing Office, 2017).

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36 Gregory M. Borchardt, "Making D.C. Democracy's Capital: Local Activism, the 'Federal State,' and the Struggle for Civil Rights in Washington, D.C."

(Ph.D. diss., The George Washington University, 2013): 274–275; J.Y. Smith, "Rep. McMillan Defeated in S.C. Runoff," 13 September 1972, *Washington Post*: A1; "Fauntroy Opposes McMillan," 13 December 1970, *Washington Post*: D10; David R. Bolt, " 'Invaders' March on McMillan," 21 June 1970, *Washington Post*: D1; William E. Rone Jr., "The Troubles of Jenrette," 27 July 1975, *Atlanta Constitution*: 2C; Martha M. Hamilton, "House Unit Votes Home Rule," 1 August 1973, *Washington Post*: A1; Stephen Green, "Diggs Plans to Shake Up D.C. Panels," 14 November 1972, *Washington Post*: B1.

37 Swain, *Black Faces, Black Interests*: 38; Barnett, "The Congressional Black Caucus": 46; Zelizer, *On Capitol Hill:* 163–172; Richard D. Lyons, "Ways and Means in Liberal Shift," 12 December 1974, *New York Times*: 38. During this era, African Americans also registered major gains on additional committees where none had previously served, including Banking and Currency (Parren J. Mitchell, 1971), Budget (Parren J. Mitchell, 1974), and Public Works (George W. Collins and Charles B. Rangel, 1971). The most common committee assignment for Black Members during this era was to Education and Labor (and its various iterations); 10 Black Members profiled in this section served on this committee. Nine Black Members served on the District of Columbia Committee, and eight Black Members served on three other committees: Post Office and Civil Service; Public Works; and Government Operations.

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41 Nadine Cohadas, "Black House Members Striving for Influence," *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report* 43 (13 April 1985): 675; Singh, *The Congressional Black Caucus*: 92; Coleman, "Black Caucus Comes of Age."

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45 Barbara Jordan and Shelby Hearon, *Barbara Jordan: A Self Portrait* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1979): 178–179. See also Fenno, *Going Home*: 103, 107–108; Barbara Reynolds, "The Black Caucus Flexes Its Newly Found Muscles," 5 October 1975, *Chicago Tribune*: A10; Walter Shapiro, "What Does This Woman Want?," October 1976, *Texas Monthly*, https://www.texasmonthly.com/news-politics/what-does-this-woman-want/; Chisholm, *Unbought and Unbossed*: 110. For more on sexism within the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) related to Shirley Chisholm and her 1972 campaign, see "Muriel Morisey Oral History Interview," Office of the Historian, U.S. House of Representatives (19 April 2017): 34. The interview transcript is available online at https://history.house.gov/Oral-History/Women/Muriel-Morisey/; Jackson Landers, " 'Unbought and Unbossed': When a Black Woman Ran for the White House," 25 April 2016, *Smithsonian Magazine*, https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smithsonian-institution/unbought-and-unbossed-when-black-woman-ran-for-the-white-house-180958699/. For an alternative perspective on the CBC's relationship with Chisholm's campaign, see Clay, *Just Permanent Interests*: 218–226.

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80 Singh, *The Congressional Black Caucus*: 97; *Congressional Record,* House, 97th Cong., 1st sess. (5 May 1981): 8508–8527; Kenworthy, "Congressional Black Caucus Facing New Circumstances After 20 Years."

81 Garrine P. Laney, "D.C. Statehood: The Historical Context and Recent Congressional Actions," Report 97–1004, 7 November 1997, Congressional Research Service.

82 To establish a Commission on the Organization of the Government of the District of Columbia and to provide for a Delegate to the House of Representatives from the District of Columbia, Public Law 91-405, 84 Stat. 845 (1970). For a historical overview of nonvoting Delegates, including Resident Commissioners, see Earl S. Pomeroy, *The Territories of the United States, 1861–1980* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1969); Betsy Palmer, "Territorial Delegates to the U.S. Congress: Current Issues and Historical Background," 6 July 2006, Report RL32340, Congressional Research Service; R. Eric Petersen, "Resident Commissioner from Puerto Rico," Report RL31856, 31 March 2005, Congressional Research Service; Michael Fauntroy, "District of Columbia Delegates to Congress," Report RS20875, 4 April 2001, Congressional Research Service. See also "At the Starting Gate for the Delegate Race," 25 September 1970, *Washington Post*: A24. While the position of Delegate was previously reserved for territories that were likely to become states, the District of Columbia Delegate Act of 1970 launched a new trend, creating Delegates for areas without statehood on the legislative horizon: District of Columbia, 1970; U.S. Virgin Islands and Guam, 1972; American Samoa, 1978; and the Northern Mariana Islands, 2008. Currently, a Resident Commissioner represents Puerto Rico.

83 "After 8 Years, House Will Weigh District of Columbia Home Rule," 8 October 1973, *New York Times*: 22; "Home Rule Bill for Washington Signed," 25 December 1973, *Los Angeles Times*: 4.

84 For more information on the Action-Alert Communications Network (AACN), see Charles E. Jones, "Testing a Legislative Strategy: The Congressional Black Caucus's Action-Alert Communications Network," *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 4 (November 1987): 521–536; Singh, *The Congressional Black Caucus*: 156. For more on the establishment of the AACN, see Thomas A. Johnson, "Black Conferees Establish Network to Influence White Congressman," 28 May 1979, *New York Times*: A7; William Raspberry, "A Black Voter Network," 19 October 1981, *Washington Post*: A1.

85 Laney, "D.C. Statehood: The Historical Context and Recent Congressional Actions"; Washington, D.C. Admission Act, H.R. 51, 116th Cong. (2019); Meagan Flynn, "House Democrats Pass D.C. Statehood, Launching Bill into Uncharted Territory," 22 April 2021, *Washington Post*, https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/dc-politics/dc-statehood-house-vote/2021/04/22/935a1ece-a1fa-11eb-a7ee-949c574a09ac_story.html; To provide for the admission of the State of Washington, D.C. into the Union, H.R. 51, 117th Cong. (2022).

86 To recognize the heritage of black citizens, H. Res. 1050, 94th Cong. (1976); To provide for the designation of February 1986 as "National Black (Afro-American) History Month," Public Law 99-244, 100 Stat. 6 (1986). Proposals for reparations have been considered by Congress since the Reconstruction era. See Garrine P. Laney, "Proposals for Reparations for African Americans: A Brief Overview," Report RS20740, 22 January 2007, Congressional Research Service.

87 Douglas Reid Weimer, "Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.: Commemorative Works and Other Honors Authorized by Congress," Report RL33704, 17 December 2007, Congressional Research Service; Edward W. Brooke, *Bridging the Divide: My Life* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2006): 178–179; Singh, *The Congressional Black Caucus*: 95; Mary Russell, "King Holiday Frustrated," 6 December 1979, *Washington Post*: A6.

88 Larry Margasak, "Courting Conservatives to Back King Holiday," 14 August 1983, Associated Press. For a detailed account of the legislative history of the Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. holiday, see "Martin Luther King Holiday," *CQ Almanac 1983*, 39th ed. (Washington DC: Congressional Quarterly Press, 1983): 600–602, https://library.cqpress.com. The federal holiday honoring King was first observed in 1986.

89 *Congressional Record,* House, 89th Cong., 1st sess. (5 May 1965): 9531, 9541; "Robert N.C. Nix Sr., 88, Dies; Ex-Congressman from Pa.," 23 June 1987, *Washington Post*: B4; "Brooke Calls Vietnam a Prime Issue," 29 August 1966, *Washington Post*: A2; John Herbers, "Brooke Shifts War View and Supports President," 24 March 1967, *New York Times*: 1; Richard L. Strout, "'Vote Serves to Warn the President …,'" 2 July 1970, *Christian Science Monitor*: 1; Brooke, *Bridging the Divide*: 165–167.

90 *Congressional Record*, House, 91st Cong., 1st sess. (26 March 1969): 7765; William Chapman, "4 Congressmen to Hold Inquiry on War Crimes," 7 April 1971, *Washington Post*: A8.

91 For the views of Parren J. Mitchell, Ronald V. Dellums, and other Congressional Black Caucus members on defense spending, see *Congressional Record,* House, 96th Cong., 2nd sess. (30 April 1980): 9488–9498.

92 "The Honorable Ronald V. Dellums Oral History Interview," Office of the Historian, U.S. House of Representatives (19 June 2012): 16. The interview transcript is available online at https://history.house.gov/Oral-History/People/Ronald-V-Dellums/.

93 DuBose, *The Untold Story of Charles Diggs*: 76.

94 Paul Dold, "U.S. Firms in South Africa: New Pressure," 20 August 1971, *Christian Science Monitor*: 1; *Congressional Record*, House, 92nd Cong., 1st sess. (10 June 1971): 19110; Spencer Rich, "South Africa Sugar Quota Draws Fire," 16 April 1969, *Washington Post*: A2. Charles C. Diggs Jr. was not alone in the early battle to bring the issue of racial segregation in South Africa to the House Floor. Louis Stokes introduced a measure to terminate the sugar quota during the 91st Congress (1969–1971), and William Lacy "Bill" Clay Sr. cosponsored a similar bill. When the House voted to extend the South Africa sugar quota in 1971, the Congressional Black Caucus voiced its disapproval, characterizing the decision as "complicity with apartheid." David E. Rosenbaum, "Sugar Vote Voted by House, 229–128," 11 June 1971, *New York Times*: 44; Jesse W. Lewis, "Diggs Presses Anti-Apartheid Bill," 31 March 1972, *Washington Post*: A2; DuBose, *The Untold Story of Charles Diggs*: 129–133; Dold, "U.S. Firms in South Africa: New Pressure"; *Congressional Record*, House, 92nd Cong., 2nd sess. (29 March 1972): 10931.

95 Alvin B. Tillery Jr., "Foreign Policy Activism and Power in the House of Representatives: Black Members of Congress and South Africa," *Studies in American Political Development* 20 (Spring 2006): 93; Alvin B. Tillery Jr., *Between Homeland and Motherland: Africa, U.S. Foreign Policy, and Black Leadership in America* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011): 125–147; "Rep. Diggs Assails Aid to Portugal," 15 December 1971, *Washington Post*: A30.

96 *Congressional Record*, House, 92nd Cong., 1st sess. (15 December 1971): 47236; *Congressional Record*, House, 92nd Cong., 2nd sess. (16 February 1972): 4247; Ronald V. Dellums and H. Lee Halterman, *Lying Down with the Lions: A Public Life from the Streets of Oakland to the Halls of Power* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000): 122–124; "Polaroid Cuts Off Goods to S. Africa," 22 November 1977, *Los Angeles Times*: A1.

97 David Remnick, "Randall Robinson: From Boyhood Pain to a Crusade Against Apartheid," 5 February 1985, *Washington Post*: E1; Robert Kinloch Massie, *Loosing the Bonds: The United States and South Africa in the Apartheid Years* (New York: Nan A. Talese/Doubleday, 1997): 405; Paula Stern, "Ethnic Groups: Shaping the Course of American Foreign Policy," 10 January 1976, *Washington Post*: A15; Harold J. Logan, "A Black Political Group Set Up as Africa Lobby," 21 May 1978, *Washington Post*: A18; "New Lobby of Blacks Will Seek to Influence U.S. Policy in Africa," 22 April 1978, *Washington Post*: A9; Tillery, "Foreign Policy Activism and Power in the House of Representatives: Black Members of Congress and South Africa": 100.

98 Eleanor Holmes Norton, then a Georgetown law professor and Walter E. Fauntroy's eventual successor as DC Delegate, accompanied Fauntroy, Mary Frances Berry, and Randall Robinson to the South African Embassy, but left before the group's arrest to notify the press of the protest. Dorothy Gilliam, "DC Sit-In Led the Way," 9 September 1985, *Washington Post*: A1; "Capital's House Delegate Held in Embassy Sit-In," 22 November 1984, *New York Times*: B10; Massie, *Loosing the Bonds*: 558–560; Kenneth Bredemeier and Michael Marriott, "Fauntroy Arrested in Embassy," 22 November 1984, *Washington Post*: 1; Courtland Milloy, "Blacks Form 'Free S. Africa Movement,'" 24 November 1984, *Washington Post*: C1.

99 Tillery, "Foreign Policy Activism and Power in the House of Representatives: Black Members of Congress and South Africa": 100; Karlyn Barker and Michael Marriott, "Protest Spreads to Other U.S. Cities," 4 December 1984, *Washington Post*: A1; "New Tactics on South Africa," 10 May 1986, *New York Times*: 8.

100 For example, Charles C. Diggs Jr. introduced a Joint Resolution entitled "A Joint Resolution to Protect United States Domestic and Foreign Policy Interests by Making Fair Employment Practices in the South African Enterprises of United States Firms a Criteria for Eligibility for Government

Contracts" seven times during the 93rd and 94th Congresses (1973–1977). According to Representative William Lacy "Bill" Clay Sr., the Congressional Black Caucus sponsored 24 bills concerning U.S. policy toward South Africa between 1985 and 1986. Clay, *Just Permanent Interests:* 281; Omang, "Rep. Crockett and the Volley From the Right"; Juan Williams, "Antiapartheid Actions Await Turn of Events; Rep. Gray Says U.S. Moves Depend Upon South Africa," 28 September 1985, *Washington Post*: A7.

101 Jonathan Fuerbringer, "House Votes Sanctions Against South Africa," 6 June 1985, *New York Times*: A1; Bob Secter, "S. Africa Sanctions Passed by the Senate," 12 July 1985, *Los Angeles Times*: A1; George da Lama and Dorothy Collin, "Reagan Slaps S. Africa's Wrist," 10 September 1985, *Chicago Tribune*: 1.

102 Typical protocol dictated that a conference report would be drafted as a compromise between the House and Senate bills. However, leaders from both chambers decided to adopt the Senate bill to avoid the possibility of a pocket veto by President Ronald Reagan. See Massie, *Loosing the Bonds*: 617–618; James R. Dickenson, "Dellums: Exoneration Is His," 20 June 1986, *Washington Post*: A17; Edward Walsh, "House Would Require U.S. Disinvestment From South Africa," 19 June 1986, *Washington Post*: A1; Dellums and Halterman, *Lying Down with the Lions*: 132–138; The Senate voted 78 to 21, and the House voted 313 to 83 to override the presidential veto. "Senate Overrides Reagan's Veto Sanctions 78 to 21," 2 October 1986, *Los Angeles Times*: A1; Edward Walsh, "House Easily Overrides Veto of South African Sanctions," 30 September 1986, *Washington Post*: A1; Desson Howe, "Cheers for Sanctions Vote," 4 October 1986, *Washington Post*: G1.

103 Allister Sparks, "6 Congressmen Begin Tour of S. Africa," 8 January 1986, *Washington Post*: A1; E.A. Wayne, "Congress Considers Boosting Sanctions Against South Africa," 5 November 1987, *Christian Science Monitor*: 3; Dellums wrote about his continued attempts to pass stricter sanctions against South Africa in his memoirs. See Dellums and Halterman, *Lying Down with the Lions*: 138–148. President George H.W. Bush eventually lifted the majority of U.S. sanctions due to what he perceived as a "profound transformation" in the attempt to promote racial equality in South Africa. See Ann Devroy and Helen Dewar, "Citing S. Africa's 'Transformation,' Bush Ends Most Sanctions," 11 July 1991, *Washington Post*: A23.

104 Cohadas, "Black House Members Striving for Influence": 680; "A Time of Testing for Black Caucus as Its Members Rise to Power in House," 27 April 1985, *National Journal*: 911.

105 Fenno, *Going Home*: 106–109.

106 Ray Mosley, "Violence Disavowed by Rep. Dellums," 14 February 1971, *Washington Post*: 113; Dellums and Halterman, *Lying Down with the Lions*: 149–150; "Ronald Dellums Oral History Interview," Office of the Historian: 10.

107 Coleman, "Black Caucus Comes of Age."

108 This perception may have been partially due to an increase in the total number of corruption probes conducted by the federal government, which soared more than 2,300 percent between 1970 (63) and 1991 (1,452). Additionally, the number of Black officials who held public positions increased from 1,469 in 1970 to 6,681 in 1987. Nevertheless, many African-American officials believed they were disproportionately targeted, a belief that research often supported. One study found that of the 465 political corruption probes initiated by the U.S. Department of Justice between 1983 and 1988, 14 percent investigated Black officeholders—even though they represented just 3 percent of all U.S. officeholders. Richard Sutch, "Table Ec1356–1370, Federal Prosecutions of Public Corruption: 1970–1996," in *Historical Statistics of the United States*, vol. 5: *Governance and International Relations*, ed. Carter et al.: 331; Gwen Ifill, "Black Officials: Probes and Prejudice—Is There a Double Standard for Bringing Indictments? The Jury's Still Out," 28 February 1988, *Washington Post*: A9. For more on the subject, see the chapter titled "A Conspiracy to Silence Dissent," in Clay, *Just Permanent Interests*: 312–338; George Derek Musgrove, *Rumor, Repression, and Racial Politics: How the Harassment of Black Elected Officials Shaped Post-Civil Rights America* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2012).

109 Of the accusations made against Adam Clayton Powell Jr., writes William Lacy "Bill" Clay Sr., they "could have been leveled against every chairman of every full committee in the House of Representatives. He did no more, and no less, than any other in terms of exercising traditional legal privileges that accompanied the powerful position of committee chairman." Clay, *Just Permanent Interests*: 82–83, 312–337. See also "Were Black Office-Holders More Routinely Investigated During the '80s?," 19 December 1993, *Atlanta Daily World*: 5; "Crockett Requests Harassment Investigation," 25 July 1983, *Chicago Daily Defender*: 23; Musgrove, *Rumor, Repression, and Racial Politics*: 119; Ifill, "Black Officials: Probes and Prejudice."

110 From 1981 until 2008, whenever Democrats controlled the House, African-American lawmakers led the Standards of Official Conduct Committee for all but one Congress. The Black committee chairs were Louis Stokes (1981–1985; 1991–1993), Julian C. Dixon (1985–1991), and Stephanie Tubbs Jones (2007–2008); William McKay and Charles W. Johnson, *Parliament and Congress: Representation and Scrutiny in the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010): 519; "The 22 Worst Offenders," 17 April 1992, *Los Angeles Times*: A18; "List of Members of the House of Representatives Who Acknowledge Having Written Checks on Insufficient Funds at the House Bank," 13 April 1992, Associated Press; "House Check-Kiter List Official: 2 Names Missing from Panel's Record of Worst Abusers," 2 April 1992, *Chicago Tribune*: 6.

111 Dellums and Halterman, *Lying Down with the Lions*: 120.

112 Kenworthy, "Congressional Black Caucus Facing New Circumstances After 20 Years."

113 Similar conflicts between individual aspirations and collective goals unfolded among women Members of Congress, often creating tension between the institutional apprenticeship generation of the 1940s and 1950s, who had attained leadership positions, and the feminist activists who followed them. See, for example, Office of the Historian, U.S. House of Representatives, *Women in Congress, 1917–2020* (Washington, DC: Government Publishing Office, 2020): 3–5, 250. Some outside critics of this transformation implied that the process amounted to a co-optation that marginalized the interests of Black communities. Political scientist Robert C. Smith concluded in the mid-1990s that, "The institutional norms and folkways of the House encourage exaggerated courtesy, compromise, deference, and above all loyalty to the institution. And the black members of Congress are probably more loyal to the House and their roles in it than they are to blacks." See Smith, *We Have No Leaders*: 225; Pianin, "Black Caucus Members Face Dilemma of Hill Loyalties"; Kenworthy, "Congressional Black Caucus Facing New Circumstances After 20 Years."

114 Edward Cowan, "Democratic Budget Is Adopted by House, 229-196," 24 March 1983, *New York Times*: A1; *Congressional Record,* House, 98th Cong., 1st sess. (22 March 1983): 6466; Richard Simon and Nick Anderson, "Respected Lawmaker Julian Dixon Dies," 9 December 2000, *Los Angeles Times*: B1.

115 Lee's murder was the first of three prominent lynchings in Mississippi in 1955. On August 13, Lamar Smith, a Black farmer, was murdered in front of the courthouse in Brookhaven. Smith had voted in a recent primary and was helping others vote by absentee ballot. On August 28, in the most notorious lynching of the period, Emmett Till, a 14-year-old from Chicago, Illinois, visiting family members, was murdered for allegedly whistling at a White woman. For more on the murders of Lee, Smith, and Till, see Charles M. Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (Berkeley: University of California Press: 1995): 35–40; United States Commission on Civil Rights, *Voting in Mississippi* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1965): 8.

116 Simeon Booker, *Black Man's America* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1964): 162. In 1982, Katie Hall, a Mound Bayou, Mississippi, native, became the first Black Member of Congress from Indiana. In a 1982 interview, Hall remembered listening to speeches given by well-known Black politicians from across the country who were invited to Mound Bayou by T.R.M. Howard. Steven V. Roberts, "Mississippi Gets a Representative, From Indiana," 26 November 1982, *New York Times*: B8.

117 The six committee chairs were Augustus F. "Gus" Hawkins (Education and Labor), John Conyers Jr. (Government Operations), Ronald V. Dellums (District of Columbia), Julian C. Dixon (Standards of Official Conduct), Mickey Leland (Select Committee on Hunger), and Charles B. Rangel (Select Committee on Narcotics Abuse and Control). Mickey Leland died tragically in a plane crash in Ethiopia in August 1989.

118 *Congressional Record,* Extensions of Remarks, 102nd Cong., 1st sess. (22 March 1991): 7564.

Edward W. Brooke

1919–2015

UNITED STATES SENATOR

1967–1979

Republican from Massachusetts



Image courtesy of the U.S. Senate Historical Office

Elected in November 1966, Edward W. Brooke of Massachusetts became the first Black lawmaker to serve in the Senate in 86 years when he was sworn in the following January. Brooke was the first popularly elected Black Senator and the first Black lawmaker from Massachusetts to serve in Congress. Brooke, a Republican, was an independent thinker who often collaborated with colleagues of both parties. Throughout his political career, Brooke attempted to balance his support for legislation designed to end racial inequality with a mistrust of what he viewed as a "paternalistic government." "Hand in hand with the legal battles and demonstrations there must go self-help," Brooke said. "There must go with this quest for equal opportunity an awareness of equal responsibility."[1]

Edward William Brooke III was born in Washington, DC, on October 26, 1919, to Helen, a homemaker, and Edward Brooke Jr., a longtime lawyer with the U.S. Veterans Administration. The future Senator was named for his grandfather, father, and deceased sister Edwina. He also had an older sister, Helene. After graduating from Dunbar High School in Washington, DC, in 1936, Ed Brooke attended Howard University. Originally intending to pursue a career in medicine, Brooke decided to major in sociology, earning a bachelor's degree in 1941. Shortly after the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, Brooke entered the U.S. Army as a second lieutenant. Before serving overseas in World War II, Brooke was stationed with the segregated, all-Black 366th Infantry Regiment at Fort Devens in Ayer, Massachusetts. Like many Black Members of the era, Brooke felt keenly the irony and indignity of fighting for democracy abroad while facing racial discrimination in the armed forces. The Massachusetts Army base implemented a Whites-only policy for all clubs, as well as the swimming pool, the tennis courts, and the general store. "In every regard, we were treated as second-class soldiers, if not worse, and we were angry," Brooke recalled. "I felt a personal frustration and bitterness I had not known before in my life." While stateside, Brooke defended Black enlisted men in military court. Despite a lack of legal training, he earned a reputation as a skilled public defender and a "soldier's lawyer."[2]

Brooke spent 195 days with his unit in Italy. His fluent Italian enabled him to cross enemy lines to communicate with Italian partisans. By the war's end, Brooke had earned the rank of captain, a Bronze Star, and a Distinguished Service Award. During his tour in Europe, he also met

Italian-born Remigia Ferrari-Scacco. After a two-year, long-distance relationship, they married on June 7, 1947, in Roxbury, Massachusetts. The couple had two daughters: Edwina and Remi. They divorced in 1978, and a year later Brooke married Anne Fleming with whom he had a son, Edward W. Brooke IV.[3]

Brooke's legal experience on the Massachusetts military base inspired him to earn a bachelor of laws degree in 1948 and a master of laws degree in 1950 from Boston University. Brooke declined offers to join established law firms, choosing instead to start his own practice in the predominantly African-American Boston neighborhood, Roxbury. At the urging of friends from his former Army unit, Brooke interrupted his law career to run for the Massachusetts house of representatives in 1950. Unsure of his preferred party affiliation, Brooke took advantage of a state law allowing candidates to cross-file. Though he had no prior political experience, he received the endorsement of the Republican Party for the house seat representing Roxbury. Unsuccessful in the general election, Brooke entered the race two years later, winning the Republican nomination but losing to his Democratic opponent.[4]

Brooke established himself as a successful lawyer and built community ties that proved significant in future bids for elected office. In 1960, he ran for Massachusetts secretary of state. Although Brooke lost that election, his strong showing surprised observers. In recognition of his performance in the campaign, Republican Governor John Volpe of Massachusetts appointed Brooke chairman of the Boston finance commission, which uncovered corruption in the city's municipal agencies. During his two-year tenure, Brooke transformed the commission into a respectable and effective organization. This position helped make him one of the most popular political figures in the state.[5]

In 1962, Brooke earned the Republican nomination for Massachusetts attorney general, then easily defeated the Democratic challenger. Brooke garnered national attention as the only member of his party to win statewide election in 1962 and enjoyed the distinction of becoming the state's first African-American attorney general. Brooke continued his efforts to thwart corruption in the state government. He also recommended a series of measures to protect consumers' rights and fought to end housing discrimination. Civil rights leaders criticized Brooke's decision that a proposed 1964 boycott by African-American students to protest segregation in the Boston school system would be illegal. "I am not a civil rights leader and I don't profess to be one," Brooke once declared, explaining the conflict between his responsibility as an attorney general who must uphold existing law and his personal views on racial equality. His response to the proposed protest won him the support of many voters in the predominantly White state.[6]

In 1966, Brooke authored *The Challenge of Change: Crisis in Our Two-Party System*, outlining many of his political principles, including his beliefs about civil rights. The "issue [of civil rights] is pressing on the nation, and cries out for a solution," Brooke wrote, arguing that in addition to legislation, African Americans needed access to educational opportunities of high quality to compete with Whites. While he promoted a civil rights agenda for reform, Brooke maintained that militancy among activists undermined the civil rights movement.[7]

After two terms as attorney general, Brooke announced his candidacy in 1965 for the U.S. Senate seat left vacant by the retirement of Leverett Saltonstall. Brooke was unopposed in the Republican primary and faced Democrat Endicott Peabody, the former governor of Massachusetts, in the general election. Campaigning as a "creative Republican," Brooke successfully courted voters from both parties. His criticism of the increasing militancy of some civil rights activists resonated with many White voters in Massachusetts. Although Peabody enjoyed the enthusiastic backing of popular Massachusetts Senator Edward Moore "Ted" Kennedy, he failed to break through with voters, and on November 8, 1966, Brooke won a seat in the 90th Congress (1967–1969), taking 62 percent of the vote. His victory met with considerable fanfare, both in Massachusetts and across the nation. Brooke was the first African-American candidate elected to the Senate since the Reconstruction Era. Asked to comment on his victory, Brooke praised the people of Massachusetts for their ability to "judge you on your merit and your worth alone." He promised to use his position to "unite men who have not been united before," reiterating his pledge to represent his constituents equally. In November 1972, Brooke easily defeated Democrat John J. Droney, the Middlesex County district attorney, earning 64 percent of the vote to win a second term in the Senate.[8]

Initially assigned to the committees on Aeronautical and Space Sciences, Banking and Currency, and Government Operations, Brooke also served on the Armed Services and the Joint Committee on Bicentennial Arrangements

committees for one Congress. From the 92nd to the 95th Congresses (1971–1979), Brooke was on three committees: Appropriations; Special Aging; and Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs. Brooke also sat on the Select Equal Educational Opportunity Committee, the Joint Committee on Defense Production, and the Select Standards and Conduct Committee.[9]

Despite being the first Black Senator since the nineteenth century—and having been elected just two years after the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964—Brooke claimed he experienced little institutional racism in the Senate. "In all my years in the Senate, I never encountered an overt act of hostility," he said. Brooke later recalled using the Senate gym and the adjoining facilities without incident. Early in his first term, Brooke went to the Senators' swimming pool in the Russell Senate Office Building. Southern Democrats and staunch segregationists John Cornelius Stennis of Mississippi, John Little McClellan of Arkansas, and James Strom Thurmond of South Carolina greeted Brooke and invited him to join them in the pool. "There was no hesitation or ill will that I could see," Brooke recollected. "Yet these were men who consistently voted against legislation that would have provided equal opportunity to others of my race. I felt that if a senator truly believed in racial separatism I could live with that, but it was increasingly evident that some members of the Senate played on bigotry purely for political gain."[10]

President Lyndon B. Johnson appointed Brooke to the President's Commission on Civil Disorders shortly after he was elected to the Senate. Illinois Governor Otto Kerner led the group, which became known as the Kerner Commission. Charged with investigating the causes of the urban riots of 1967, the Kerner Commission also proposed solutions for the wide-spread incidences of looting and violence in American cities. The 11-member commission reported that American society was sharply divided along racial lines. Brooke agreed with one of the commission's principal recommendations: that the government should fund a series of programs to increase educational, housing, and employment opportunities for people of color living in urban areas. Although the commission's reports received widespread attention by scholars and in the press, President Johnson disagreed with many of its findings, and the commission's recommendations were largely set aside by policymakers.[11]

In the Senate, Edward Brooke was often at the forefront of efforts to expand and protect the legislative achievements of the civil rights movement. Working with Democratic Senator Walter F. Mondale of Minnesota, Brooke succeeded in attaching an antidiscrimination amendment to the groundbreaking Civil Rights Act of 1968. Title VIII of the legislation included provisions to combat racial discrimination in housing. "Fair housing does not promise an end to the ghetto," Brooke cautioned. "It promises only to demonstrate that the ghetto is not an immutable institution in America." Brooke cited his own experience of being one of the "lucky ones" that was fortunate enough to "escape the ghetto," and spoke of the "psychological impact" of living in "an area which has been marked for second-class citizens." To combat the "unconscionable bitterness between white and Black Americans, it is encumbent [*sic*] upon our Government to act, and to act now," Brooke said.[12]

In 1975, Brooke helped lead the effort in the Senate to extend the 1965 Voting Rights Act. When a proposed Senate amendment threatened to dilute the historic voting rights legislation, Brooke joined the debate. "I just cannot believe that here in 1975 on the floor of the Senate we are ready to say to the American people, black or white, red or brown, 'You just cannot even be assured the basic right to vote in this country.'" Brooke's eloquent and impassioned plea to his colleagues helped extend the landmark measure for seven years. Shortly after the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. in 1968, Brooke urged his congressional colleagues to recognize the renowned civil rights leader by declaring January 15 (King's birthday) a national holiday. Arguing that it "would be fitting to pay our respects to this noble figure by enduring public commemoration of his life and philosophy," the Massachusetts Senator earned the support of many African Americans. Brooke also made headlines when he traveled to Jackson State College in Mississippi in May 1970 to help settle the situation after police shot and killed two Black students. In 1977, he successfully fought an amendment to a Health, Education and Welfare (HEW) bill that would have prevented the department from enforcing quotas to meet affirmative action goals.[13]

As a Republican Senator from a state with a small Black population, Brooke had different concerns, interests, and constituencies than most other Black lawmakers, all of whom served in the House of Representatives at the time. Occasionally, this placed Brooke at odds with the Black Representatives, and he never joined the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC). But the Senator and House Members

also found occasions to work with and support each other. In 1969, both Brooke and the Black Members of the House opposed Richard M. Nixon's nomination of Clement F. Haynsworth Jr. to the Supreme Court, and they coordinated opposition. In 1971, Brooke declined to participate in the Black Representatives' boycott of President Nixon's State of the Union Address, but he did later support a meeting between the Members and the President. Two years later, Senator Brooke was the keynote speaker at the CBC's annual fundraiser dinner.[14]

Although Brooke maintained his Republican Party affiliation, his stances were often contrary to the official party line. During his two terms in the Senate, Brooke backed affirmative action, federal set asides for contracts with minority businesses, and public housing legislation. He also favored extending minimum wage standards to jobs not covered under the Fair Labor Standards Act, providing tax incentives to companies to enable them to hire more employees, and increasing operating subsidies for commuter rail services and mass transit systems. Brooke was a vocal opponent of antibusing legislation, and on several occasions helped defeat or weaken strong antibusing bills passed in the House. In 1974, he successfully defeated the Holt amendment, introduced by Maryland Representative Marjorie Sewell Holt, to a HEW appropriations bill that would have effectively ended the federal government's role in school desegregation. At times Brooke broke party ranks to work with Democrats in the Senate and the House. For example, Brooke and then-House Majority Leader Thomas P. "Tip" O'Neill Jr. of Massachusetts recommended a swift increase in Social Security benefits in 1972.[15]

Although Brooke initially supported President Nixon, he grew increasingly critical of the Nixon administration. Saying that he was "deeply concerned about the lack of commitment to equal opportunities for all people," Brooke denounced the White House for neglecting Black communities and failing to enforce school integration. In addition to Haynsworth, Brooke opposed two other Nixon Supreme Court nominees: G. Harrold Carswell and William H. Rehnquist. In May 1973, he introduced a resolution authorizing the U.S. Attorney General to appoint a special prosecutor to serve in all criminal investigations arising from the Watergate scandal. Six months later, Brooke became the first Republican Senator to publicly call for President Nixon's resignation. "There is no question that the President has lost his effectiveness as the leader of this country, primarily because he has lost the confidence of the people of the country," Brooke remarked. "I think, therefore, that in the interests of this nation that he loves that he should step down, tender his resignation." Brooke also was one of the few Republicans to disagree publicly with President Gerald R. Ford's pardon of Nixon, deeming it a "serious mistake."[16]

Brooke also influenced American foreign policy, especially during the Vietnam War. As he campaigned for the Senate in 1966, Brooke called for increased negotiations with the North Vietnamese rather than an escalation of the fighting. In 1967, he went on a three-week fact-finding mission to Southeast Asia, and then spoke about that experience in his first formal speech in the Senate. Although Brooke had hoped for a diplomatic solution to the conflict, he came home from Vietnam convinced "that the enemy is not disposed to participate in any meaningful negotiations" and that President Johnson's "patient" approach to Vietnam did, in fact, have merit. Brooke was praised by those who found his willingness to publicly change his position courageous and criticized by many civil rights activists who believed the Vietnam War siphoned valuable funding away from vital domestic programs. Years later, Brooke maintained that his maiden speech had been misinterpreted because the press overlooked his continued support of a reduction of American involvement in the region. As a moderate Republican, Brooke grew impatient with the Nixon administration's aggressive policies in Southeast Asia, which escalated the conflict with few signs of success. In 1970, he and 15 members of his party voted for the Cooper–Church Amendment, which originated in response to Nixon's decision to invade Cambodia and prohibited the use of American troops outside Vietnam. Brooke further challenged the President's war effort by voting for legislation that established a time limit for the withdrawal of American troops from Vietnam.[17]

Brooke's solid support base in Massachusetts began to wane after an acrimonious and public divorce in 1978 led to allegations of financial misconduct. In the Republican primary, Brooke faced a challenge from conservative television talk show host Avi Nelson. Although he managed to rebuff Nelson's bid, the controversies surrounding Brooke's finances left him in a weakened position as he entered the general election campaign. In November 1978, Democrat Paul Efthemios Tsongas, a U.S. Representative from Massachusetts, defeated Brooke, 55 to 45 percent.[18]

After leaving office, Brooke resumed the practice of law in Washington, DC. In 1984, he became chairman of a commercial bank in Boston, and one year later, he was named to the board of directors of a large defense contractor. Upon being diagnosed with breast cancer in 2002, Brooke returned to the public spotlight to increase awareness of breast cancer in men. In 2004, President George W. Bush awarded Brooke the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the nation's highest civilian honor. In 2007, Brooke published his autobiography, *Bridging the Divide: My Life*. A year later, Congress awarded him the Congressional Gold Medal. Brooke died at his home in Coral Gables, Florida, on January 3, 2015.[19]

Manuscript Collections

Boston University (Boston, Massachusetts). *Papers*: unspecified amount. Includes items from Edward W. Brooke's U.S. Senate career including photographs, letters, daily planners, the public hearings schedule for the Select Committee on Equal Educational Opportunity, travel arrangements, daily itineraries, and research reports regarding Senator Brooke's re-election. A finding aid is available in the repository and online.

Library of Congress Manuscript Division (Washington, District of Columbia). *Papers*: 1941–2015 (bulk 1963–1978), 245,250 items. Correspondence, memoranda, speeches, transcripts of interviews, writings, reports, notes, subject files, legislation, briefing books, press releases, photographs, and other papers relating primarily to Edward W. Brooke's career as attorney general of Massachusetts (1963–1966) and as U.S. Senator (1967–1978). A finding aid is available in the repository and online.

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Shirley Chisholm

1924–2005

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1969–1983

Democrat from New York



Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

The first African-American Congresswoman, Shirley Chisholm represented a U.S. House of Representatives district centered in Brooklyn, New York. First elected in 1968, Chisholm was catapulted into the national limelight by virtue of her race, gender, and an outspoken personality that she balanced with deft skill as a political insider. Four years later, in 1972, she campaigned for the Democratic presidential nomination. From her seat on the powerful Rules Committee, "Fighting Shirley," as she was known, moved into Democratic leadership and advocated for increased federal spending and expanded programs to help aid low-income and working-class Americans. "I am the people's politician," she once told the *New York Times*. "If the day should ever come when the people can't save me, I'll know I'm finished. That's when I'll go back to being a professional educator."[1]

Shirley Chisholm was born Shirley Anita St. Hill on November 30, 1924, in Brooklyn, New York. She was the oldest of four daughters of Charles St. Hill, a factory worker from Guyana, and Ruby Seale St. Hill, a seamstress from Barbados. For part of her childhood, Chisholm lived in Barbados on her maternal grandparents' farm and received a British education while her parents worked during the Great Depression to settle the family in Bedford-Stuyvesant, a neighborhood in Brooklyn. The most apparent manifestation of her West Indies roots was the slight, clipped British accent she retained throughout her life. She attended public schools in Brooklyn and graduated with high marks. Chisholm attended Brooklyn College on scholarship and graduated with a bachelor's degree in sociology in 1946. She married Conrad Q. Chisholm, a private investigator, in 1949; they later divorced. From 1946 to 1953, Shirley Chisholm worked as a nursery school teacher and then as the director of two daycare centers. Three years later, she earned a master's degree in early childhood education from Columbia University. She served as an educational consultant for New York City's division of daycare from 1959 to 1964. Chisholm was heavily involved in Democratic clubs in Brooklyn in the 1950s and 1960s, including the Bedford-Stuyvesant Political League and the Unity Democratic club. In 1964, Chisholm was elected to the New York state legislature; she was the second African-American woman to serve in Albany. In 1977, she married Arthur Hardwick Jr., a New York state legislator.[2]

A court-ordered redistricting—that carved a new Brooklyn congressional district with a slight Black majority

and a large Puerto Rican population out of Chisholm's Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhood—convinced her to run for Congress. The influential Democratic political machine, headed by Stanley Steingut, declared its intention to send an African-American candidate from the new district to the House. In the primary, Chisholm faced three African-American challengers: civil court judge Thomas R. Jones, a former district leader and New York assemblyman; Dolly Robinson, a former district co-leader; and William C. Thompson, a well-financed state senator. Thompson received the endorsement of the Steingut machine, which usually guaranteed the candidate a primary victory. Chisholm, however, received the support of community organizers with whom she had worked for more than a decade. Chisholm roamed the new district in a sound truck that pulled up outside housing projects while she announced: "Ladies and Gentlemen … this is fighting Shirley Chisholm coming through." Chisholm capitalized on her personal campaign style. "I have a way of talking that does something to people," she noted. "I have a theory about campaigning. You have to let them feel you." In the primary in mid-June 1968, Chisholm defeated Thompson, her nearest competitor, by about 800 votes in an election characterized by light voter turnout.[3]

In the general election, Chisholm faced James Farmer, who ran as the candidate of both the Republican Party and the Liberal Party. Farmer was one of the principal figures of the civil rights movement, a cofounder of the Congress of Racial Equality, and an organizer of the Freedom Riders in the early 1960s. The two candidates held similar positions on housing, employment, and education issues, and both opposed the Vietnam War. Farmer charged that the Democratic Party "took [Black voters] for granted and thought they had us in their pockets. … We must be in a position to use our power as a swing vote." Farmer focused on Chisholm's gender, arguing that "women have been in the driver's seat" in Black communities for too long and that the district needed "a man's voice in Washington," not that of a "little schoolteacher." Chisholm, whose campaign motto was "unbought and unbossed," met that charge head-on, using Farmer's rhetoric to highlight discrimination against women and to explain her unique qualifications. "There were Negro men in office here before I came in five years ago, but they didn't deliver," Chisholm countered. "People came and asked me to do something … I'm here because of the vacuum." Chisholm portrayed Farmer, who had lived in Manhattan, as an outsider and used her fluent Spanish to appeal to the growing Hispanic population in the Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhood. The deciding factor, however, was that more than 80 percent of the district's registered voters were Democrats. Chisholm won the general election by a resounding 67 percent of the vote.[4]

Chisholm's freshman class included two African Americans of future prominence, Louis Stokes of Ohio and William Lacy "Bill" Clay Sr. of Missouri, and boosted the number of African Americans in the House from six to nine, the largest total at that time. Chisholm was the only new woman to enter Congress in 1969.[5]

Chisholm did not receive a warm welcome in the House because of her refusal to abide by long-standing House expectations for first-term Members to fly under the radar. "I have no intention of just sitting quietly and observing," she said. "I intend to focus attention on the nation's problems." She did just that, criticizing the Vietnam War in her first House Floor speech on March 26, 1969. Chisholm vowed to vote against any defense appropriation bill "until the time comes when our values and priorities have been turned right-side up again." She was assigned to the Committee on Agriculture, a decision she appealed directly to House Speaker John W. McCormack of Massachusetts, bypassing Ways and Means Committee Chairman Wilbur Daigh Mills of Arkansas, who oversaw Democratic committee appointments. McCormack told her to be a "good soldier," at which point Chisholm brought her complaint to the Democratic caucus and the press. She was reassigned to the Veterans' Affairs Committee which, though not one of her top choices, was more relevant to her district's makeup. "There are a lot more veterans in my district than trees," she quipped.[6]

Chisholm was on the Veterans' Affairs committee during the 91st and 92nd Congresses (1969–1973). From 1971 to 1977, she served on the Committee on Education and Labor, having won a place on that panel with the help of Thomas Hale Boggs Sr. of Louisiana, whom she had endorsed as Majority Leader. She also served on the Committee on Organization, Study, and Review (known as the Hansen Committee), which recommended reforms for the selection of committee chairmen that the Democratic Caucus adopted in 1971. In the 94th Congress (1975–1977), Chisholm was elected assistant secretary of the Democratic Caucus, and from 1977 to 1981, she served as secretary of the Democratic Caucus. She eventually left

her Education Committee assignment to accept a seat on the Rules Committee in 1977, becoming the first Black woman—and the second woman ever—to serve on that powerful panel. Chisholm also was a founding member of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) in 1971 and the Congressional Women's Caucus in 1977.[7]

As a legislator, Chisholm prioritized educational and labor policies that aided African Americans, women, and the working class and poor. She joined New York Representative Bella Savitzky Abzug in cosponsoring legislation to increase federal funding for and oversight of childcare centers. She also opposed President Richard M. Nixon's proposed guaranteed minimum annual income for families, arguing that the plan's proposed income was not adequate to meet the needs of a family, nor did the legislation provide "day care, job training, and job development which will be necessary if the family assistant plan is to work." She was a fierce defender of federal assistance for education. In 1975, Chisholm successfully added an amendment to a national school lunch bill to expand participation by increasing the family income of students eligible for free or reduced lunch. She helped lead her colleagues in overriding President Gerald R. Ford's veto on the measure. Chisholm said she did not view herself as "an innovator in the field of legislation." In her efforts to address the needs of the "have-nots," she often chose to work outside the established system. At times she criticized Democratic leadership in Congress as much as she did the Republicans in the White House.[8]

Despite her reputation, not unjustly earned, for independence, Chisholm was willing to form coalitions and build connections with powerful lawmakers in the House. In 1973, Chisholm was a leading proponent of an amendment to the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 that increased the minimum wage and brought domestic workers, a profession that disproportionately employed women of color, under minimum wage regulations. Her colleagues applauded Chisholm for her behind the scenes work on behalf of the legislation. Chisholm insisted that one of her strengths was in bringing legislative factions together. "I can talk with legislators from the South, the West, all over," she said. "They view me as a national figure and that makes me more acceptable." Chisholm gained the trust of her colleagues and was rewarded with a spot on the influential Rules Committee, whose members were chosen by the party leader, and she was elected to a position in the Democratic leadership.[9]

In 1972, Chisholm declared her candidacy for the Democratic nomination for President, charging that none of the other candidates represented the interests of Black and minority voters or those of Americans living in poverty. She campaigned across the country and succeeded in getting her name on 12 primary ballots, becoming as well known outside her Brooklyn neighborhood as she was in it. At the Democratic National Convention she received 152 delegate votes, or 10 percent of the total—a respectable showing given her modest funding. A 1974 Gallup poll listed her as one of the top 10 most-admired women in America.[10]

But while the presidential bid enhanced Chisholm's national profile, it also stirred controversy among her House colleagues. Chisholm's candidacy split the CBC. Many Black male colleagues felt she had not consulted them or that she had betrayed the group's interests by trying to create a coalition of women, Hispanics, White liberals, and welfare recipients. Pervasive gender discrimination, Chisholm noted, cut across racial lines: "Black male politicians are no different from white male politicians. This 'woman thing' is so deep. I've found it out in this campaign if I never knew it before." Furthermore, there were strategic differences, and many CBC members thought it wiser to support the frontrunner, South Dakota Senator George Stanley McGovern, and to try to influence the likely Democratic nominee. Her presidential campaign also strained relations with other women Members of Congress, particularly Bella Abzug of New York, who endorsed Senator McGovern.[11]

Despite her promotion to influential roles in the House, Chisholm maintained her independence. In 1978, as a member of the Rules Committee, she voted against a Rules package that bundled several energy bills, including legislation to deregulate the sale of natural gas. Amid pressure from Speaker of the House Thomas P. "Tip" O'Neill Jr. of Massachusetts and President James Earl "Jimmy" Carter, Chisholm refused to support the package. Chisholm claimed she voted against the rule because higher rates caused by deregulation would fall hardest on people with low incomes. Ultimately, the bundle passed the Rules Committee after another Democrat switched his vote and supported the rule.[12]

Even as Chisholm gained influence, she continued to feel slighted because of her race and gender. As part of Democratic leadership, she went to a breakfast meeting every week with President Carter. However, she eventually stopped attending the meetings, believing the men in the

room, especially the President, ignored her. One staffer explained, "She would come back furious … because they had considered her invisible."[13]

Later in her career, Chisholm was a vocal advocate for the humane treatment of Haitian refugees. In the late 1970s, human rights violations by the Haitian government and a poor economy led to an increase in immigration from Haiti to the United States. In 1979, she and Walter E. Fauntroy, the Delegate for Washington, DC, founded and co-chaired the CBC Task Force on Haitian Refugees, later renamed the Task Force on Haiti. Chisholm was particularly concerned with refugee policies of both the Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan administrations, which she argued privileged Cuban refugees fleeing Communist-controlled Cuba over Haitian refugees. "It is clear to the Congressional Black Caucus that the [Carter] administration has no intention of ending its invidious discrimination against Haitians," Chisholm explained to her colleagues in a congressional hearing. In 1980, Chisholm proposed legislation to end the inequity in the federal government's refugee policy and give Haitian migrants a better chance of remaining in the United States.[14]

By 1976, Chisholm faced a stiff challenge from within her own party primary by a longtime political rival, New York city councilman Samuel D. Wright. He criticized Chisholm for her absenteeism in the House, brought on by the rigors of her presidential campaign, and for what he said was a lack of connection with the district. Chisholm countered by playing on her national credentials and her role as a reformer of Capitol Hill culture. "I think my role is to break new ground in Congress," Chisholm noted. Two weeks later, Chisholm turned back Wright and Hispanic political activist Luz Vega in the Democratic primary, winning 54 percent of the vote to Wright's 36 percent and Vega's 10 percent. She won the general election handily with 83 percent of the vote.[15]

From the late 1970s onward, Brooklyn Democrats speculated that Chisholm was losing interest in her House seat. Her name was widely floated as a possible candidate for several jobs related to education, including president of the City College of New York and chancellor of the New York City public school system. In 1982, Chisholm declined to seek re-election. "Shirley Chisholm would like to have a little life of her own," she told the *Christian Science Monitor*, explaining that she wanted to spend more time with her husband, Arthur.[16]

Other reasons, too, factored into Chisholm's decision to leave the House. She had grown disillusioned over the conservative turn the country had taken with the election of President Ronald Reagan in 1980. Additionally, she said that many Democrats, particularly African-American politicians, misunderstood her efforts to build alliances. While her rhetoric about racial inequality could be passionate, Chisholm's actions toward the White establishment in Congress were often conciliatory. Chisholm maintained that many members of the Black community did not understand the need for negotiation with White politicians. "We still have to engage in compromise, the highest of all arts," Chisholm noted. "Blacks can't do things on their own, nor can whites."[17]

After leaving Congress in January 1983, Chisholm cofounded the National Political Congress of Black Women and campaigned for Jesse Jackson's presidential bids in 1984 and 1988. She also taught at Mt. Holyoke College in South Hadley, Massachusetts, in 1983. Though nominated as U.S. Ambassador to Jamaica by President William J. Clinton, Chisholm declined due to ill health. She settled in Palm Coast, Florida, where she wrote and lectured. Chisholm died on January 1, 2005, in Ormond Beach, Florida.[18]

Manuscript Collection

Rutgers University Library, Special Collections and University Archives (New Brunswick, NJ). *Papers*: 1963–1994, approximately 3.7 cubic feet. The papers of Shirley Chisholm consist of speeches, 1971–1989, on a wide variety of topics; congressional files, 1965–1981, composed primarily of complimentary letters received and presidential campaign materials; general files, 1966–1986, consisting chiefly of biographical materials, including information on Representative Chisholm's record in Congress; newspaper clippings, 1969–1990, including editorials written by Representative Chisholm; constituent newsletters, 1969–1982, complemented by selected press releases; photographs (including photocopies and other reproductions), 1969–1990, many of which depict Representative Chisholm with other political figures; publications, 1969–1992, with additional coverage of Representative Chisholm's political career and her retirement; and campaign miscellany, including buttons from her 1972 presidential campaign and political posters. Also included in the collection are the papers of Representative Chisholm's aide Robert Frishman, 1963–1985. A finding aid is available in the repository and online.

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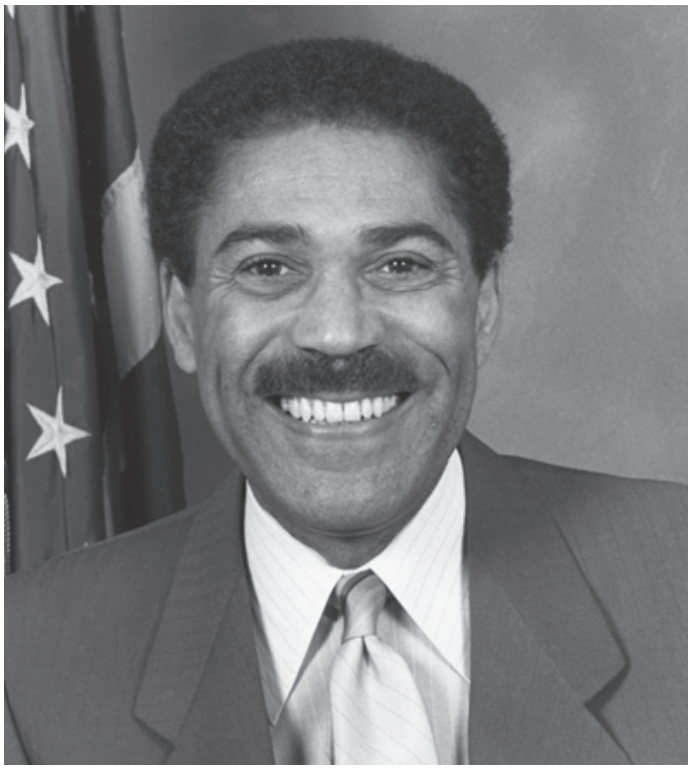
William Lacy "Bill" Clay Sr.

1931–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1969–2001

Democrat from Missouri



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The first African-American Representative from Missouri, William Lacy "Bill" Clay Sr. served in the U.S. House of Representatives for more than three decades. During his extensive tenure, he used his experience as a civil rights activist and labor union representative in St. Louis to promote legislation to help poor and working-class Americans. Never one to avoid confrontation, the spirited dean of the Missouri delegation observed, "I didn't get so tied to the job that it stopped me from speaking out. People used to say to me, 'How can you do that? You won't get re-elected.' I would say, 'I didn't come here to stay forever.'" For Clay, politics was a means to an end, a way to pursue and effect the change his constituents sought. It was a belief he imparted to the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC), which he helped establish in the late 1960s and early 1970s. "We have no permanent friends, no permanent enemies, just permanent interests," Clay said.[1]

William Lacy Clay—who went by Bill—was born in St. Louis on April 30, 1931, to Irving, a welder, and Luella Clay. His political awakening occurred in 1949, after police arrested him, hauled him to a district police station, and tried to coerce him to confess to being involved in a brutal crime with which he had no connection. His aunt, a housekeeper for a member of the St. Louis board of police commissioners, telephoned her employer, and detectives were swiftly dispatched to end the interrogation. That episode, Clay recalled decades later, "convinced me that survival and political influence are inseparable in American society." In 1953, he graduated from St. Louis University with a bachelor's degree in history and political science. Drafted into the U.S. Army, Clay served from 1953 to 1955. While on duty in Alabama, he responded to the racial discrimination he and other African-American troops faced by organizing demonstrations; once, Clay led a boycott of the base barbershop to protest its policy of serving Black soldiers only one day a week. His experiences in the armed forces contributed to his future career as a civil rights activist and politician.[2]

Clay returned to St. Louis and briefly worked as a real estate broker and a manager with a life insurance company. He won his first elective office in 1959 as an alderman from a predominantly Black St. Louis ward and served in this position through 1964. Clay was also active in the St. Louis civil rights movement. He formed a local NAACP youth council and led pickets at restaurants, movie theaters, and other businesses with discriminatory employment practices.

As an alderman, Clay helped pass a fair employment ordinance and a separate law banning racial discrimination in public accommodations. In 1963, to highlight the lack of job opportunities for Black men and women in St. Louis, Clay published a report titled "Anatomy of an Economic Murder." Just months later, he was arrested and jailed for a total of 105 days for his role in demonstrations against the hiring practices of a St. Louis bank. Clay continued to gain experience in local politics as a Democratic ward committeeman, an influential party position, from 1964 to 1967. His early political career coincided with his work as a union official. Clay worked as a business representative for the city employees' union from 1961 to 1964 and as an education coordinator with a local steamfitter's union in 1966 and 1967. Clay married Carol Ann Johnson, and the couple had three children: William Lacy Jr., Vicki, and Michele.[3]

A 1964 Supreme Court decision mandating that congressional districts be drawn with equal populations paved the way for Clay's entry to the U.S. House. Three years later, the Missouri legislature passed a bill that reapportioned the state's districts in compliance with the high court's ruling. One of the new districts incorporated the north side of St. Louis and some of its outlying suburbs; 53 percent of the population was African American. When the 22-year incumbent Frank Melvin Karsten of Missouri chose not to seek re-election in the newly redrawn majority-Black district, Clay entered the 1968 Democratic primary for the open congressional seat. He defeated five candidates for the nomination, earning 41 percent of the vote. Clay faced Curtis Crawford, a former St. Louis assistant circuit attorney, in the general election. Against the backdrop of a turbulent period of racial unrest, which included the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr., the 1968 campaign received national attention because the Missouri House election uncharacteristically featured two Black candidates. Clay emphasized his support for employment opportunities for African Americans and the promotion of civil rights. He also pledged to represent the needs of the poor and working-class voters of the district. "The conditions of poverty found in the First District and other areas of the country must be immediately addressed by our federal government to bring faith and hope to our people, before we can talk of quelling unrest and civil disorder." On Election Day, Clay defeated his opponent in the heavily Democratic district with 64 percent of the vote, becoming the first African-American Representative from Missouri in Congress.[4]

Clay's career in the House was notable for his long tenure on a handful of committees. Beginning in his first term for the 91st Congress (1969–1971), Clay was assigned to the Committee on Education and Labor; he would serve on the committee for his entire career. He eventually chaired the Subcommittee on Labor-Management Relations and was the ranking minority member after Republicans took control of the House in 1995. Clay served on the Post Office and Civil Service Committee from the 93rd to the 103rd Congress (1973–1995) and on the Committee on House Administration from the 99th to the 103rd Congress (1985–1995), chairing the Subcommittee on Libraries and Memorials. Clay reaped the benefits of the House seniority system, rising through the ranks of the Post Office and Civil Service Committee (chairing two subcommittees) to head the full panel during the 102nd and 103rd Congresses (1991–1995). "From the day you are sworn into Congress, you dream of the day that you will rise to chair a full committee—and today that time has come," Clay declared in 1990. Clay also was a member of the Joint Committee on the Library during the 101st Congress (1989–1991).[5]

As a new Member of the 91st Congress, Clay joined two other African-American lawmakers in their first term: Representatives Shirley Chisholm of New York and Louis Stokes of Ohio. The three vowed to focus on issues affecting their Black and urban constituents, who they believed had been neglected by the government. Clay was one of the 12 founding members of the CBC. First formed in 1969 as the Democratic Select Committee, and renamed in 1971, the CBC sought to provide a formal network for African-American Members to focus on legislative issues directly affecting Black citizens. Soon after its creation, the CBC made headlines because of a public dispute with President Richard M. Nixon. The CBC accused Nixon of ignoring the interests of Black Americans, and after Nixon repeatedly refused to meet with the Black Members, the organization boycotted Nixon's January 1971 State of the Union Address. Clay, along with Ohio Representative Louis Stokes, led the boycott, drafting a letter outlining the reasons for group's protest: "We now refuse to be part of your audience," the letter stated in response to the President's persistent refusals to meet with the Black Members of Congress. When Nixon ultimately met with the CBC in March 1971, each member addressed a major point of concern for the Black community. Clay spoke about the need for student

grants to help impoverished African-American students who could not repay educational loans. After 1971, the CBC quickly developed into one of Congress's most influential caucuses. And years later, Clay said the CBC was "the single most effective political entity we have had in articulating, representing, protecting and advancing the interests of black people in this nation over the past twenty years."[6]

Popular among his St. Louis constituents, Clay made clear his intention to defend the rights of people he believed lacked an adequate voice in the government, even in the face of a shifting political environment. "I don't represent all people," Clay declared. "I represent those who are in need of representation. I have no intention of representing those powerful interests who walk over the powerless people." Clay viewed his position in Congress as an opportunity to publicize issues that concerned African-American voters in his district and throughout the nation. "I didn't come to Congress with any fixed goal, but with a general direction I wanted move in," Clay said early in his career. "That is primarily to educate black people to the rights they should be enjoying and obviously aren't and to articulate for the general public the needs of black Americans."[7]

From his seat on the Education and Labor Committee, Representative Clay guided many initiatives through the House. For nearly two decades, he worked to revise the Hatch Act of 1939, which restricted the political activities of federal workers. In 1993, Clay's amendments to the Hatch Act permitting government employees to publicly endorse political candidates and to organize political fundraisers, among other activities that were previously prohibited, became law. "It's exhilarating to see your efforts finally rewarded," Clay remarked after President William J. Clinton signed the measure at a White House ceremony. Clay also spent several years promoting the Family and Medical Leave Act, which passed in early 1993, mandating that companies with more than 50 workers offer up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave for employees to care for a newborn or attend to a family medical emergency. Clay called the Family and Medical Leave Act "landmark legislation, in the same category as legislation against child labor, on minimum wage, and occupational safety, and health." In 1996, he served as the floor manager for a bill to raise the federal minimum wage. "The American people came to know how unfair it was to relegate people at the bottom of the economic scale to a wage that is unlivable," he said shortly after the bill passed the House.[8]

Beginning in the mid-1980s, Clay used his position as chair of the Education and Labor Committee's Subcommittee on Labor-Management Relations to support reforms to the nation's retirement income policies. Clay wanted to expand the number of workers covered by retirement plans and to protect employee retirement plans from possible economic upheaval. In 1984, President Ronald Reagan signed into law the Retirement Equity Act of 1984, which Clay initially introduced. The act expanded the opportunity to access retirement plans by lowering the age that employees could participate in a pension plan. The St. Louis Representative also sponsored revisions to pension law that were incorporated in the Tax Reform Act of 1986, including shortening the time for an employee to become fully vested and creating tax incentives for employers to cover more employees.[9]

In the 1980s and 1990s, as factories closed and good-paying jobs disappeared in cities across the North and Midwest, including St. Louis, Clay sought legislation to protect Americans from the disruption. Clay argued that "we as a society have an obligation not only to encourage economic growth but to seek to cushion the inevitable human dislocation it causes." Clay supported the mandatory notification of plant closings and worked to protect the negotiating rights of unions.[10]

From his position on the Subcommittee on Labor-Management Relations and the Committee on Post Office and Civil Service, Clay sponsored several bills that sought to secure or improve the collective bargaining rights of public sector employees. Government workers, at the federal, state, and local level, were not covered by the 1935 National Labor Relations Act, that guaranteed collective bargaining for most private sector workers. In 1962, President John F. Kennedy passed Executive Order 10988 that allowed for collective bargaining for federal employees, but state and local employee relations continued to be guided by state and local law. In 1973, Clay sponsored legislation to give all government workers the right to form unions and bargain collectively. In the late 1980s, Clay also sponsored legislation to expand collective bargaining rights to police and fire fighters. None of these bills advanced out of the House.[11]

In July 1981, Clay proposed legislation to provide new benefits to air traffic controllers, who were in the middle of contract negotiations, including a shortened workweek and new benefit and leave policies. A few weeks later, the air traffic controllers, represented by the Professional Air

Traffic Controllers Organization, went on strike. President Reagan made national news when he promptly fired the striking air traffic controllers. Later in his career, Clay introduced an amendment to the National Labor Relations Act and the Railway Labor Act to prevent employers from permanently replacing striking workers, including air traffic controllers, with new employees. The bill, Clay explained, would "further the economic security of the citizens of this country and promote the democratic values which serve to distinguish our country from all others." The House passed the Workplace Fairness Act in July 1991, but it did not get a vote in the Senate. Clay continued to sponsor similar legislation, but he was frustrated with the Clinton administration for what he perceived as a lackluster attempt to break a Senate filibuster that caused his bill to languish.[12]

As an advocate of improving the education of poor and working-class students and students of color, Clay worked to reduce class sizes, to increase the number of college grants for disadvantaged students, and to boost federal funding for historically Black colleges and universities (HBCU). In 1991, he introduced legislation to provide federal aid to help HBCUs receive private financing. A version of this bill was added to the Higher Education Amendments of 1992, signed by President George H.W. Bush in July 1992. "If America is to be prosperous and stay competitive, we must continue to improve educational opportunities for students of all ages," Clay commented later in the 1990s in response to a growing backlash in the Republican-controlled House against President Clinton's policies for improving public school education.[13]

Clay did not always support Democratic Party initiatives. He criticized the controversial North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), calling it "badly designed" and "fatally flawed." Concerned that NAFTA would undermine the well-being of American workers and weaken job protections, Clay attempted to convince his colleagues of the pitfalls of the bill. "Approval of this measure will increase the downward pressures on the wages of workers in the United States; nullify any movement toward greater labor-management cooperation; discourage efforts to improve the education and skills of low-wage workers; and exacerbate the inequitable distribution of income." With the backing of President Clinton, NAFTA passed the House on November 17, 1993, by a vote of 234 to 200.[14]

Clay's consistent support in his district enabled him to retain his seat despite a series of alleged ethical violations ranging from tax evasion to the misuse of congressional funds. Throughout his career, the Missouri Representative argued that he was the victim of an unfounded government "witch hunt" because of his race and his leadership role on civil rights. "Not many elected officials, black or white, have suffered harassment, humiliation, or intimidation to the degree and extent that I have," Clay remarked. He further contended that African-American leaders faced more scrutiny than their White counterparts. Clay believed the prosecutor in one case acted so unethically that the Missouri legislator introduced a resolution to the impeach the federal prosecutor.[15]

In the early 1990s, Clay became embroiled in a scandal involving the House "bank," an informal, institutional facility some Members used to deposit their congressional pay. The revelation of the bank's long-standing practice of allowing Representatives to write checks with insufficient funds caused a public outcry. Clay vehemently denied "abusing the system" when records revealed he was responsible for numerous overdrafts. "No rules were broken, and no public money was lost," he said. Clay's constituents remained loyal; both in the 1992 primary and in the general election, where he earned 68 percent of the vote.[16]

Moreover, despite several reapportionments that resulted in a growing number of conservative White voters in the outlying suburbs of his district—a consequence of St. Louis's declining population—Clay handily retained his congressional seat. His stiffest opposition for the overwhelmingly Democratic district usually emerged in the primaries. Active in local politics throughout his congressional career, Clay faced a series of challenges from African-American and White candidates alike in St. Louis's tumultuous political environment. Despite this steady opposition, Clay typically won the primaries with ease.[17]

In May 1999, Clay announced his decision to retire at the conclusion of the 106th Congress (1999–2001). "I will continue to speak loudly, boisterously, about the inequities in our society," Clay promised of his remaining time in the office. Clay's colleagues offered many tributes honoring his "brilliant career," ranging from his legislation on behalf of American workers to his commitment to increasing funding for education, especially for minority students. The longtime Representative also received praise for his 1992 book, *Just Permanent Interests: Black Americans in Congress, 1870–1991*.[18]

In 2000, Clay's son, William Lacy Clay Jr., was elected to represent his father's former St. Louis district, making the Clays the second African-American father and son ever to serve in Congress (Harold E. Ford and Harold E. Ford Jr. were the first). In addition to *Just Permanent Interests,* Clay has published several other books including a political memoir, *A Political Voice at the Grass Root*s and *The Jefferson Bank Confrontation: The Struggle for Civil Rights in St. Louis*, a history of the protest that led to his jail sentence in the 1960s.

Manuscript Collection

Harris-Stowe State University, Henry Givens Administrative Building (St. Louis, MO). *Papers*: 1968–2000, amount unknown. The papers of William "Bill" Lacy Clay Sr. contain documents, papers, correspondence, and artifacts generated throughout the congressional career of Representative Clay.

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Louis Stokes

1925–2015

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1969–1999

Democrat from Ohio



Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

In 1971, Louis Stokes of Ohio became the first Black Representative to sit on the powerful House Appropriations Committee, eventually rising to become chair of its Subcommittee on Veterans Affairs, Housing and Urban Development, and Independent Agencies, where he helped direct billions of dollars in federal spending to vital government services. Over the course of his 30-year career in Congress, Stokes, who had spent part of his childhood in public housing in Cleveland before becoming Ohio's first Black Representative in 1969, used his influence to increase opportunities for millions of African Americans. "I'm going to keep on denouncing the inequities of this system, but I'm going to work within it. To go outside the system would be to deny myself—to deny my own existence. I've beaten the system. I've proved it can be done—so have a lot of others," Stokes said. "But the problem is that a black man has to be extra special to win in this system. Why should you have to be a super black to get someplace? That's what's wrong in the society. The ordinary black man doesn't have the same chance as the ordinary white man does."[1]

Louis Stokes was born on February 23, 1925, in Cleveland, Ohio, to Charles and Louise Cinthy Stokes. His parents, who met in Cleveland, were both from Georgia and moved to Ohio as part of the Great Migration, leaving the Jim Crow South for better opportunities in the industrial Midwest. His father worked in a laundromat and died when Louis was young. Stokes and his younger brother Carl were raised by their widowed mother, a domestic worker. The boys' maternal grandmother played a prominent role in their upbringing, tending to the children while their mother cleaned homes in wealthy White suburbs far from downtown Cleveland. Years later, Louise Stokes remembered that she had tried to instill in her children "the idea that work with your hands is the hard way of doing things. I told them over and over to learn to use their heads." Louis Stokes helped the family by shining shoes around his neighborhood and clerking at an Army/Navy store. He attended Cleveland's public schools and served as a personnel specialist in the U.S. Army from 1943 to 1946. During World War II, he served in the segregated Army and spent most of his service in the segregated South. His experience during the war laid bare for Stokes the basic inequities facing African Americans—even those who were willing to sacrifice everything for their country. "The scars on my mind from the discrimination, the indignities, and the segregation which I was forced to accept while wearing the uniform of my country will

never be erased," Stokes told his colleagues on the House Floor. He returned home with an honorable discharge, taking jobs in the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and U.S. Department of the Treasury offices in Cleveland while attending college at night with the help of the GI Bill. He attended the Cleveland College of Western Reserve University from 1946 to 1948. Stokes eventually earned a law degree from the Cleveland Marshall School of Law in 1953 and opened a law firm with his brother. Stokes was married twice and had four children: Shelly, Chuck, Angela, and Lori.[2]

Stokes devoted himself to his law practice, taking on several civil rights cases—often working pro bono on behalf of poor clients and activists. He was an active participant in civic affairs, joining the Cleveland branch of the NAACP and the board of the Cleveland and Cuyahoga bar associations; he also chaired the Ohio State Bar Association's criminal justice committee. Stokes eventually served as vice president of the NAACP's Cleveland chapter and led its legal redress committee for five years. His brother, Carl, pursued a high-profile career in elective office, serving two terms in the Ohio legislature, and in 1967, he won election as mayor of Cleveland, becoming one of the first African Americans to lead a major U.S. city. "For a long time, I had very little interest in politics," Louis Stokes recalled. "Carl was the politician in the family and I left politics to him."[3]

Meanwhile, Louis Stokes enjoyed a growing reputation as a prominent Cleveland attorney. Working on behalf of the Cleveland NAACP, Stokes helped challenge the Ohio legislature's redistricting in 1965 that followed the Supreme Court's "one man, one vote" decisions. The state legislature had fragmented Cleveland's congressional districts, diluting Black voting strength. Stokes joined forces with Charles Lucas, a Black Republican, to challenge Ohio's district map. They lost their case in U.S. District Court, but based on Stokes's written appeal, the U.S. Supreme Court agreed with the brief in 1967. From that decision followed the creation of Ohio's first majority-Black district. Later that year, in December 1967, Stokes made an oral argument before the U.S. Supreme Court in *Terry v. Ohio*, a precedent-setting case that defined the legality of police search and seizure procedures.[4]

At his brother Carl's behest, Louis Stokes made his first run for elective office in 1968. He sought to win the seat in the newly created congressional district that encompassed much of the east side of Cleveland—including Garfield Heights and Newburgh Heights—where African Americans accounted for 65 percent of the population. Stokes was hardly a typical newcomer to the political campaign. Carl put his political network at Louis's disposal. "I ran my brother Louis," Carl Stokes recalled, "and put behind him all the machinery that just elected me mayor." With Carl's help, Louis cofounded the Twenty-First Congressional District Caucus—a political organization that would serve as his base throughout his long congressional career. It provided the supporters, volunteers, and organizational structure that sustained Stokes in the absence of support of the local Democratic machine; it was a loyal cadre that would do everything, from stuffing envelopes and knocking on doors to holding an annual picnic that became a highlight of the community's annual calendar. With the local, White-controlled Democratic Party often opposed to the political ambitions of Black Clevelanders, the caucus helped develop independent Black political power in the city. Stokes also had the advantage of having support from leading Black institutions in the city. He won two vital endorsements: the support of the *Call & Post*, the influential local Black newspaper, and the backing of the vast majority of the local church ministers in the new district.[5]

Stokes won the primary with 41 percent of the vote—double the total of his closest competitor, Black city councilman Leo A. Jackson. Stokes faced minimal opposition in his 14 subsequent primaries. In 1976, White leaders in the local Democratic machine recruited one of the incumbent's former staffers to run against him. Stokes won by a landslide. In the 1968 general election, Stokes faced Republican Charles Lucas, his ally in the legal fight to create a majority-Black district. While their policies slightly differed, both supported a de-escalation of the Vietnam War; both opposed War on Crime rhetoric; and both supported policies to end urban poverty. Their major difference was partisan affiliation, and in a heavily Democratic district this gave Stokes a nearly insurmountable advantage. Stokes tied Lucas to Republican presidential candidate Richard M. Nixon and segregationist Republican Senator and Nixon supporter Strom Thurmond of South Carolina, arguing they would not promote legislation that advanced Black interests. Stokes prevailed with 75 percent of the vote. He won his subsequent 14 general elections by lopsided margins in the heavily Democratic district—taking as much as 88 percent of the vote. Gradually, reapportionment changed the

makeup of the state, eliminating five of Ohio's 24 House seats. Stokes's district expanded to include traditionally White communities like Shaker Heights and Cleveland Heights. Reapportionment in the early 1990s brought in working-class White neighborhoods including Euclid in east Cleveland, but African-American residents still made up 59 percent of the vote in the district.[6]

As a first-term Representative, Stokes received assignments on the Education and Labor Committee and the Internal Security Committee (formerly the House Un-American Activities Committee). During his second term in the House, Stokes earned a seat on the powerful Appropriations Committee, with oversight of all federal spending bills. He was the first Black Representative to win a seat on the prestigious committee. This exclusive assignment required him to relinquish his other committee assignments. Years later, Stokes said of the Appropriations Committee, "It's the only committee to be on. All the rest is window dressing." During his 30-year career, Stokes also served on the Budget Committee from the 94th through the 96th Congress (1975–1981), the Select Committee on Assassinations in the 94th and the 95th Congresses (1975–1979), the Committee on Standards of Official Conduct from the 96th through the 98th Congress (1979–1985) and again in the 102nd Congress (1991–1993), the Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence in the 98th through the 100th Congress (1983–1989), and the Joint Select Committee to Investigate Covert Arms Transactions with Iran in the 100th Congress.[7]

Stokes eventually chaired the Appropriations Committee's Subcommittee for Veterans, HUD, and Independent Agencies. As a "cardinal"—the name given to Appropriations subcommittee chairs—Stokes controlled more than $90 billion annually in federal money. Stokes was also one of just a handful of African-American Members to wield the gavel on multiple panels: the Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence (100th Congress), the Committee on Standards of Official Conduct (97th and 98th Congresses, 102nd Congress), and the Select Committee on Assassinations (95th Congress).

In 1970, local politics back home in Ohio nearly cost Stokes his seat on the Appropriations Committee. In Cleveland, the Twenty-First District Caucus, headed by the Stokes brothers, was involved in several political disputes with the local, White-controlled Democratic Party. To prove their electoral strength in the face of a Democratic machine unwilling to share power, the Stokes-led caucus endorsed a handful of Republicans for local election. For Cleveland-based Democratic Congressman Charles Albert Vanik this was an act of political disloyalty. Vanik, a member of the Ways and Means Committee which, at the time served as Democrats' Committee on Committees, had the responsibility to choose the Ohio Representative to Appropriations following the death of Michael Joseph Kirwan. Initially, he had promised the seat to Stokes, but he revoked the offer unless Stokes resigned as chairman of the Twenty-First District Caucus. In response, the other eight Black Members of the House demanded that Vanik fulfill his promise to Stokes. Eventually Speaker Carl Albert of Oklahoma intervened, persuading Vanik to relent and support Stokes's placement on Appropriations.[8]

Few Black Members served in the House when Stokes arrived on Capitol Hill in 1969. Stokes was joined that year by first-term lawmakers Shirley Chisholm of New York and William Lacy "Bill" Clay Sr. of Missouri, increasing the total number of Black Representatives to nine. Stokes believed that their elections would transform Black congressional politics. "We felt that it was a new day, and that many blacks who lacked representation in Congress would look to us as their representatives." As their number grew, Black legislators sought to create a power base in Congress. Stokes and Clay quickly developed an enduring friendship and became strong supporters of the formation of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC), to promote economic, educational, and social issues important to African-American voters. In 1972, Stokes succeeded Charles C. Diggs Jr. as chair of the CBC and sought to narrow the focus of the caucus to what he believed CBC members could best accomplish in their role as legislators. "From the beginning of the CBC we were trying to be all things to all Black people, and I realized as chairman we needed to understand we were very limited in numbers, we were limited in resources." Under Stokes's guidance, the CBC focused on adding what he called "a black perspective" to legislation. To Stokes, this meant "being able to put an amendment on a bill in committee that you know will affect black people … that you know goes right to the heart of some of the kinds of problems confronted by black people."[9]

Stokes's position on Appropriations was the ideal place for the Cleveland Representative to advocate for funding that aided Black communities, both in his district and nationally. He earned a reputation as a congenial but

determined activist for issues related to Black America and the poor and working class more broadly. In his work in Appropriations, and as a member of the Budget Committee for six years, Stokes fought against cuts to social programs proponents said would balance the budget. Any reduction in federal spending, Stokes argued, would roll back gains made by Africans Americans in the 1960s and 1970s. He described conservative efforts to scale back school desegregation and affirmative action programs as a "full scale attack" on the priorities of Black communities. Despite efforts by the Ronald Reagan administration to curtail funding in 1981, Stokes successfully supported an additional $145 million in Title I grant funding for the education of poor children. "Services and resources necessary to quality in human life (must be) placed irrevocably ahead of weaponry and defense spending," Stokes explained.[10]

Stokes had a special interest in improving federal funding for health care, and he was particularly concerned with reducing what he called the "shocking disparities between the health of minority Americans and the health of white Americans." In the late 1970s, as a member of the Appropriations Committee, Stokes initially and reluctantly supported compromise language that banned federal funds for most abortions but opposed efforts to impose even more restrictive bans on federal funding, which he argued would disproportionately affect women living in poverty. In the Appropriations Subcommittee for Labor, Health, Education, and Welfare, Stokes was a persistent advocate for federal funding to establish Morehouse School of Medicine, which became the third medical school after Howard University College of Medicine and Meharry Medical College whose mission was specifically to train African-American doctors. In 1977, Stokes explained that a new medical school would help lessen the shortage of Black doctors and reduce the "disparity between black and white Americans in the doctor/patient ratio." He also was an early advocate of federal government intervention in the fight against the AIDS epidemic. In 1989, Stokes sponsored the Disadvantaged Minority Health Improvement Act of 1989, which among other things, created the Office of Minority Health and authorized the Department of Health and Human Services to fund programs and studies "with respect to the prevention and control among minority groups of diseases or other adverse health conditions." A year later, under new sponsorship, a similar bill passed the House and Senate and was signed into law. During debate on the House Floor, Stokes was recognized as "the father of the legislation for many, many years."[11]

During his career Stokes, rather than focus on funding local projects that gained favor with voters, maintained a national perspective in his Appropriations responsibilities. He once told a reporter: "I've had to analyze how I see my role in the House. I see myself as representing a broad minority constituency not only in the district, but nationally." And as subcommittee chair, Stokes discussed his desire to reduce the number of earmarks in the VA-HUD budget. Nevertheless, Stokes was attentive to local concerns; during more than two decades on the committee, Stokes steered hundreds of millions of federal dollars into projects in his home state, including funding for community colleges, public housing, economic development, infrastructure projects, and the funding of a NASA facility west of Cleveland.[12]

Democratic leaders frequently sought to capitalize on Stokes's reputation for trustworthiness and fairness—turning to him to lead high-profile committees and handle controversial national issues, as well as the occasional ethics scandal in the House. When Representative Henry B. González of Texas abruptly resigned as chair of the Select Committee on Assassinations after a dispute with staff and Members, Speaker Thomas P. "Tip" O'Neill Jr. of Massachusetts tapped Stokes to lead the panel, which was investigating the circumstances surrounding the deaths of President John F. Kennedy and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. During the hearings, Stokes made national news when he questioned King's assassin, James Earl Ray. In 1978, the committee filed 27 volumes of hearings and a final report that recommended administrative and legislative reforms regarding the investigation of political assassinations and prosecution of people involved in assassinations. While the panel found that the King and the Kennedy murders may have involved multiple people (James Earl Ray and Lee Harvey Oswald have traditionally been described as lone killers), it concluded there was no evidence to support assertions of a broad conspiracy involving domestic groups or foreign governments.[13]

Stokes's chairmanship of the Select Committee on Assassinations led to his appointment by Speaker O'Neill in 1981 as chairman of the House Committee on Standards of Official Conduct (often called the Ethics Committee). Initially hesitant to serve as chair, Stokes accepted the

position after O'Neill agreed to reform the committee structure. The Ohio Representative steered the panel through a turbulent period that included investigations of Members implicated in an FBI bribery sting, an investigation into the finances of the 1984 Democratic Vice-Presidential nominee Geraldine Ferraro, and a scandal that involved inappropriate relationships between lawmakers and House Pages. Stokes left the post in 1985 but returned to lead the Ethics Committee in early 1991. Only months after resuming the chair Stokes was linked to the House "bank" scandal; Stokes had written 551 overdrafts against an informal account maintained by the House Sergeant at Arms. Stokes did not participate in the Committee on Standards and Official Conduct's investigation into the overdraft scandal, and he did not return to the committee the following Congress.[14]

From his seat on the Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, Stokes was a forceful critic of the Reagan administration's foreign policy. He gained national prominence as a member of the House Select Committee to Investigate Covert Arms Transactions with Iran—part of a joint investigative committee with the Senate—when he questioned Lieutenant Colonel Oliver North in 1987 about his role in funding anticommunist Nicaraguan Contras through weapons sales to Tehran. Stokes took exception to North's frequent insistence that he acted on the best interest of the United States, and that the congressional inquiry was counter to American interests abroad. At one juncture he reminded North, "I wore [the uniform] as proudly as you do, even when our government required black and white soldiers in the same Army to live, sleep, eat and travel separate and apart, while fighting and dying for our country."[15]

During the 1990s, Stokes's seniority made him an influential voice on the Appropriations Committee. In 1993, at the start of the 103rd Congress (1993–1995), he assumed the gavel as chair of the Subcommittee on Veterans Affairs, HUD, and Independent Agencies, which controlled one of the largest amounts of discretionary spending in the federal budget. In this position, Stokes prodded federal agencies to diversify their workforce and better serve their minority constituencies. Republicans praised him for his nonpartisan leadership of the subcommittee, but when the GOP won control of the House in the 1994 elections, and Stokes became the ranking member of the panel, he often found himself fighting Republican efforts to cut welfare programs, including public housing. In one committee meeting, Stokes noted that he and his brother, Carl, had grown up in public housing, and that without such assistance "[we] would be either in jail or dead, we'd be some kind of statistic."[16]

In January 1998, Stokes announced that he would retire from the House at the end of the 105th Congress (1997–1999), noting that he wanted to leave "without ever losing an election." He conceded that politics had lost some of its appeal since his brother Carl's death from cancer two years earlier. "We used to talk every day. We could run things by one another," he recalled. "We could think and strategize on political issues. I guess without him here, it really has taken away a lot of what I enjoy about politics. It's not the same." Among his proudest accomplishments as a Representative, Stokes cited both his ability to bring federal money to his district to address needs in housing and urban development and the opportunities that allowed him to set "historic precedents" as an African-American lawmaker in the House. "When I started this journey, I realized that I was the first black American ever to hold this position in this state," Stokes told a newspaper reporter. "I had to write the book … I was going to set a standard of excellence that would give any successor something to shoot for." As his replacement, Stokes supported Stephanie Tubbs Jones, an African-American judge and a former prosecutor who prevailed in the Democratic primary and easily won election to the House in 1998. After his congressional career, Louis Stokes resumed his work as a lawyer in Silver Spring, Maryland. Stokes died on August 18, 2015. He lay in state in Cleveland City Hall on August 24.[17]

Manuscript Collection

Western Reserve Historical Society (Cleveland, OH). *Scrapbooks*: 1948–1998, 10.2 linear feet. The collection consists of 31 volumes that span Louis Stokes's long career in the U.S. House of Representatives, mostly newspaper articles and clippings. The collection also includes awards, certificates, *Congressional Record* excerpts, editorials, invitations, magazine articles, newsletters, pamphlets, press releases, and programs. An external hard drive includes digital images of the volumes.

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George W. Collins

1925–1972

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1970–1972

Democrat from Illinois



Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

A diligent but reserved public servant, George W. Collins served in Congress for two years before he died in office unexpectedly. He had entered politics at the local level in Chicago and leveraged his service to Mayor Richard J. Daley's Democratic political machine to win a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives. Despite a redistricted seat that many experts predicted would lead to his political demise, Collins won a second term in the House in 1972. Following his untimely death in a plane crash only a month after his re-election, Collins's widow, Cardiss Collins, filled his vacancy in the House and served on Capitol Hill for 24 years.

George Washington Collins was born in Chicago, Illinois, on March 5, 1925. The son of Wash and Leanna Collins, George Collins grew up during the Great Depression on the North Side of Chicago. After graduating from Waller High School, Collins entered the U.S. Army as a private in 1943. He served with the Engineers Corps in the South Pacific during World War II before being discharged as a sergeant in 1946. Upon returning to civilian life, Collins attended Northwestern University. In 1958, he married Cardiss Robertson. The couple had one son, Kevin.[1]

Collins gained his first political experience in the local Democratic organization headed by Chicago's powerful longtime mayor, Richard Daley. Appointed precinct captain in 1954 in Chicago's twenty-fourth ward on the West Side, Collins was responsible for helping residents register to vote and locate their polling location. Collins went on to serve as deputy sheriff of Cook County from 1958 to 1961. Collins ascended further in local government as secretary to veteran alderman Benjamin Lewis of the twenty-fourth ward and as an administrative assistant to the Chicago board of health. After Lewis's brutal murder in 1963—he was handcuffed and shot in his office—Collins succeeded his former supervisor as twenty-fourth ward alderman, a position he held until his election to Congress in 1970.[2]

When Representative Daniel John Ronan of Illinois died during his third term in Congress in August 1969, Collins decided to run for the vacant seat. As a faithful member of the Cook County Democratic organization, Collins received the backing of Mayor Daley in the special election for Ronan's unexpired term for the 91st Congress (1969–1971) and for the election for a full term in the 92nd Congress (1971–1973). The district was 42 percent Black and encompassed Chicago's predominantly Black West Side and two working-class White suburbs, Cicero and Berwyn (once labeled the "Selma of the North" by Martin Luther

King Jr.). The Democratic primary election in March 1970 received national media attention because both candidates were African American. During the campaign, Collins emphasized his political experience and his ability to bring improvements to the district because of his connections with city hall. He easily defeated his opponent Brenetta Howell, a community activist, social worker, and mother, with 86 percent of the vote. Collins campaigned mostly in Chicago, where he expected to receive the most support. Democratic organizers in his district told him to avoid Cicero and Berwyn. "They told me not to bring any of my literature out there," Collins said. "Just stay out and they would run me as a straight Democrat."[3]

Aided by the citywide influence of the Daley machine, Collins defeated Republican Alex Zabrosky, a White engineer and steel executive from Berwyn, in the general election, 56 to 44 percent. Collins won Chicago voters by an overwhelming margin, while Zabrosky carried the suburbs with a more modest majority. Collins's 1970 election also marked the first time two African Americans represented Chicago simultaneously in Congress; William L. Dawson had held a Chicago seat in the House since 1943.[4]

Sworn in on November 16, 1970, Collins was assigned to the Government Operations Committee as he finished out the remaining six weeks of the term and gained an additional assignment to the Public Works Committee at the beginning of the 92nd Congress. Vowing to serve his constituents "in any way," he made frequent trips home to Chicago to ensure that he kept in touch with voters. To advance the interests and concerns of his Chicago district, the Illinois Representative promoted a wide range of legislation to help low-income and underserved communities. Although Collins supported President Richard M. Nixon's proposals to provide a minimum federal payment to struggling families with children, they differed over how much aid to provide. Nixon's proposed Family Assistance Plan provided up to $3,720 in annual payments for a family of four. Collins and several of his colleagues in the newly formed Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) cosponsored the Adequate Income Act of 1971, which sought to guarantee a minimum income of $6,500 a year for a family of four. He also introduced a bill which would fund aid programs at higher rates to reduce the share covered by states.[5]

From his seat on the Government Operations Committee's Subcommittee on Legal and Monetary Affairs, Collins participated in an oversight hearing on the growing and largely unregulated tax preparation industry. "Many low- and moderate-income taxpayers are forced to pay what is in effect a surtax in order to find out how much tax they owe," Collins said. "This should not be." He introduced a bill requiring the U.S. Treasury Department to provide free tax preparation to people making under $10,000 a year. A separate Legal and Monetary Affairs Subcommittee hearing revealed that low-income homeowners in Detroit had been defrauded by real estate brokers who sold dilapidated houses using mortgages insured by the Federal Housing Administration (FHA). Back in Chicago, Collins met with officials from the Department of Housing and Urban Development and helped convince them to bar several real estate brokerages accused of selling substandard homes on the city's West Side from accessing FHA-backed mortgages.[6]

As a veteran of World War II, Collins cared deeply about the welfare of American soldiers, and he worked to end racial discrimination in the armed forces. In 1971, Collins and nine other members of the CBC toured American military bases to investigate widespread allegations of racial discrimination. He and his CBC colleagues conducted a series of hearings to investigate the complaints. Known as a Member who preferred to work quietly behind the scenes, Collins made only occasional speeches on the floor during his tenure in the House. When Vice President Spiro T. Agnew accused African-American Representatives of exaggerating the unequal and at times desperate circumstances of many African Americans living in the United States, several CBC members, including Collins, reproached him. "Mr. Agnew, take off those rose-colored glasses," Collins said. "When the black leadership talk about social, economic, and financial conditions of the black and the poor, it is very real."[7]

Despite a comfortable margin of victory in his initial election to office, Collins's bid for a second term in Congress was uncertain. As a result of a court-ordered redistricting plan for Illinois, Collins faced another product of the Chicago Democratic machine, Frank Annunzio, an Illinois Representative first elected in the 89th Congress (1965–1967), in a newly drawn district that was about 60 percent Black and extended east to west from the heart of downtown Chicago to the western portion of the city. Allegedly offered a position in the city administration in return for not opposing Annunzio, Collins defied the mayor and declared his intention to enter the upcoming election.

Relations between the Chicago Democratic machine and the city's African-American political leadership had deteriorated in the aftermath of a split between the mayor and South Side Representative Ralph H. Metcalfe after Metcalfe accused Daley of devoting insufficient attention to the issue of police brutality in Chicago's Black neighborhoods. In response to Collins's decision to run, Daley, hoping to maintain his relationship with other Black lawmakers, convinced Annunzio to run for an open congressional seat in a district largely composed of various ethnic European groups, including Polish and German Americans that was vacated by Representative Roman Conrad Pucinski. In the Democratic primary in March 1972, Collins handily defeated Rhea Mojica Hammer, an associate producer of a Spanish-language television program. In the general election, Collins trounced his Republican opponent, real estate broker Thomas Lento with 83 percent of the vote.[8]

On December 8, 1972, a month after his re-election to a second term, Collins died in an airplane crash that killed 43 of the 61 passengers and crew onboard a flight from Washington, DC, to Chicago, where Collins had planned to organize a Christmas party for children in his district. Representative Louis Stokes of Ohio, the chair of the CBC, eulogized his colleague: "The legacy which George Collins leaves is an abiding devotion to the people. … Those of us who served with him saw his strength and balance. The legacy he left all of us is that we should renew our devotion to mankind." Shortly after Collins's death, his widow, Cardiss, won the special election to fill his vacant congressional seat, becoming the only African-American woman to succeed her husband in Congress.[9]

Manuscript Collection

University of Illinois at Chicago, Special Collections and University Archives Department, Richard J. Daley Library (Chicago, IL). *Papers*: 1970–1996, 287 linear feet. The Cardiss Collins papers include the papers of Collins's husband, former U.S. Representative George W. Collins.

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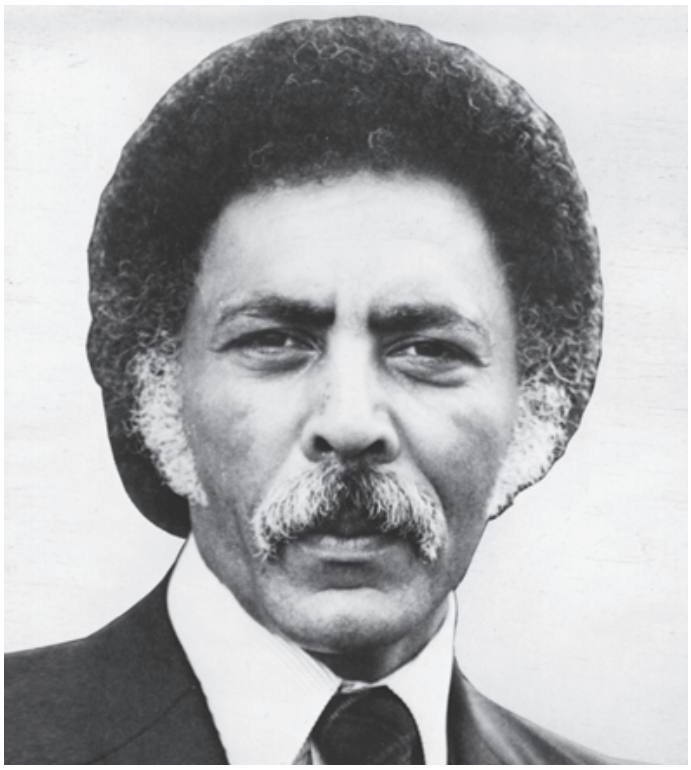
Ronald V. Dellums

1935–2018

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1971–1998

Democrat from California



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Born and raised in the northern California district where both the free speech movement and the Black Panthers were founded in the 1960s, Ronald V. Dellums embraced the activist spirit of the region, taking his seat in Congress in 1971 as an outspoken critic of the Vietnam War. Throughout his nearly three-decade career in the U.S. House of Representatives, Dellums remained true to his antiwar principles, consistently working to reduce the military budget. Initially a politician who believed more could be accomplished outside the establishment, the California Representative eventually chaired two standing committees and became adept at building congressional coalitions to achieve his legislative agenda. "It was never about personal battles," Dellums recalled upon his retirement from the House. "It has always been about ideas. Individuals come and go, but ideas must ultimately transcend, and ideas must ultimately prevail."[1]

Ronald Vernie Dellums was born on November 24, 1935, in Oakland, California, to Verney Dellums, a Pullman porter and a longshoreman, and Willa Dellums, a beautician and government clerk. His uncle, C.L. Dellums—a leader in the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters union—served as a role model and as a political influence. Ron Dellums attended McClymonds High School before graduating from Oakland Technical High School in 1953. After a short stint at San Francisco City College in California, he enlisted in the Marine Corps in 1954. Dellums faced racial discrimination from senior officers and was denied admission into Officer Candidate School despite having the highest test scores in his training battalion. While in the service, Dellums married Arthurine Bethea, and they had two children: Michael and Pam. He and Arthurine later divorced. In 1956, at the end of his two-year enlistment in the Marines, he enrolled at Oakland City College where he earned an associate's degree in 1958. He continued his education at San Francisco State College, graduating with a bachelor's degree in 1960. Two years later, he was awarded a master's degree in social work from the University of California at Berkeley. In 1962, he married Leola "Roscoe" Higgs, an attorney; the couple had a daughter, Piper, and two sons, Erik and Brandy. They divorced in 1999, and Dellums married Cynthia Lewis in 2000.[2]

After earning his master's degree, Dellums worked in a series of social work jobs that promoted his involvement with community affairs and local politics in the Bay Area. He began his career as a psychiatric social worker for the

California department of mental hygiene from 1962 to 1964. Between 1964 and 1968, Dellums directed several area programs, including the Bayview Community Center in San Francisco, Hunter's Point Youth Opportunity Council, and the San Francisco Economic Opportunity Council. He later found employment at San Francisco State College and the University of California at Berkeley as a lecturer and worked as a consultant for programs across the country funded by federal War on Poverty legislation passed in the mid-1960s. At the urging of friends and members of the community, Dellums made his first foray into politics when he sought and won a seat on the Berkeley city council in 1967. Asked to describe his approach to politics, he responded, "I'd listen and try to understand what people had to say, but then I'd act on my own beliefs. That's the only way anyone should run for office."[3]

While serving on the council, Dellums mounted a campaign in 1970 for the congressional seat encompassing Berkeley, a university town, and nearby Oakland, one of the most populated and impoverished cities in California. The district was majority White, about 40 percent Black, and home to Asian and Hispanic communities. In the Democratic primary, Dellums squared off against the six-term incumbent Jeffery Cohelan. Running on an antiwar platform, he criticized Cohelan's late opposition to America's involvement in Vietnam. As a 34-year-old, African-American candidate, Dellums connected with the anti-establishment current that was prevalent in Berkeley and Oakland. He also made a concerted effort to appeal to voters across the diverse district. "[I] entered the campaign for Congress with a fervent belief that beyond ethnicity, it would be possible to bring women, labor, seniors, youths, and the poor into a coalition of the 'powerless,'" he later recollected. Dellums's grassroots campaigning ultimately helped him upset Cohelan. After garnering 55 percent of the vote, Dellums remarked that the race "brought up the new versus the old generation issue, war versus peace, open versus closed politics."[4]

The November general election attracted national attention even though Dellums was virtually assured of winning the heavily Democratic district. Vice President Spiro T. Agnew campaigned against Dellums, a vocal critic of the Richard M. Nixon administration's policy in Vietnam, calling him an "out-and-out radical" and an "enthusiastic backer of the Black Panthers." The Vice President's visit to the district did little to slow Dellums's momentum and, in fact, seemed to generate more publicity for his campaign. "One person I forgot to thank," Dellums quipped in his victory speech, "my public relations agent, Spiro T. Agnew." Dellums defeated Republican candidate John Healy, a 25-year-old accountant, and third-party candidate Sarah Scahill with 57 percent of the vote to become one of the first African Americans to represent a majority-White congressional district.[5]

Dellums served on four standing committees during his House career. He served on the Committee on the District of Columbia from his first term in the 92nd Congress (1971–1973) until the 103rd Congress (1993–1995), after which the panel was terminated and folded into the Committee on Government Reform and Oversight. Dellums was also a long-serving Member of the Armed Services Committee, from the 93rd Congress through the 105th Congress (1973–1999). Dellums chaired the District of Columbia Committee for 14 years, from the 96th Congress to the 102nd Congress (1979–1993) and led the Armed Services Committee in the 103rd Congress. At various points in his career, he also held assignments on the Foreign Affairs Committee, the Post Office and Civil Service Committee, the Select Committee on Intelligence, and the Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence.

With his election to the 92nd Congress, Dellums quickly made headlines in his district and around the country. Unlike many first-term Members of Congress, who chose to learn the ropes quietly, Dellums adopted an active and vocal approach, introducing more than 200 pieces of legislation. Groomed in the radical tradition of his district, he displayed little patience for congressional customs and the inner workings of the institution. After the House refused to conduct an investigation on possible American war crimes in Vietnam, he spearheaded a plan to hold his own ad hoc hearings—an unusual and controversial move that provoked scorn from some longtime politicians but drew considerable media attention. "I am not going to back away from being called a radical," Dellums remarked defiantly during his first term. "If being an advocate of peace, justice, and humanity toward all human beings is radical, then I'm glad to be called a radical." Dellums was one of the 13 Members who founded the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) in 1971 and served as chair during the 101st Congress (1989–1991). Through the caucus, he convened informal hearings on racism in the military, an issue of personal importance because of the discrimination he encountered in the Marines.[6]

During the next 15 years, the California Representative led the charge against apartheid by sponsoring numerous bills to end U.S. support for the South African government and participating in a series of peaceful demonstrations—which, on one occasion, led to his arrest at the South African Embassy in Washington, DC. During the 92nd Congress, he introduced a measure to prohibit American companies from operating in South Africa. The first legislator to propose such severe restrictions against the apartheid regime, Dellums, alongside the CBC, waged a long, intense battle to highlight the discriminatory practices of South Africa. "We are serious in our determination that positive action be taken soon to terminate U.S. business relationships with apartheid and repression in Africa," Dellums affirmed on behalf of the CBC in 1972. On June 18, 1986, Dellums achieved one of his most significant legislative triumphs. During debate on a bill sponsored by William H. Gray III of Pennsylvania to impose moderate sanctions on South Africa, Dellums proposed a floor amendment to replace the bill's contents with a more stringent measure calling for a near-total U.S. trade embargo and divestment by American companies of their holdings in the African nation. In an unusual turn of events, the opposition chose not to request a recorded roll call vote after a voice vote passed Dellums's amendment. Dellums expressed shock at how easily the bill had passed as well as profound satisfaction: "This is the highest point of my political life, the most significant and personally rewarding," Dellums rejoiced. "It's been a long journey to this moment." Although the Senate ultimately passed a more moderate measure than the House, the two chambers united to easily override a veto by President Ronald Reagan. The Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act became law on October 2, 1986.[7]

One of Dellums's long-standing goals as a Representative was to slash the military budget. In the 93rd Congress (1973–1975) he sought a seat on the powerful Armed Services Committee. While this decision may have seemed out of character for an antiwar politician, Dellums explained that if he could become well versed in military affairs, he would be better able to argue the merits of his views on military oversight. "People sent me [to Congress] … to challenge the insanity of war and to raise my voice in the name of peace," he later reflected. The CBC drafted a letter to House Democratic leadership on Dellums's behalf, but the chair of Armed Services, Felix Edward Hébert of Louisiana, and the Committee on Committees opposed the appointment of an outspoken war critic. Refusing to yield, the CBC, led by Louis Stokes of Ohio and William Lacy "Bill" Clay Sr. of Missouri, won the backing of Speaker Carl Albert of Oklahoma to place Dellums on the panel. He became the first African-American lawmaker to serve on the committee. Dellums was appointed to the committee at the same time as Patricia Scott Schroeder of Colorado, another critic of the Vietnam War. In retaliation, Hébert set aside one seat for the two newcomers at the first Armed Services meeting in 1973. Dellums and Schroeder decided to not allow Hébert to see that his antics bothered them, so they sat side by side on the one chair the entire first committee meeting. "Let's not give these guys the luxury of knowing they can get under our skin," Dellums urged Schroeder. "Let's sit here and share this chair as if it's the most normal thing in the world."[8]

In 1982, Dellums sponsored an alternative defense authorization bill that slashed military spending by more than $50 billion. The measure would become part of the CBC's alternative budget, which the caucus proposed annually and that generally called for higher spending on domestic social programs along with cuts to defense spending. Though the resolution received little support outside the CBC, Dellums considered it one of his most meaningful legislative endeavors. "We will be back next year and the year after that and the year after that until we right the wrongs in this madness," he asserted. Dellums remained steady in his opposition to most U.S. military operations, including the American invasion of Grenada in 1983 and the Persian Gulf War in 1991, but he did support some peacekeeping efforts in Africa and the Caribbean. His unswerving commitment to reduce military funding became a hallmark of his House career.[9]

Throughout his tenure on Armed Services, Dellums challenged the Cold War era arms race. On several occasions, he worked with Republican John Richard Kasich of Ohio to stop production of the B-2 bomber. Dellums also opposed the development of the MX missile—a land-based intercontinental ballistic missile that could deploy multiple nuclear warheads midair, each of which could be programmed to hit a different target. Beginning in 1977, he regularly offered amendments to block funding for the research, development, and procurement of nuclear missiles generally. Dellums asserted that the MX program would be too costly and divert funding from economically depressed cities, while also increasing the likelihood of a

deadly nuclear war. "The planet is in extraordinary danger from the potential of a nuclear holocaust and … the MX missile is one of the outward manifestations of that potential danger," he warned.[10]

Dellums rose through the ranks of Armed Services and chaired several subcommittees before making history as the panel's first African-American chair in 1993. Initially, some Members wondered how Dellums's record of opposition to defense spending would influence his decisions as chair. But Dellums ultimately let the committee work its will. His panel's first defense authorization bill allowed a continued ban on gays in the military, a pay increase for the armed services, and a boost in anti-missile funding—all despite his objections. "I'm not here to be dictatorial," he said. "My job as chair is to maintain the integrity of the process."[11]

Dellums chaired the Armed Services Committee during the early post-Cold War era and oversaw broad reductions to the defense budget. The 1995 defense authorization reduced federal defense spending to 18 percent of the total budget, approaching levels not seen since before World War II. "The Berlin Wall is down. The cold war is over," Dellums said on the House Floor. "We now have to think … in very radically different ways." In late 1993, after a battle between U.S. servicemembers and a Somali militia in Mogadishu left a dozen American troops dead, Dellums held a hearing to examine the U.S. military's role in the UN peacekeeping mission in the African nation. Amid congressional criticism of the Clinton administration for the casualties, Dellums cosponsored a measure with Lee Herbert Hamilton of Indiana, chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee, that would have required the President to regularly consult with a designated group of Members of Congress regarding military activities abroad. Paradoxically, Dellums's advocacy for peace led him to support U.S. military intervention in Bosnia to stop the genocide against the country's Muslim population. Dellums served as chair for one term before becoming the ranking member in 1995 when the Republicans took control of the House for the first time in 40 years.[12]

As longtime chair of the Committee on the District of Columbia, Dellums examined a range of issues affecting the nation's capital, such as transportation, schools, housing, and public safety. Envisioning himself as "an advocate, not an overseer, of District affairs," Dellums prioritized statehood for Washington, DC. During his first term, he introduced a bill to call for a referendum in which District residents could vote on statehood. Under Dellums's leadership, the District of Columbia Committee approved statehood legislation twice—in 1987 and 1992. "There should be no colonies in a democracy, and the District of Columbia continues to be a colony," Dellums said. A public transportation advocate, Dellums sponsored legislation to fund the completion of the capital city's 103-mile Metrorail system. To improve the city's finances, Dellums oversaw passage of a bill that increased the federal government's annual payment to the District government, which was provided to offset the cost of the federal government's presence in the city. The legislation also set a formula for future federal payments, avoiding the need for negotiations each year.[13]

Dellums rarely faced serious re-election challenges, winning more than 60 percent of the vote throughout most of his House career. His popularity among his constituents, especially in the urban areas of Oakland and Berkeley, allowed him to escape the fate of several Members who lost their congressional seats after they were linked to the House "bank" scandal in the 102nd Congress (1991–1993). By some accounts Dellums had more than 800 overdrafts on what was an informal bank account overseen by House officials. In addition to strong support from his constituents, reapportionment in 1992 gave him a safer district; with the elimination of the outlying suburbs, Dellums captured more than 70 percent of the vote in his three remaining contests.[14]

In February 1998, the 14-term Representative shocked his colleagues when he resigned from the House, citing personal reasons. In his farewell speech, Dellums reflected on his long and successful career: "To get up every day and put on your uniform and put on your tie and march to the floor of Congress knowing that, in your hands, in that card, in your very being, you have life and death in your hands, it is an incredible thing." After Congress, Dellums worked as a lobbyist, starting his own firm in Washington, DC. In 2006, he returned to the political spotlight when he was elected mayor of Oakland at age 70. "You just asked an old guy to come out of the comfort zone and play one more game," Dellums observed. Ronald Dellums died on July 30, 2018, at his home in Washington, DC.[15]

Manuscript Collection

African American Museum and Library at Oakland (Oakland, CA). *Papers*: ca. 1971–1999, 432 linear feet. The Ronald V. Dellums Congressional Papers consists of records, artifacts, memorabilia, and related items produced during his career as a member of the U.S. House of Representatives. These materials include committee files; hearing and report books; correspondence with constituents and colleagues;

sponsored or cosponsored bills; personal files; staff files; press releases and other publications; and subject reference files. Significant items include original copies of correspondence and memoranda from House colleagues, staff, and constituents, original copies of invitations to various functions, and photographs. Also included are memorabilia from Representative Dellums's life (awards, plaques, certificates, congressional and military commendations), video recordings of House Floor tributes upon his retirement from Congress, and notes and reports from his work overseeing U.S. Department of Defense budgets. The collection finding aid is available in the repository and online.

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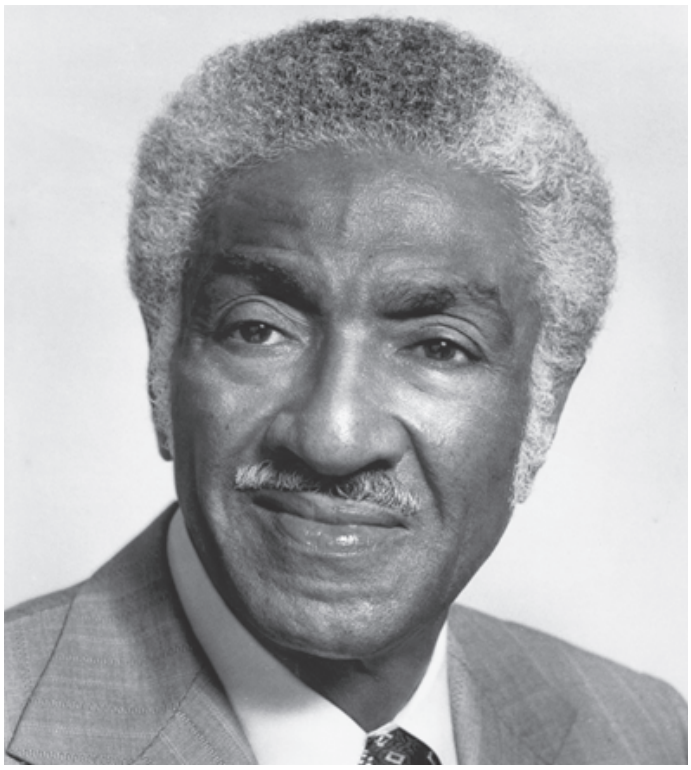
Ralph H. Metcalfe

1910–1978

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1971–1978

Democrat from Illinois



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In 1970, Ralph H. Metcalfe won election to the U.S. House of Representatives from a South Side Chicago district with a storied history of electing Black lawmakers to Congress. A former Olympic champion, Metcalfe rose through the ranks of the Chicago Democratic political machine before winning a seat in Congress. Over time, Metcalfe broke with the city's powerful machine, risking his career but winning him loyal support among his constituents and his Black colleagues in the House. "I'm willing to pay whatever political consequences I have to, but frankly, I don't think there will be any," he remarked. On Capitol Hill, Metcalfe was a founding member of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC), where he joined his colleagues in putting "the interests of black people first—above all else, and that means even going against our party or our political leaders if black interests don't coincide with their positions."[1]

Ralph Harold Metcalfe was born in Atlanta, Georgia, on May 29, 1910, to Marie Attaway, a seamstress, and Clarence Metcalfe, a stockyard worker. As a child, Metcalfe moved with his family to the South Side of Chicago in search of "better opportunities for education and so that we would not come up in a climate of suffering the indignities that black people were suffering during that particular time," he recalled. After graduating from Chicago's Tilden Technical School in 1930, Metcalfe attended Marquette University in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, where he received a bachelor's degree in 1936. He completed his education by earning a master's degree in physical education from the University of Southern California in 1939.[2]

During high school, Metcalfe began a long and successful career as a track athlete. "I was told by my coach that as a black person I'd have to put daylight between me and my nearest competitor," Metcalfe recalled. "I forced myself to train harder so I could put that daylight behind me." Metcalfe became a household name in the United States when he medaled in the 1932 and 1936 Olympics. During the infamous Berlin Games of 1936, Metcalfe and Jesse Owens led the American 400-meter relay team to a world record, much to the dismay of German spectators, especially Adolf Hitler, who expected the German athletes to showcase their superiority by sweeping the track and field events. "There was talk of boycotting Hitler and his doctrine of Nordic supremacy," Metcalfe recalled. "But we thought we would make a contribution. There were more negroes on that team than any previous United States Olympic team. We won and it stuck a pin in the balloon of Hitler's doctrine."[3]

Following his retirement from competitive sports in 1936, Metcalfe taught political science and coached track at Xavier University in New Orleans until 1942. During World War II, he served in the U.S. Army Transportation Corps from 1943 to 1945, where he rose to the rank of first lieutenant and earned the Legion of Merit for his physical education training program. When he returned to Chicago after the war, Metcalfe got to know William L. Dawson, a House Member representing Chicago's South Side and a powerful figure in the city's political machine headed by Mayor Richard J. Daley. Dawson took Metcalfe under his political wing and arranged for his selection as director of the civil rights department of the Chicago commission on human relations, a position he held until 1949. Metcalfe then headed the Illinois state athletic commission from 1949 to 1952. In 1947, he married Madalynne Fay Young. The couple had one child, Ralph Metcalfe Jr.[4]

With Dawson's backing, Metcalfe won election as Chicago's third ward Democratic committeeman in 1952. He quickly worked his way up the ranks of Daley's political machine. After becoming an alderman in 1955, he was later selected by Daley to serve as president pro tempore of the Chicago city council.[5]

When Representative Dawson decided to retire from the House in 1970, he chose Metcalfe to replace him. In the Democratic primary, Metcalfe faced A.A. "Sammy" Rayner, an alderman and an undertaker, who blamed the predominantly White power structure of Chicago for the problems facing many African Americans in the city. Metcalfe defended his ties to Daley's machine, reassuring voters that the political organization "is structured in a businesslike manner to get things done and, therefore, it is an asset." Gang violence was a central issue in the campaign—Rayner viewed gangs as a byproduct of the region's economic distress, while Metcalfe ran on a "law and order" platform committed to eradicating violent crime. With the backing of Daley and Dawson, Metcalfe defeated Rayner and went on to win election to the House easily, with 91 percent of the vote against Republican Jayne Jennings, a schoolteacher, a few days before Dawson's death in November 1970. After reapportionment in 1972, Metcalfe's district remained predominantly Black, but its boundaries shifted to include a largely White neighborhood surrounding the University of Chicago. Metcalfe faced little Republican opposition in each of his three re-elections.[6]

During his first term in the House, Metcalfe was assigned to the Committee on Merchant Marine and Fisheries and also became the first African-American Representative to sit on the Interstate and Foreign Commerce Committee; he served on both committees throughout his tenure. He served on the Post Office and Civil Service Committee during the 95th Congress (1977–1979). In 1971, Metcalfe was one of 13 founding members of the CBC.

In the House, Metcalfe focused on assisting his South Side district. Prior to arriving on Capitol Hill, Metcalfe had led the Chicago city council's housing committee, and he used that experience to shape bills in Congress. Metcalfe introduced legislation to increase the availability of home improvement loans and federal housing programs to benefit his constituents. He also advocated funding for security measures to protect residents living in public housing and fought to eliminate "redlining," the discriminatory practice of withholding funds for home loans and insurance from low-income and predominately Black neighborhoods. "It is essential that individuals living in our cities, or individuals of low or moderate income residing in rural areas, be provided with the means and incentive to remain in their communities," he argued. As a strong proponent of gun control, Metcalfe introduced legislation to prohibit the manufacture and sale of handguns. "The people in the First Congressional District of Illinois know the terror of uncontrolled handguns," Metcalfe said. "They know that the only solution to this epidemic of violent handgun crime is an absolute ban on the manufacture, sale, and distribution of these weapons throughout the United States."[7]

As a CBC member, Metcalfe was selected to voice the caucus's position on health care policy. He chaired the CBC's health subcommittee (later called the CBC Health Braintrust) and helped sponsor a national conference in 1971 to address the needs of African Americans. To reduce racial disparities, Metcalfe favored efforts to increase the number of Black doctors, the expansion of services covered under Medicare, and the protection of funding for sickle-cell anemia research. He criticized the President Richard M. Nixon administration for failing to support legislation aimed at improving health services for those most in need and exhorted his House colleagues to "design a health care package which adequately meets the needs and aspirations of poor and minority groups." Metcalfe delivered the CBC's official response to President Gerald R. Ford's 1976 State of the Union Address, in which he criticized the President's

defense spending and urged greater federal investment into domestic employment and public health programs.[8]

Metcalfe's actions to combat discrimination in American society extended to his work on the Interstate and Foreign Commerce Committee, where he drafted provisions in the Railroad Revitalization and Regulatory Reform Act designed to end persistent civil rights violations in the industry. Drawing on his own athletic career, Metcalfe cosponsored the Amateur Sports Act of 1978, which provided federal funding for American Olympic athletes and increased opportunities for minorities, women, and disabled Americans to participate in amateur sports.[9]

Although his legislative agenda focused heavily on domestic issues, Metcalfe had an interest in U.S. foreign policy as well. As chair of the Merchant Marine and Fisheries Subcommittee on the Panama Canal, he held hearings on the governance of the U.S.-controlled Panama Canal Zone. Metcalfe made several visits to Central America and oversaw the enforcement of laws providing equal employment opportunity, improving access to housing, and merging the U.S. and Panamanian school systems. He supported the 1977 treaties that eventually ceded American control of the canal and the surrounding territory to Panama, but he also introduced a resolution that American territory and property in the Canal Zone be disposed of through legislative action. After his death, Congress addressed Metcalfe's concerns with the Panama Canal Act of 1979.[10]

Metcalfe joined his African-American colleagues in the House in calling for the United States to intervene decisively in African affairs, particularly in South Africa. In 1975, he introduced a resolution urging the U.S. government to end all means of support for the apartheid South African government until the end of its government-sanctioned policy of racial discrimination. In a speech on the House Floor, Metcalfe praised the goals of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), an intergovernmental body of independent African nations, which had outlined its support for diplomatic or military intervention to end apartheid in South Africa and White-minority rule in Rhodesia. Metcalfe warned his colleagues that the U.S. must "reassess its own policies in southern Africa" and embrace the OAU's priorities to avoid violent conflict in the region.[11]

In 1972, Metcalfe made national news when he publicly broke with Chicago Mayor Richard Daley, his friend and political ally, and the city's Democratic machine over the issue of police brutality against the Black community. The fissure emerged in late 1971, when Metcalfe opposed the party's decision to endorse Cook County State's Attorney Edward Hanrahan for re-election. Hanrahan had authorized the controversial 1969 police raid that resulted in the murder of Black Panther leader Fred Hampton. In a major blow to Daley's machine, Metcalfe supported Hanrahan's Republican opponent, who won the 1972 election. In the spring of 1972, two Black dentists, one of whom chaired a citizens' committee to support Metcalfe's congressional campaigns, were harassed and arrested by police over alleged traffic violations. Metcalfe spoke out against police brutality and invited Daley to come to the South Side for a meeting on police reform. When Daley refused, Metcalfe pulled his support for the machine and sought broad, systematic reforms in Chicago. "The Mayor doesn't understand what happens to black men on the streets of Chicago, and probably never will," Metcalfe declared. In Washington, he testified before the House Select Committee on Crime to highlight the Chicago Police Department's discriminatory hiring practices and lack of diversity. Back at home, he organized a panel to conduct public hearings for victims and witnesses of police brutality and created a citizens' group to lobby the city government for reforms. "I've always spoken out for my people—for what I believe but in the past I've tried to remedy situations on a case-by-case basis, trying to work within the party or official government circles," Metcalfe said. "In the brutality field, however, I can't just stand by while each and every case is investigated. I want the system changed."[12]

When Metcalfe backed William Singer, Daley's opponent in the 1975 Chicago mayoral primary, Daley retaliated by depriving Metcalfe of the ability to hand out patronage positions. He also orchestrated a challenge against Metcalfe in the 1976 Democratic primary for Chicago's South Side congressional seat. In his fight against what he termed a "political dictatorship" in Chicago, Metcalfe asserted, "There is only one issue. The right of black people to choose their own public officials and not have them picked from downtown." With the CBC's support, he handily defeated Daley aide Erwin A. France with more than 70 percent of the vote in the bitterly contested primary. "This is a people's victory," Metcalfe declared.[13]

With the death of Mayor Daley in December of 1976, tensions eased between Metcalfe and the Chicago machine. But Metcalfe continued to call attention to racial discrimination in Chicago while attempting to improve police services for his constituents residing in impoverished

neighborhoods. "If we want to strengthen and rebuild Chicago, then we must help the people who are sticking it out in the inner city to survive." During the 94th and 95th Congresses (1975–1979), Metcalfe worked to commemorate the accomplishments of African Americans, sponsoring the first resolutions to make February Black History Month.[14]

Metcalfe died suddenly of an apparent heart attack on October 10, 1978, only a month before his almost certain re-election to a fifth term. Representative Louis Stokes of Ohio praised Metcalfe's dedication to his district and the CBC. "Ralph was a man who had the ability to inspire people," Stokes recalled. "The type of individual who, as you came to know him, you would have to admire."[15]

Manuscript Collections

The Metcalfe Collection (Chicago, IL). *Papers*: ca. 1932–1977, amount unknown. The collection documents Ralph H. Metcalfe's athletic pursuits, including his Olympic track victories, his public service including his tenure with the U.S. House of Representatives, and his involvement with the civil rights movement. The collection has not yet been processed.

Chicago Public Library, Woodson Regional Library, Vivian G. Harsh Research Collection of Afro-American History and Literature (Chicago, IL). *Papers*: 1934–1975, one linear foot. The papers include Ralph H. Metcalfe's early correspondence, awards, photographs, official documents, and memorabilia.

Notes

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8 C. Gerald Fraser, "Health Care Gain Sought by Blacks," 13 December 1971, *New York Times*: 7; Thomas Dotton, "600 in Cambridge This Week for US Black Caucus Forum," 2 April 1972, *Boston Globe*: 1; Ralph Metcalfe, "Blacks Face Struggle for Better Health Care to End Misery and Death," 4 January 1972, *Boston Globe*: 17; *Congressional Record*, House, 93rd Cong., 1st sess. (31 January 1973): 2845–2846; C. Gerald Fraser, "Wider Health Care Urged for Blacks," 12 December 1971, *New York Times*: 77; "Black Caucus Assails Ford for Ignoring Poor," 25 January 1976, *Chicago Tribune*: 16.

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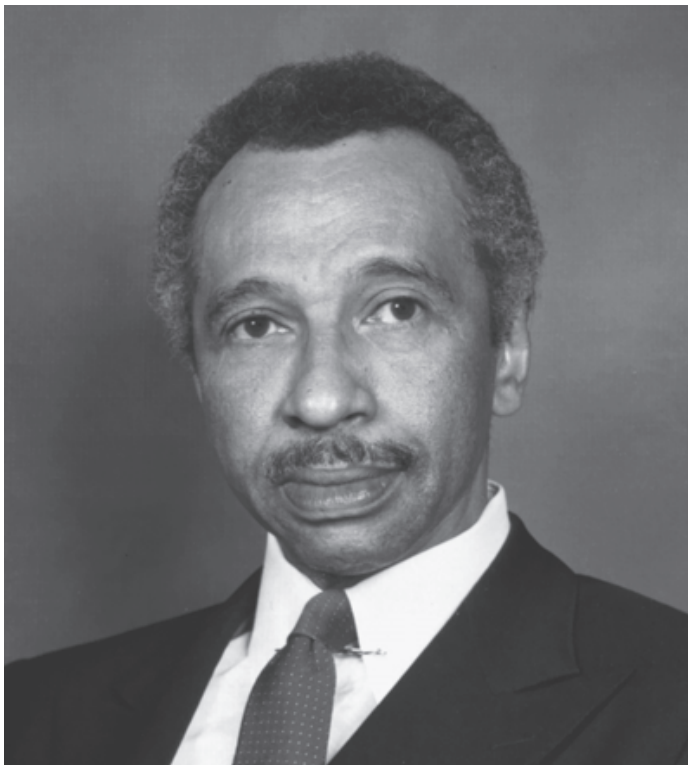
Parren J. Mitchell

1922–2007

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1971–1987

Democrat from Maryland



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A lifelong activist who carried on his family's tradition of public service, Parren J. Mitchell won election to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1970, becoming the first African-American Representative from Maryland. Mitchell was outspoken and unafraid to denounce racial and economic inequality, and he earned a reputation in the House as a dedicated and successful legislator. Mitchell's passion and determination to extend the gains made in the civil rights movement guided his eight terms in the House, especially his work to increase opportunities for minority-owned businesses. "If you believe in fighting racism, you make a commitment for the rest of your life," Mitchell said in a speech honoring Martin Luther King Jr. in 1989. "There's no getting off that train. You can't say, 'I've put five years in fighting racism and now I am finished.' No, you are not finished. Our job is to fight it every day, to continue to shove it down and when it rises up to shove it down even harder."[1]

Parren James Mitchell was born in Baltimore, Maryland, on April 29, 1922, to Clarence Mitchell Sr., a waiter, and Elsie Davis Mitchell, a homemaker. His older brother, Clarence Mitchell Jr., became an influential and longtime lobbyist for the NAACP, serving as director of the Washington bureau from 1950 to 1978. In their youth, Clarence and Parren participated in demonstrations protesting segregation in Baltimore. This early activism fostered Parren Mitchell's interest in promoting civil rights, which shaped much of his future legislative career. Mitchell's political family tree also extended to his sister-in-law, Juanita Jackson Mitchell, who led the Maryland office of the NAACP, and a nephew who served in the Maryland state senate. After graduating from Douglass High School in Baltimore in 1940, Parren Mitchell joined the U.S. Army in 1942, serving as a commissioned officer and a company commander with the all-Black 92nd Infantry Division. Mitchell earned a Purple Heart during his World War II service in Italy. Following his discharge from the armed services in 1946, Mitchell used funding from the 1944 GI Bill of Rights to enroll in Morgan State College in Baltimore. After graduating with a bachelor's degree in 1950, he sued the University of Maryland for admission to the main campus in College Park. Mitchell became the school's first African-American graduate student, earning a master's degree in sociology in 1952. After becoming an instructor of sociology at Morgan State, from 1953 to 1954, Mitchell supervised probation work for the Baltimore city circuit court from 1954 to 1957. He was appointed

the executive secretary of the Maryland commission on interracial problems and relations in 1963 and oversaw the implementation of the state's new public accommodations law. Mitchell also led the Baltimore community action agency, an antipoverty program, from 1965 to 1968, before returning to Morgan State as a professor of sociology and the assistant director of its Urban Affairs Institute. In 1969, Mitchell became president of Baltimore Neighborhoods, Inc., a nonprofit fair housing organization. Mitchell never married and had no children.[2]

Persuaded by local community groups to run for elective office, Mitchell believed he could best help poor and working-class residents of Baltimore from Congress. Consequently, he entered the 1968 Democratic primary for the Maryland House seat that encompassed much of west Baltimore and its bordering suburbs. During the campaign, Mitchell accused the 16-year incumbent and chair of the Committee on House Administration, Samuel Friedel, of losing touch with his constituents, saying, "He doesn't understand the dimensions of the urban crisis, the mood of the people." Mitchell ultimately lost his first election by 5,000 votes. Two years later, he again challenged Friedel in the Democratic primary. Mitchell countered his opponent's political experience by accentuating his family's civil rights activism and deep roots in Baltimore. In a grassroots campaign that focused on his anti-Vietnam War stance and record of community outreach, Mitchell won by a razor-thin margin of 38 votes. He went on to defeat his Republican opponent, lawyer Peter Parker, in the overwhelmingly Democratic district, becoming the first African-American lawmaker to represent the state of Maryland in Congress. Mitchell, whose district was roughly 40 percent Black, was one of the first Black Members to win election in a minority-Black congressional district. After his Maryland district was redrawn in 1971, Mitchell rarely encountered any serious opposition in his bids for re-election. The new district was majority-Black and encompassed much of Baltimore's Black population; most of the White suburbs had been drawn into other districts.[3]

After being sworn in as a Member of the 92nd Congress (1971–1973) on January 3, 1971, Mitchell was assigned to the Banking and Currency Committee and the Select Committee on Small Business. He served on the Banking and Currency Committee for the duration of his House tenure. In the 94th Congress (1975–1977), when the House turned the Select Committee on Small Business into the permanent Small Business Committee, Mitchell took a seat on the panel. Mitchell stepped down from the Small Business Committee on May 15, 1975, to serve on the Budget Committee. He returned to the Small Business Committee at the beginning of the 96th Congress (1979–1981) and served there until his retirement at the end of the 99th Congress (1985–1987). Mitchell was chair of the committee from 1981 until 1987. Mitchell served on the House Budget Committee from the 93rd to the 95th Congresses (1973–1979). In the 94th and 95th Congresses (1975–1979), Mitchell chaired the Budget Committee's Task Force (that committee's term for a subcommittee) on Human Resources. Mitchell also sat on two joint committees: Defense Production and Economic.

As one of the 12 founding members of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC), Mitchell played a significant role in crafting the identity of the new organization in the 1970s. Early on, Mitchell organized a network of Black experts in business and economics to help develop and disseminate ideas to influence legislation. The CBC soon adopted this model—which the caucus called "brain trusts"—in other fields, including health, education, and international affairs. Dubbed the "Little General" for his ability to assemble and organize caucus members with little notice, Mitchell chaired the CBC during the 95th Congress (1977–1979). Representative Cardiss Collins of Illinois noted that Mitchell's efficient and selfless leadership helped lend credibility to the organization. "Parren works hard to make sure each person gets his share of spotlight. He's forging the caucus forward because now we are acting rather than reacting," she said.[4]

Mitchell was known as an outspoken and passionate legislator. One of the first to call for President Richard M. Nixon's resignation after the Watergate scandal, he routinely criticized the White House, under both Republican and Democratic presidencies, during his eight terms in the House for what he perceived as a willingness to neglect the needs of poor Americans. Mitchell's frustration with the slow pace of the advancement of rights for Black Americans sometimes led the press to characterize him as an angry, "unhappy warrior." "I know I get emotional. But it's been more than 20 years from 1954," Mitchell said. "How many people have been jailed, lost, and now you see those gains unraveling."[5]

Early in his congressional career, Mitchell was a vocal opponent of the Vietnam War. "I was part of that breed that came in with some clear-cut objectives," he said. "I

was part of that movement in the country that was deeply dissatisfied with the way the political process was working, and deeply dissatisfied with involvement in Vietnam." In his first term, Mitchell often spoke against the war from the House Floor. The Maryland Representative joined nine of his congressional colleagues on a national tour in 1971 criticizing American foreign policy in Southeast Asia. He and 22 Members of Congress also sought to publicize the antiwar movement by drafting a lawsuit demanding an end to the American bombing and mining of North Vietnamese ports. Mitchell and a handful of Representatives sought to force President Nixon to end a bombing campaign in Cambodia, declaring the action unconstitutional because Congress had not authorized it. Frustrated that money appropriated to subsidize the war in Vietnam drained funding for social programs, Mitchell balked at a Nixon administration proposal to provide North Vietnam financial aid.[6]

Mitchell's primary legislative focus took shape while he was a member, and later chair, of the Small Business Committee. Throughout his congressional career, he directed a series of measures promoting minority-owned businesses and small firms. In 1976 and 1977, Mitchell sponsored the Minority Enterprise Act to expand the Small Business Administration's efforts to fund and support racial minority-owned businesses. Much of Mitchell's bill was eventually included as amendments to the Small Business Act and Small Business Investment Act of 1958, signed into law by President James Earl "Jimmy" Carter in 1978. In 1977, the Maryland Representative attached an amendment to a $4 billion public works program that required state and local governments applying for federal contracts to reserve 10 percent of its funding for minority-owned companies. He later described this effort as "my proudest congressional accomplishment."[7]

Mitchell achieved another major legislative triumph in 1982 when he guided an amendment to a highway funding bill through the House to set aside funding for small businesses whose owners were economically disadvantaged. Despite criticism that his affirmative action proposals constituted a quota system, Mitchell and other proponents maintained that such legislation was necessary to balance the economic scales. As chair of the Small Business Committee, Mitchell criticized the Ronald Reagan administration for what he said were efforts to avoid complying with regulations ensuring that federal contract set-asides were available to "socially and economically disadvantaged businesses." In hearings over federal contracts to small businesses, Mitchell frequently expressed his frustration with the lack of progress in contract procurement for racial minority-owned businesses. "You've got a law, and the law needs to be enforced," he explained at one hearing.[8]

Throughout his career in Congress, Mitchell consistently opposed increased funding for the military, and worked to redirect that money to programs at home. In 1977, for instance, he proposed transferring $6.5 billion from the military budget to domestic programs in the U.S. "I have no great fear of the Soviet Union or China," Mitchell remarked. "If this democracy should ever fail it will come from within because of the enormous disparity between the rich and the poor." As CBC chair, Mitchell lashed out against the Carter administration's proposed 1979 fiscal year budget, which allotted a 3 percent hike for military spending. Calling the boost "unconscionable," Mitchell added, "I certainly feel duped in so far as the military budget is concerned." In 1980, Mitchell sponsored a CBC-backed amendment as an alternative to the House Budget Committee's legislation to balance the budget. Mitchell's unsuccessful proposal would have increased funding for domestic programs for education, job training, and income assistance. According to the Maryland Representative, the measure put forth by the Budget Committee plunged "an economic dagger into the bodies of the poor, the nearly poor and the elderly." The following year, the CBC launched its own comprehensive substitute budget—an initiative put forth annually by the caucus—emphasizing the need for increased funding for domestic programs.[9]

Mitchell's legislative agenda stretched beyond national borders. He advocated for strong economic sanctions against South Africa's apartheid government and was frustrated when the House passed a watered-down version of a bill to limit trade between the United States and South Africa. "You can't compromise with total evil. You can't take a mid-point on immorality," he said. Mitchell also urged U.S. participation in the African Development Fund, an international financial institution that focused on providing money for basic infrastructure projects in Africa. "A brief cost-analysis will show that the benefits received by the United States far exceeds [*sic*] the cost of participating in the African Development Fund, mainly because African countries serve the commercial interests of the United States," Mitchell informed his House colleagues.[10]

Mitchell took great pride in his determination to stay in close contact with his constituents—he commuted to the Capitol every day from Baltimore to ensure he remained accessible to voters. "I know it sounds hokey, but I enjoy all this work," Mitchell admitted. "When you're asked to take this job, you're asked to perform a public service. And that's what I think I do."[11]

Mitchell's announcement in September 1985 that he would not seek re-election to a ninth term came as a surprise to many. "I'm concerned about what you might call the heart of Congress," he said, adding, "Those who are poor are generally treated with contempt. The concerns of minorities are no longer the concerns of this Congress. … It's a step backward." Mitchell denied speculation that his retirement resulted from an ideological rift with the Democratic Party, saying he was leaving because "16 years is a long time to be here." In 1986, he accepted an invitation from Maryland Attorney General Stephen H. Sachs to join his gubernatorial ticket as a candidate for state lieutenant governor; he and Sachs ultimately lost the Democratic nomination. After his retirement from Congress, Mitchell continued to promote economic opportunities for minorities and founded the Minority Business Legal Defense and Education Fund, a private organization that offered legal assistance to the minority business community.[12]

Mitchell died on May 28, 2007, in Baltimore, Maryland, of complications from pneumonia. Mitchell, Representative Elijah E. Cummings of Maryland said, was "a true servant leader, never concerning himself about fame or fortune but, rather, devoting himself entirely to uplifting the people he represented."[13]

Notes

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Charles B. Rangel

1930–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1971–2017

Democrat from New York



Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

Known in his Harlem, New York, district as the "Lion of Lenox Avenue," Representative Charles B. Rangel rose to become the first African-American chair of the powerful Ways and Means Committee. With a House career that spanned 46 years, Rangel—whose safe Democratic district provided him with seniority and stature on Capitol Hill—was one of the longest-serving Members of Congress in American history. Rangel helped found the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) in 1971 and was a staunch defender of urban economic development and international trade. His assignment to the Ways and Means Committee gave him considerable influence over America's tax policy, and he shaped major bills that ranged from anti-drug policies to health care reform. Upon his retirement, Rangel reflected on his long career, noting, "Thank God I never had to decide between doing the right thing or being defeated at the polls."[1]

Charles Bernard Rangel was born on June 11, 1930, in Harlem, New York City, to Blanche Wharton and Ralph Rangel. The second of three children, he was raised by his mother and his maternal grandfather, Charles Wharton. From 1948 to 1952, Rangel served in the U.S. Army and was awarded the Bronze Star and the Purple Heart for his service in the Korean War when he led 40 U.S. soldiers from behind enemy lines despite being wounded himself. After returning to New York and graduating from DeWitt Clinton High School, Rangel earned a bachelor's degree from New York University under the GI bill in 1957. Three years later, he earned a law degree at St. John's University Law School. In 1963, U.S. Attorney General Robert Francis Kennedy appointed him Assistant U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of New York. He later served as an aide to the speaker of the New York assembly and was counsel for the President's Commission to Revise the Draft Laws in 1966. In March 1965, Rangel participated in the famous voting rights march led by Martin Luther King Jr. from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama. In 1966, he won a seat in the New York state assembly, representing central Harlem. During his time in Albany, he forged a bipartisan friendship with Republican Governor Nelson A. Rockefeller. On July 26, 1964, Rangel married the former Alma Carter. They raised two children: Steven and Alicia.[2]

As an assemblyman, Rangel supported Harlem's renowned but embattled U.S. Representative Adam Clayton Powell Jr., whom he considered a mentor. Powell had represented the majority-Black district—encompassing Harlem, East Harlem, the Upper West Side, Washington

Heights, and Inwood—since its creation in 1944. But by 1968, Powell's extended vacations to the Bahamas amid multiple congressional ethics investigations had begun to swing public opinion against him. In 1970, Rangel, rather than get dragged down by Powell's eroding reputation, challenged the incumbent in the Democratic primary, partially out of "plain political survival." Backed by New York Mayor and former Congressman John Vliet Lindsay, Rangel made the race about giving Harlem "effective representation" which he claimed it had lost under Powell's inconsistent tenure. Rangel defeated Powell by only 150 votes in the primary that featured three other candidates, and he later prevailed in the general election. Until ethical issues arose in the late 2000s, Rangel rarely faced primary threats. One of the few close contests was in 1994 when Adam Clayton Powell IV, the son of Rangel's predecessor, won 33 percent of the vote against Rangel. In his subsequent 22 re-elections, Rangel won the general contest by lopsided majorities of 80 percent or more.[3]

During his first term in the 92nd Congress (1971–1973), Rangel was assigned seats on the Public Works Committee, the Science and Astronautics Committee, and the Select Committee on Crime. In May 1972, Rangel left Public Works to join the Judiciary Committee. In the 93rd Congress (1973–1975), Rangel left Science and Astronautics for the Committee on the District of Columbia and maintained his seats on the Judiciary and Select Committee on Crime, which soon disbanded. In the 94th Congress (1975–1977), Rangel left both Judiciary and District of Columbia to join the powerful Ways and Means Committee. From the moment Rangel arrived for the opening of the 92nd Congress, Mayor Lindsay and Governor Rockefeller lobbied Wilbur Daigh Mills of Arkansas, the chair of Ways and Means, to give the new Representative a seat on the committee. It took four years, but Rangel became the first African-American member of Ways and Means; 32 years later, in 2007, he became the first African-American chair of the prestigious panel. He was also assigned to the Select Committee on Narcotics Abuse and Control in 1975 and chaired that panel from the 98th through the 102nd Congress (1983–1993). From the 104th through the 114th Congress (1995–2017), Rangel served on the Joint Committee on Taxation, which he chaired during the 110th and 111th Congresses (2007–2011).

Rangel was a founding member of the CBC in 1971 and served as the group's chairman in the 94th Congress. Missouri Representative William Lacy "Bill" Clay Sr. credited Rangel with creating the group's name because the New York representative explained, "protecting black interests was the primary reason most of us were elected." As chairman of the CBC in 1974, Rangel focused the caucus on pursuing shared legislative goals specific to poor, urban, and African-American constituents.[4]

Rangel's short tenure on the Judiciary Committee coincided with that panel's impeachment hearings of President Richard M. Nixon. Even prior to the Watergate scandal, Rangel had been a cosponsor on a House resolution introduced by John Conyers Jr. of Michigan that called for President Nixon's impeachment because of his escalation of the Vietnam War. During the Watergate hearings, Rangel often intently focused on the executive branch's efforts to withhold evidence. Years after the hearings, Rangel remembered that "as a former prosecutor I was focused on what I saw as a clear path to his conviction." In late July 1974, the Judiciary Committee approved three articles of impeachment, but President Nixon resigned before the House could vote. Rangel came away from the impeachment hearings believing the episode was a "test of the strength of the Constitution … that when this or any other President violates his sacred oath of office, the people are not left hapless, that they can, through the House of Representatives charge him, and his guilt will finally be decided in the hall of the U.S. Senate."[5]

As a member of the Select Committee on Crime, Rangel participated in congressional investigations into the Attica Prison uprising in New York in September 1971 that resulted in 43 deaths. Less than a week after the riot, Rangel and other members of the committee visited the prison and spent two days interviewing staff, prison officials, and inmates. Rangel and the committee later held hearings on "prisons in turmoil," focusing on Attica and other recent prison riots. During the hearings, Rangel expressed concern over conditions in the prisons and the mistreatment of prisoners, and he dismissed suggestions by prison officials that the riots were just the product of revolutionaries. For Rangel, prison riots and other examples of prison failures were especially salient to communities of color because prison populations were, he noted, "disproportionately black and Hispanic." "If the prisons fail, we can expect the present revolving door system of crime and punishment to continue," he wrote in a newspaper column in 1973.[6]

Early in his tenure, Rangel worked to combat drug trafficking and drug use because, he explained, everyday

issues like health, education, and housing had "been corrupted either physically or morally by the drug addiction problem." In the 1980s, amid the rise in the use of cocaine and crack cocaine, especially, Rangel, then the chair of the Select Committee on Narcotics Abuse and Control, gained wide-spread recognition for his anti-drug legislative work. In 1989, *Ebony* called Rangel "the Front-line General in the War on Drugs." Despite a shared interest in the "war on drugs," Rangel publicly criticized the Ronald Reagan administration for not doing enough to prevent illegal drugs from coming into the United States. "The administration claims to have declared a war on drugs, but when was the last time we heard our commander in chief talk about the international drug problem?" Rangel asked. Rangel was a vocal supporter of the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986, which increased funding for local and state police, interdiction, educational programs, and treatment and rehabilitation. During the floor debate, Rangel successfully passed an amendment that increased funding for law enforcement. "We cannot wage a narcotics war with peashooters," he lectured to his colleagues.[7]

Despite his advocacy for the 1986 Anti-Drug Abuse Act, Rangel soon opposed one particularly controversial aspect of the law. The law included new mandatory minimum sentencing requirements that set widely divergent penalties for the possession of 5 grams of crack cocaine versus 500 grams of cocaine. The mandatory minimums led to an increase in prison population of often non-violent, low-level users and dealers. Activists, scholars, and lawmakers soon argued that the 100-to-1 sentencing disparity had racially discriminatory outcomes as Black offenders more often would be convicted for possession of crack cocaine than cocaine. In 1993, Rangel introduced legislation to end the sentencing disparity. "It's clearly unconstitutional and way out of line to be such a different level of crime for basically the same type of drug. No one can justify the 100-to-1 ratio. Clearly we are talking about different neighborhoods, not different crimes," he said. In 2010, Rangel supported the passage of the Fair Sentencing Act that reduced the disparity from 100-to-1 to 18-to-1.[8]

On Ways and Means, Rangel worked to open economic opportunities for minority groups and poor Americans. Rangel authored the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit in the Tax Reform Act of 1986, a measure that significantly boosted affordable housing in the United States. In 1993, he authored a provision providing tax breaks to promote investments and jobs in low-income neighborhoods called "empowerment zones." Tax benefits for enterprise and empowerment zones were later included in the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1993. And as part of an economic stimulus bill to rejuvenate the U.S. economy after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, Rangel extended unemployment benefits for workers in industries affected by the attacks, especially those in New York's travel and hospitality businesses.[9]

In 1987, Rangel contributed to the demise of apartheid in South Africa as the author of the "Rangel amendment" which denied certain tax benefits to U.S. corporations working there. As U.S. businesses pulled out of South Africa, the country's revenue streams dried up and the apartheid government grew weaker before collapsing amid democratic reforms. Thirteen years later, Rangel worked to open commerce by supporting the African Growth and Opportunity Act, providing new incentives for U.S. companies to begin trading with sub-Saharan Africa. He also helped found the Charles B. Rangel International Affairs Program through Howard University in 2002, which aimed to significantly increase the representation of minorities in the U.S. Foreign Service.[10]

In 2003, Rangel introduced legislation to reinstate the military draft, revisiting an issue he had worked on before his first House campaign. "How can anyone support the war and not support the draft?" he asked amid U.S. conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq. He argued repeatedly that the government relied on disadvantaged and working-class enlistees to fight its battles. His bills to reinstate the draft never gained much traction; in fact, Rangel voted against his own bill in 2004, sending it down to defeat 402 to 2. Rangel insisted he did so to protest "procedural finagling." Rangel also sponsored the Heroes Earnings Assistance and Relief Tax (HEART) Act to provide financial help to America's veterans. The bill became law on June 17, 2008.[11]

During his long tenure on the Ways and Means Committee, Rangel frequently clashed with its chairmen, Democrats and Republicans alike. On several occasions, Rangel and the CBC quarreled with Ways and Means Chair Daniel David Rostenkowski of Illinois due to Rostenkowski's relationship with Chicago Mayor Richard Daley, who often pushed for policies the caucus viewed as discriminatory and detrimental to African Americans. At a time when Members rarely went toe-to-toe with the powerful Rostenkowski, Rangel's independence and

his role as the CBC's voice in conference committee deliberations often put him at odds with the chair. Shortly after Republicans gained the majority in 1995, Rangel sparred with new Chair William Reynolds Archer Jr. of Texas over the elimination of tax preferences for minorities in the media.[12]

For his part, Rangel liked to stress that he found common ground on tax reform with Republican leadership despite rising partisanship in the House. But things were different under Archer's successor, William Marshall Thomas of California. Tensions boiled over late on a Friday in July 2003, when Thomas's attempt to rush a bill through committee led Rangel to sequester his fellow Democrats in the committee library to read the bill. Insults flew and Thomas's staff, intending to remove Rangel and his colleagues from the room, summoned the Capitol Police and the House Sergeant at Arms. Tensions subsided and the committee left shortly afterward for floor business, but the fallout proved rancorous and led Thomas to issue an apology.[13]

Rangel ascended to the chairmanship of Ways and Means when Democrats regained the majority in 2007. As chair, Rangel worked in a bipartisan manner with ranking members James O. McCrery III of Louisiana and, later, David Lee Camp of Michigan to pass small business tax breaks, relief for Hurricane Katrina victims, and a ban on genetic discrimination for health insurance. He also worked alongside the George W. Bush administration to extend the Andean Trade Preference Act with Peru that reinforced labor and environmental standards. Though many in the CBC expected Rangel to push legislation important to the caucus (including hearings on reparations, gun control legislation, and action against racial profiling), Rangel insisted his position also made him accountable to constituents outside the CBC. Rangel did address one important concern of the CBC with legislation pumping funds into the Gulf Coast after Hurricane Katrina. But he made it clear that the legislation was about economic fairness. "When God hit with Katrina, she didn't give a damn about color at all," he said, "but she sure did give the poor people a hard road to travel."[14]

Rangel was chair of Ways and Means as the financial crisis of 2008 unfolded, and the global economy went into a recession. In January 2009, Rangel led the committee markup of the sections of the House's economic recovery legislation. The committee's bill included tax relief for parents and for businesses to depreciate their equipment and prevent layoffs, and funds to invest in education and technology training. Rangel also served on the conference committee that resolved differences between the House and Senate versions of the final bill. In February 2009, President Barack Obama signed the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.[15]

As Ways and Means chair, Rangel shepherded early versions of the Democrats' landmark health care bill, the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act. For Rangel, reforming the health care system was part of a career-long effort to challenge income inequality. "We have a moral obligation in terms of the number of people who have lost their homes, gone into bankruptcy as a result of the costs of providing health care," Rangel explained during a committee hearing. On July 17, 2009, he presided over a 16-hour markup that passed 23 to 18. Rangel joined his fellow Democrats in turning back 32 amendments from Republicans seeking to strip key provisions from the bill including the employer mandate and the tax surcharge. As the bill made its way through Congress, Rangel remained involved in high-level meetings with party leaders.[16]

Rangel's chairmanship was ultimately undone by a string of ethics violations. Reports emerged in July 2008 that Rangel had accepted rent-controlled apartments in New York at values far below market. In response, Rangel requested an investigation of his personal finances. But additional allegations arose of improper use of his office resources and failure to disclose or pay taxes on $500,000 worth of assets in the Dominican Republic. Rangel fought these claims every step of the way. The investigation dragged on for two election cycles and lasted through the Democrats' high-profile push to reform the country's health care system. "I don't want anyone to feel embarrassed, awkward," he would later insist in a speech on the House Floor in 2010. "Hey, if I was you, I may want me to go away, too. I am not going away. I am here." Nevertheless, Rangel took a leave of absence as chair just days before President Barack Obama signed the signature health care bill into law in March 2010. The leave of absence became permanent. The Ethics Committee found him in violation of 11 of 13 charges and voted 9 to 1 to recommend that the House censure the Harlem Congressman. After the committee referred the matter to the full House in December 2010, Speaker Nancy Pelosi of California presided over the debate, with Zoe Lofgren of California prosecuting and Robert C. "Bobby" Scott of Virginia acting as Rangel's defense. The House

voted 333 to 79 to censure Rangel, making him the twenty-third Representative to be censured in House history and the first in nearly 30 years.[17]

Rangel's ethical difficulties bolstered primary opponents. He faced five challengers in 2010 and lost the backing of the *New York Times* editorial board. Nevertheless, he captured 51 percent in the primary; his closest rival Adam Clayton Powell IV won 24 percent. Redistricting radically changed Rangel's old Harlem district in 2012, making it majority Hispanic for the first time. That year, Adriano J. Espaillat, a Dominican American and state assemblyman, challenged Rangel in the Democratic primary, which Rangel ultimately won 44 percent to Espaillat's 42 percent. Espaillat unsuccessfully challenged the results in the state supreme court. Rangel's vote total improved in a 2014 primary rematch, as he secured 47 percent of the vote against Espaillat's 44 percent. Rangel cruised to victory in each general election.[18]

In the wake of his censure and with Democrats having lost the House majority in 2010, Rangel's influence waned. He remained an *ex officio* member of Ways and Means in the 112th Congress (2011–2013) before regaining full status in the 113th Congress (2013–2015). He served as ranking member on the Subcommittees on Trade in the 113th and 114th Congresses (2013–2017).[19]

Rangel retired following the conclusion of the 114th Congress (2015–2017). Voting in the Democratic primary in June 2016, he told reporters, "This is the first time in 46 years I couldn't find my name."[20]

Manuscript Collection

The City College of New York, Rangel Archives, Charles B. Rangel Center for Public Service (New York, NY). *Papers*: Dates and extent of the papers are unknown. The Charles B. Rangel collection is not yet open to the public.

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Walter E. Fauntroy

1933–

DELEGATE

1971–1991

Democrat from the District of Columbia



Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

Walter E. Fauntroy's leadership in the civil rights movement paved the way for his two-decade career as the District of Columbia's Delegate in the U.S. House of Representatives. While he worked on many issues during his tenure, Fauntroy dedicated much of his career to attaining home rule, the right of the city's residents to elect a municipal government, for Washington, DC, and to ending apartheid in South Africa. During his time in the House, Fauntroy embraced coalition building to accomplish his legislative goals, finding strength in numbers. Paraphrasing former President Theodore Roosevelt, Fauntroy once remarked that "when you carry a big stick you can walk quietly."[1]

Walter Edward Fauntroy was born in Washington, DC, on February 6, 1933, the fourth of seven children of Ethel, a part-time seamstress, and William Fauntroy, a clerk with the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office. Fauntroy graduated from Dunbar High School in Washington, DC, in 1952 and earned a bachelor's degree from Virginia Union University in Richmond in 1955. On August 3, 1957, Fauntroy married Dorothy Simms. The couple had a son, Marvin, and later adopted a baby girl, Melissa Alice. After receiving a bachelor of divinity degree from Yale Divinity School in 1958, Fauntroy became pastor of Washington's New Bethel Baptist Church.[2]

Through his ministry and his devotion to improving conditions for African Americans, Fauntroy, like many other Black clerics of the era, became actively involved in the civil rights movement. Impressed by the DC minister's organizational skills and commitment to the movement, civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. appointed Fauntroy director of the Washington bureau of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) in 1961. While with the SCLC, Fauntroy helped coordinate the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom on August 28, 1963. In preparation for the Washington march, Fauntroy and other leading civil rights activists, such as future Representative Andrew Young of Georgia, assisted King with his famous "I Have a Dream" speech. He also urged President Lyndon B. Johnson and Congress to pass civil rights legislation. President Johnson appointed Fauntroy vice chairman of the 1966 White House Conference "To Fulfill These Rights," which focused on recommendations for improving the lives of African Americans after the passage of the landmark 1964 Civil Rights Act. Fauntroy also helped organize the 1965 march in Alabama from Selma to Montgomery and was national coordinator of the 1968 Poor People's Campaign, which

sought to draw attention to poverty and force government action to combat it.[3]

Fauntroy centered many of his civil rights, antipoverty, and neighborhood revitalization activities on the nation's capital. He was the founder and director of the Shaw Urban Renewal Project, an economic initiative to restore the historic African-American neighborhood of Washington, DC, where Fauntroy grew up. He served as vice chair of the District of Columbia city council from 1967 until he resigned in 1969 to spend time with the Model Inner City Community Organization, a neighborhood planning agency he founded with other Washington ministers.[4]

The following year, Fauntroy's political fortunes advanced when Congress passed the District of Columbia Delegate Act. The legislation reinstituted a nonvoting Delegate to represent the nation's capital in the U.S. House, a position last held by Norton Parker Chipman from 1871 to 1875. In the crowded January 1971 Democratic primary, Fauntroy ran on a platform of instituting home rule for the District, eliminating job discrimination for African Americans, and providing federally funded day care. With the help of campaign appearances by Coretta Scott King, the widow of Martin Luther King Jr., and strong support from local Black churches, Fauntroy orchestrated a surprising upset over six opponents, garnering 44 percent of the vote. Overwhelmingly elected in the March 1971 general election with a 59 percent majority, Fauntroy routed his closest opponent, Republican John Nevius, a White lawyer with a strong civil rights record, to become the first African American to represent the District of Columbia in Congress. "It was an exhilarating experience in learning the ways of politics, in being Americans for the first time," Fauntroy exclaimed after his victory. Fauntroy won by comfortable margins in his subsequent re-election bids in the predominantly African-American and Democratic city.[5]

Fauntroy's first committee assignment was to the Committee on the District of Columbia, where he served for his entire House career and led several subcommittees, including the Subcommittee on Fiscal Affairs and Health. He served on the Banking and Currency Committee (later named the Banking, Currency, and Housing Committee and subsequently the Banking, Finance, and Urban Affairs Committee) from the 93rd to the 101st Congresses (1973–1991) and chaired three of its subcommittees, including the influential Domestic Monetary Policy Subcommittee. He also served on the Select Committee on Assassinations during the 94th and 95th Congresses (1975–1979), chairing its Subcommittee on the Assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. From the 98th to the 101st Congress (1983–1991), he served on the Select Committee on Narcotics Abuse and Control.[6]

Sworn in to the U.S. House on April 19, 1971, Delegate Fauntroy immediately began work on accomplishing his major campaign promise: achieving home rule for the District of Columbia. As a Delegate, Fauntroy was unable to vote on the House Floor, but he could serve on and vote in committee and introduce legislation. Fauntroy used his seat on the District of Columbia Committee to build support among his colleagues and in the capital for a measure that would provide self-government for District residents. Those who lived in the capital city had lacked the ability to choose their own municipal government since portions of the District of Columbia Organic Act—a Reconstruction-era law that consolidated the District of Columbia into a territorial government—were repealed in 1874. "The election of a congressman is but the first step toward full self-government for the District," Fauntroy commented. "The immediate next step is that of organizing the people for political action to make their congressman effective." Only a few months after becoming a Delegate, Fauntroy introduced a home rule bill to expand the independence of the District by removing some of Congress's oversight authority and allowing DC residents to select their own local officials. He also ran as a "favorite-son" candidate in the 1972 DC Democratic presidential primary in a symbolic move to draw attention to home rule and issues affecting Black Americans. After winning the election, he threw his support (the 15 votes of the Washington, DC, delegation) behind the eventual Democratic nominee, George Stanley McGovern, who endorsed much of Fauntroy's DC agenda. "We must learn to use our power and stop relying on simple benevolence," Fauntroy declared.[7]

In 1972, the defeat of District of Columbia Committee Chairman John Lanneau McMillan of South Carolina, a longtime opponent of home rule, removed a critical obstacle from the pursuit of self-government for the nation's capital. Fauntroy had campaigned against McMillan in 1970 alongside the SCLC, which sent busloads of supporters of McMillan's opponent to South Carolina. With McMillian gone, Fauntroy, Charles C. Diggs Jr. of Michigan, the new chair of the District of Columbia Committee, and the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC)

helped pass the District of Columbia Self-Government and Governmental Reorganization Act in December 1973. When the bill was in committee, Fauntroy pushed for a provision to give the District financial autonomy, but the final legislation kept the budget under congressional control. The bill gave Washington, DC, limited self-rule, permitting citizens to elect a mayor and a city council. Although pleased with this progress, Fauntroy continued his efforts to attain greater independence for the District from the federal government. In 1978, he helped guide a proposed constitutional amendment through the House to give the District of Columbia full representation in both houses of Congress—one of his most significant accomplishments. The vote "reaffirmed my great faith in the American people," asserted an elated Fauntroy. Despite his intense lobbying efforts, which included nationwide speaking tours, the DC Voting Rights Amendment failed to achieve ratification, with only 16 of the necessary 38 states approving the measure by 1985. Some critics blamed the DC Delegate for neglecting to muster enough support for the amendment and for causing a public backlash against the legislation after a controversial meeting with Palestine Liberation Organization leader Yasser Arafat. "The District is too urban, too liberal, too Democratic and too black," Fauntroy remarked bitterly after the defeat of the proposed amendment. Undaunted by the earlier failure, Fauntroy and Senator Edward Moore "Ted" Kennedy of Massachusetts each introduced legislation in 1987 that would have granted the District of Columbia statehood and full representation without amending the Constitution.[8]

As chair of several subcommittees on the District of Columbia Committee, Fauntroy vowed to improve conditions for his many low-income constituents, focusing on affordable housing and antidrug legislation. He offered an unsuccessful floor amendment to a 1972 military construction bill that would have removed authorized funding for a military construction project on a vacant portion of the Bolling-Anacostia military complex that he believed could be used for affordable housing. Fauntroy criticized urban renewal efforts in the nation's capital that adversely affected its many impoverished Black residents. In 1978, he compiled a housing and community proposal to address common neighborhood problems such as housing shortages, abandoned buildings, resident displacement, and inadequate community services. He also cosponsored antidrug bills as a member of the House Select Committee on Narcotics and a resolution to create an organization to battle regional drug trafficking.[9]

Fauntroy played an active role in the CBC, seeking to use his position to highlight issues concerning African Americans, both in the District and nationwide. As chair of the CBC during the 97th Congress (1981–1983), he criticized the economic and social policies of President Ronald Reagan, insisting that they undermined progress made during the civil rights movement. "We are gravely concerned about how his policies will affect Black working people and the million more white Americans who are unemployed or in danger of losing their jobs," he stated, addressing the economic recession of the early 1980s. In 1977, Fauntroy sought to increase the CBC's effectiveness by founding the National Black Leadership Roundtable (NBLR), a group of national organizations encompassing Black civil rights, business, and labor leaders, to promote the public policy agenda of the caucus. Under Fauntroy's direction, the NBLR successfully promoted the election of more African Americans to federal office. To build on the NBLR's efficacy, Fauntroy helped the CBC initiate the Action-Alert Communications Network, a grassroots network of organizations designed to keep Black voters in at least 100 congressional districts informed on important issues and to urge them to pressure their Members of Congress to vote with the CBC.[10]

Fauntroy's legislative interests extended beyond domestic affairs, and he used his position in the House to bring attention to South Africa's policy of apartheid. The DC Delegate made headlines on November 21, 1984, along with Mary Frances Berry, a member of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, and Randall Robinson, director of the foreign policy advocacy organization TransAfrica. The group was arrested for refusing to vacate the premises of the South African Embassy in Washington, DC, while protesting the imprisonment of several South African labor and civil rights leaders. Their arrest, the first of many until the passage of comprehensive economic sanctions by the United States against South Africa in 1986, sparked a national wave of civil disobedience. "We knew we had to humble ourselves and go to jail," explained Fauntroy after his highly publicized arrest. The three subsequently launched the Free South Africa Movement (FSAM) to bring attention to racial inequality in South Africa and to pressure the Reagan administration into stiffening its foreign policy toward the apartheid regime. Fauntroy drew upon

his experience as a civil rights leader to help orchestrate a campaign of demonstrations outside the South African Embassy that included Members of Congress, civil rights leaders, and celebrities. In January 1986, he joined five congressional colleagues on a tour of South Africa to assess the effects of limited economic sanctions imposed by the United States during the first session of the 99th Congress (1985–1987). Fauntroy continued his work with the FSAM and the CBC to pressure Congress to pass stronger sanctions against South Africa. On October 2, 1986, the Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act became law after the House and Senate overrode a veto by President Reagan.[11]

Fauntroy, who believed his responsibility as a Member of Congress required him to focus on international and domestic issues, also spent considerable time during his career highlighting human rights violations in Haiti and promoting the country's economic development. Responding to critics who argued he spent too much time away from the nation's capital Fauntroy said, "When I sought the office of delegate, I ran on the theme that once elected I would build a network of friends for the District, and my traveling is for the purpose of strengthening that network." In 1979, Fauntroy and Shirley Chisholm of New York created a CBC task force to bring attention to Haiti's high poverty rate and to urge the U.S. government to allow more Haitian refugees fleeing the rule of President Jean-Claude Duvalier to seek asylum.[12]

Fauntroy opted to leave his safe congressional seat to run for mayor of Washington, DC, in 1990. While the longtime Delegate indicated his decision to run surfaced from a desire to heal a polarized and beleaguered city, some speculated he had become frustrated with his limited authority as a Delegate. Fauntroy joined a crowded field in the Democratic primary to replace Mayor Marion S. Barry Jr., who had been arrested and imprisoned, and who later sought counseling for drug addiction. During the campaign, Fauntroy had difficulty convincing his political base that he understood the problems facing the District—a criticism that stemmed from his global approach to politics as a Delegate. "The people do not know me," Fauntroy admitted. "They don't know what I do on the Hill." After winning less than 10 percent of the vote in the Democratic primary, Fauntroy noted, "I am disappointed, of course, that I did not win and that I will not have the opportunity to personally implement solutions to some of the most serious problems facing any city in this nation."[13]

In 1995, Fauntroy was sentenced to two years of probation for filing a false financial report in 1988 when he served in Congress. Fauntroy continued to serve as the pastor of the New Bethel Baptist Church in Washington, DC, and engaged in community service projects until his retirement in 2009. Fauntroy later experienced a series of legal setbacks following a charge of check fraud; the issue was later resolved, and the charges were dropped.[14]

Manuscript Collection

George Washington University, Special Collections, The Estelle and Melvin Gelman Library (Washington, DC). *Papers*: ca. 1941–2006, 757 linear feet. Delegate Walter E. Fauntroy's papers contain correspondence, news releases, booklets, articles, brochures, statements, meeting files, briefing books, memorabilia, newsletters, photographs, negatives, slides, bills, and hearing files related to his career in the U.S. House of Representatives as Delegate of the District of Columbia. A small portion of the collection includes Fauntroy's administrative files, project proposals, speeches, correspondence, financial and legal documents, church sermons, church administrative documents, religious sheet music, and personal papers. A finding aid is available in the repository and online.

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Yvonne Brathwaite Burke

1932–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1973–1979

Democrat from California



Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

In 1972, Yvonne Brathwaite Burke made history as the first African-American woman elected to Congress from California and only the third Black woman to serve on Capitol Hill. Six years earlier, she had become the first African-American woman elected to the California state assembly, beginning a meteoric and ground-breaking rise to the highest echelons of political power. In the U.S. House of Representatives, Burke's assignment to the Appropriations Committee enabled her to influence federal spending, and her election as the first woman chair of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) provided a platform to influence policy across the government. In 1973, Burke became the first woman in Congress to both give birth and be granted maternity leave while serving.

Yvonne Brathwaite Burke was born Perle Yvonne Watson on October 5, 1932, in Los Angeles, California, the only child of James Watson, a custodian at the MGM film studios, and Lola Watson, a real estate agent in East Los Angeles. Burke, who rejected the name Perle and went by Yvonne, grew up in modest circumstances. At age four, she transferred from the public school to a model school for exceptional children and later became the vice president of her class at Manual Arts High School in Los Angeles. She enrolled at the University of California at Berkeley in 1949 before transferring to the University of California at Los Angeles, where she earned a bachelor's degree in political science in 1953. She was among the first Black women admitted to the University of Southern California School of Law. She earned her law degree and passed the California bar in 1956. In 1957, she wed mathematician Louis Brathwaite; they divorced in 1964. In 1972, she married William Burke. They raised two children: Christine, who was William Burke's child from a previous marriage, and Autumn.

Even though she held a prestigious law degree, legal firms in the city discriminated against her and refused to hire Burke because she was a Black woman. Consequently, Burke opened her own private practice, specializing in civil, probate, and real estate law. She also served as the state's deputy corporation commissioner and as a hearing officer for the Los Angeles police commission. Burke organized a legal defense fund for people arrested during the wave of civil unrest, arson, and property destruction that occurred in Watts, a Los Angeles neighborhood, in 1965. She was also named by Governor Edmund G. Brown Jr. to the McCone Commission, which investigated the conditions that led to the unrest. A year later, in 1966, she won election to the

California assembly. She eventually chaired the assembly's committee on urban development and won re-election in 1968 and 1970. Among her assembly bills were measures to reinstate retirement benefits for any Japanese Americans that lost their qualifications after being interned during World War II, to create a Black studies program in state schools, and to instruct the attorney general to perform a study on police and community interactions.[1]

Burke ultimately grew impatient with the slow pace of legislation in the California assembly and, when court-mandated reapportionment created a new congressional district, she decided to enter the race for the U.S. House seat. The new district encompassed much of southwest Los Angeles and had a large African-American constituency. Democrats made up nearly 75 percent of registered voters. In the Democratic primary, Burke defeated Billy Mills, a popular Black Los Angeles city councilman, as well as three other challengers, with 54 percent of the vote. Less than a month later, she garnered national media attention as the vice chair of the Democratic National Convention in Miami Beach that nominated Senator George Stanley McGovern of South Dakota. Burke spent much of the convention controlling the gavel during the long and sometimes-raucous platform deliberations, eventually helping to pass revised rules that gave minorities and young voters a greater voice in shaping party policy.[2]

Back home in Los Angeles that fall, Burke faced 31-year-old Gregg Tria, a recent law school graduate who ran on an antibusing and anti-abortion platform, in the general election. Burke defeated Tria easily, winning 73 percent of the vote. Burke won re-election with 80 percent of the vote in both 1974 and 1976, against Republicans Tom Neddy and Edward Skinner, respectively.[3]

In Burke's first term during the 93rd Congress (1973–1975), she received assignments on two committees: Public Works; and Interior and Insular Affairs. When a spot on the powerful Appropriations Committee opened in late 1974, the Democratic Caucus wanted a Member from California to fill it. Encouraged by Representative Phillip Burton of California, Burke campaigned for the committee vacancy and won, giving up her other two committee assignments to join the panel. She served on Appropriations for the duration of her House career. Burke's appointment to the panel occurred at a time when African-American lawmakers began to serve simultaneously on the most influential House committees: Appropriations (Burke and Louis Stokes of Ohio), Ways and Means (Charles B. Rangel of New York and Harold E. Ford of Tennessee), and Rules (Andrew Young of Georgia).[4]

In the 94th Congress (1975–1977), Burke was appointed chair of the Select Committee on the House Beauty Shop, a position that rotated among the women Members and oversaw the facility used by women lawmakers and House staff. Burke set out to address workplace inequalities at the beauty shop, improving salaries as well as the facility's physical condition. "The women at the beauty shop were not treated very well," Burke remembered years later. "I just became very concerned about them. And they said, 'We need someone who is willing to carry our water, to really kind of take up for us.'" When her staff questioned the decision to chair the committee, Burke brushed aside their concerns. "'Someone has to stand up for women, and someone has to stand up for women who are working over there in the beauty shop,'" she replied.[5]

Burke made national headlines in her first term when she revealed in the spring of 1973 that she was expecting a child. In Congress, she said, "at that time and you were a woman, everything about you was always open to the press. Your life was an open book." When Autumn Roxanne Burke was born on November 23, 1973, Burke became the first Member to give birth while serving in Congress. The House subsequently granted Burke maternity leave, another first in congressional history.[6]

The interests of low-income and minority communities were at the forefront of Burke's legislative agenda. During her first term in office, she fought efforts by the Richard M. Nixon administration to dismantle certain programs established as part of President Lyndon B. Johnson's Great Society agenda, particularly the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO), which oversaw federal efforts to end poverty. In testimony before the Education and Labor Committee's Subcommittee on Equal Opportunities, Burke argued that any effort to defund or relocate responsibilities of the OEO would be a detriment to low-income Americans. She pointed to the agency's community development, health care, and law services as successes of the program. "With the dismantling of OEO, not only the symbol of concern, but the actual involvement and commitment of the government will be suspended," she said. "Who will lobby for the poor in communities where the poor have no effective voice in the decisions of governments?"[7]

Representative Burke recognized that the civil rights struggle had shifted to a phase in which less overt discrimination still plagued the country and needed to be addressed by Congress. In an article for *Ebony*, she wrote, "The kinds of things we faced in my generation were easy to understand," she explained. "Your parents said, 'They don't let you sit down here, they don't let you go to that place.' Everybody knew. But now it is so complex, so frustrating to young people when they are led to believe that everything is fine, yet at the same time it is not fine."[8]

Burke also fought for equal opportunities for minority-owned businesses in the construction of the Trans-Alaska Pipeline by adding two amendments to the bill that provided the framework for the nearly 800-mile-long project. Encouraged by a letter from a worker in Seattle, Washington, about the participation of minority businesses in the project, one of Burke's amendments required the Secretary of the Interior to enforce a rule outlawing discrimination against people or businesses from the hiring, supply, and contracting processes based on their "race, creed, color, national origin, or sex." Speaking on the House Floor, Burke emphasized that "the construction of the Alaskan Pipeline will create substantial employment opportunities, and it therefore seems desirable and appropriate to extend the existing programs for nondiscrimination and equal employment opportunity" to the project. Burke's second amendment to the bill, the Buy America Act, required builders to use domestic manufacturing products "to the maximum extent feasible" on the pipeline. Despite voicing strong concerns about the pipeline's potential environmental problems, Burke continued to back the project with the belief that it would support the United States' energy sector.[9]

In 1975, Burke commented on her position on Appropriations: "My general philosophy as a committee member will be to reorder spending priorities toward domestic, people-oriented programs and cut back on nonessential defense spending." As a committee member, she objected to raising bus fares in Washington, DC, sought funding for an American Indian hospital in Los Angeles, and pushed for more diversity in the Federal Bureau of Investigation.[10]

Burke seemed to take to heart the advice former President Johnson gave her before she started her congressional career: "Don't talk so much on the House Floor," he told her. Over time, she earned a reputation as a legislator who avoided confrontation and controversy yet worked determinedly behind the scenes to effect changes she believed were important. "I don't believe in grand-standing but in the poverty areas, if there is something we need, then I'll go after it," she explained. Using her experience as a former state legislator in the California assembly, Burke chose her positions carefully and usually refrained from partisan rhetoric in debates. "I took always a lot of pride in my ability to bring people together, to compromise issues, to negotiate issues," she said. "I was always direct. I was me."[11]

Burke supported most major feminist issues and joined the Congressional Women's Caucus when it was founded in 1977, serving as the group's first treasurer. She was part of the effort that extended the time limit for ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment by an additional three years. In the 94th Congress, the California Representative introduced the Displaced Homemakers Act, which authorized the creation of job training centers for women—particularly middle-aged, self-supporting women—who were entering or re-entering the labor market after many years. The purpose of the bill, which also provided health and financial counseling, was "to help displaced homemakers make it through a readjustment period so that they may have the opportunity to become productive, self-sufficient members of society," Burke explained. In 1977, she vigorously criticized the Hyde amendment, which prohibited the use of federal Medicaid funds for abortions. "The basic premise which we cannot overlook is that if the Government will not pay for an indigent woman's abortion, she cannot afford to go elsewhere," Burke wrote in a *New York Times* op-ed. In 1978, Burke introduced a bill to prohibit pregnancy-related discrimination in the workplace, particularly employer policies that kept women out of their jobs for long periods before and after childbirth.[12]

These efforts in support of women's rights, along with her prominent committee assignments and her role as chair of the CBC from 1976 to 1977, positioned Representative Burke to meet the needs of what she called her "three constituencies. I had a constituency of African Americans, a constituency of women, and a constituency that elected me." She was part of a group of Members who were asked to appear at events across the nation in the 1970s. In states "that did not have women-elected Members and who did not have African-American-elected Members—they expected us to go," she recalled.[13]

After three terms in the House, the demands of traveling to and from California with her young family convinced

Burke to seek out new opportunities back home on the West Coast. Hoping to have a more direct and administrative effect on policy than the demands of her job in the House allowed, Burke declined to run for re-election to the 96th Congress (1979–1981) to campaign for the office of California attorney general, the chief law enforcement position for the state (and a position no woman had held in any state government). She won the Democratic nomination but lost to Republican state senator George Deukmejian in the general election. In June 1979, California Governor Jerry Brown appointed Burke to the Los Angeles County board of supervisors, making her the first Black person to sit on the panel. In 1980, she lost her bid to a new four-year term and returned to private law practice. In 1984, Burke was the vice chair of the Los Angeles Olympics Organizing Committee. Burke became the first African American to win outright election as a Los Angeles County supervisor in 1992, defeating future Representative Diane E. Watson by a narrow margin. A year later, she became the first woman and the first person of color to chair the board. Burke served 16 years on the board of supervisors until her retirement in 2008. In 2010, Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger appointed Burke to the California transportation commission. In 2012, she was appointed to the Amtrak board of directors by President Barack Obama.[14]

Manuscript Collection

University of Southern California, Special Collections, Regional History Collections (Los Angeles, CA). *Papers*: 1959–1980, 417 linear feet. The papers of Yvonne Brathwaite Burke contain the records of Burke's political activities from her tenure in the California assembly (1966–1972), U.S. Congress (1973–1979), the Los Angeles County board of supervisor (1979–1980), and her campaign for California attorney general (1978). The collection contains audiotapes (cassette and reel-to-reel) and videotapes (cassette). A finding aid is available in the repository and online.

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Barbara Jordan

1936–1996

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1973–1979

Democrat from Texas



Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

From her seat on the House Judiciary Committee, Barbara Jordan of Texas—the first Black woman ever elected to Congress from the South—expertly interpreted the issues of the Watergate impeachment investigation at a time when many Americans despaired about the Constitution and the country. Jordan was one of the first African-American lawmakers elected from the South since 1898, and during her three terms in office, her pragmatic leadership style enabled her to build broad coalitions of support in her diverse district. "I am willing to work through any structure," she said. "I am not so hard that I cannot bend as long as my basic principles are intact."[1]

Barbara Charline Jordan was born in Houston, Texas, on February 21, 1936, one of three daughters of Benjamin M. Jordan and Arlyne Patten Jordan. Benjamin Jordan, a graduate of Tuskegee Institute, worked in a local warehouse before becoming pastor of Good Hope Missionary Baptist Church, which his family had long attended. Arlyne Jordan was an accomplished public speaker. Barbara Jordan was educated in the Houston public schools and graduated from Phillis Wheatley High School in 1952. She earned a bachelor's degree from Texas Southern University in 1956 and a law degree from Boston University in 1959. That same year, she was admitted to the Massachusetts and Texas bars, and she began to practice law in Houston in 1960. To supplement her income, Jordan was employed as an administrative assistant to a county judge. Jordan never married.[2]

In 1960, Jordan, in addition to beginning her legal career, worked on John F. Kennedy's Democratic presidential campaign. She eventually helped manage a highly organized get-out-the-vote program that served Houston's 40 African-American precincts. In 1962 and 1964, Jordan ran for the Texas house of representatives but lost both times. In 1966, she ran for the Texas senate when court-enforced redistricting created a constituency that consisted largely of minority voters. Jordan won, defeating a White liberal and becoming the first African-American state senator in Texas since 1883 and the first Black woman elected to the Texas state legislature. Jordan received a cool welcome from the other 30 White and male senators. Undeterred, Jordan quickly established herself as an effective legislator who pushed through bills establishing the state's first minimum wage law, antidiscrimination clauses in business contracts, and the Texas fair employment practices commission. On March 28, 1972, Jordan was elected president pro tempore of the Texas

senate, making her the first Black woman in America to preside over a legislative body. In seconding the nomination, one of Jordan's male colleagues on the other side of the chamber stood, spread his arms open, and said, "What can I say? Black is beautiful." One of Jordan's responsibilities as president pro tempore was to serve as acting governor when the governor and lieutenant governor were out of the state. When Jordan filled that largely ceremonial role on June 10, 1972, she became the first Black chief executive in the nation.[3]

In 1971, Jordan entered the race for the Texas congressional seat encompassing downtown Houston. The district had been redrawn after the 1970 Census and was about 55 percent African American and 15 percent Latino. In the 1972 Democratic primary, Jordan faced Curtis Graves, another Black state legislator, who criticized her for what he said was her close relationship with the White political establishment. Jordan blunted Graves's charges with her legislative credentials. "I'm not going to Washington and turn things upside down in a day," she told supporters at a rally. "I'll only be one of 435. But the 434 will know I'm there." Jordan took the primary with 80 percent of the vote. In the general election, against Republican Paul Merritt, she won 81 percent of the vote. Along with Andrew Young of Georgia, Jordan became the first African American in the twentieth century elected to Congress from the Deep South. In the next two campaign cycles, Jordan overwhelmed her opposition, capturing 85 percent of the total vote in both general elections.[4]

In both her Texas legislative career and in the U.S. House, Jordan pursued influence and change within existing systems. "I sought the power points," she once said. "I knew if I were going to get anything done, [the congressional and party leaders] would be the ones to help me get it done." Immediately upon arriving in Congress, Jordan worked to establish relationships with the rest of the Texas delegation, which wielded outsized influence in the House. During debate, Jordan regularly sat on the center aisle of the chamber's large, theater-style seating arrangement. She did so to better hear the day's proceedings, to be seen by the presiding officer when she sought recognition, and to save an open seat for colleagues who wanted to stop and chat. But her decision broke with years of tradition in which members of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) usually sat to the far right of the rostrum of the Democratic side of the chamber. As the Representative for downtown Houston, Jordan also occasionally broke with her party to vote for oil and gas deregulation to appease her district's petroleum industry. "They support me as the least of the evils," she noted. "They are not a strong base of support. They know it and I know it."[5]

In the House, Jordan sought out powerful committee assignments, where, as a Black woman, she could blaze new trails and magnify her influence. She disregarded suggestions that she accept a seat on the Education and Labor Committee and instead used her connection with former President Lyndon B. Johnson of Texas—she had once been his guest at the White House during her time as a state legislator—to intercede on her behalf with Wilbur Daigh Mills of Arkansas, who, as chair of the Ways and Means Committee, also led the Democratic Committee on Committees. With Johnson's help, Jordan landed a seat on the Judiciary Committee, where she served for her three terms in the House. In the 94th and 95th Congresses (1975–1979), she was also assigned to the Committee on Government Operations.[6]

Jordan prioritized her independence in Congress. Although she belonged to a handful of caucuses, including the CBC, she remained wary of allying too closely with any particular interest group. House women met informally to discuss policy too, but Jordan's attendance at those meetings was irregular, and she was noncommittal on most issues that were brought before the group. She was especially careful not to attach herself too closely to an agenda she had little control over that might impinge on her ability to navigate and compromise within the institutional power structure. "I am neither a black politician nor a woman politician," Jordan said in 1975. "Just a politician, a professional politician."[7]

Jordan entered the House amid a power struggle between the Democratic-controlled Congress and the Republican administration of President Richard M. Nixon over federal spending. The administration had vetoed two spending bills in the first months of 1973 and impounded—or, refused to spend—funds appropriated by Congress. Just a few months into her first term, Jordan joined her first-term colleagues in a House Floor protest calling on congressional leaders to reassert their constitutional authority over spending matters. "As freshman members … we expect to endure a certain amount of individual impotence in terms of our ability to influence congressional actions," she said. "[But] we do not expect powerlessness of Congress as an institution."[8]

The following year, Jordan took on a national leadership role as a member of the Judiciary Committee. In the summer of 1974, as the committee considered articles of impeachment against President Nixon for crimes associated with the Watergate scandal, Jordan delivered opening remarks that shook the committee room and captivated the large television audience that had tuned in to the proceedings. "My faith in the Constitution is whole, it is complete, it is total," Jordan said. "I am not going to sit here and be an idle spectator to the diminution, the subversion, the destruction of the Constitution." After explaining why she supported each of the five articles of impeachment against President Nixon, Jordan concluded by saying that if the Judiciary Committee did not find the evidence compelling enough, "then perhaps the eighteenth-century Constitution should be abandoned to a twentieth-century paper shredder." Reaction to Jordan's statement was overwhelming. Jordan recalled that people swarmed around her car after the hearings to congratulate her, and many people sent the Texas Representative letters of praise. Back home in Houston, a new billboard read: "Thank you, Barbara Jordan, for explaining the Constitution to us."[9]

Watergate also helped shape Jordan's legislative priorities. In October 1973, shortly after Nixon fired special prosecutor Archibald Cox, who had been appointed to investigate the Watergate scandal, she joined colleagues in cosponsoring legislation that would have appointed a new special prosecutor who could not be arbitrarily removed from office. Jordan also introduced a bill of her own that would have created a permanent system in which grand juries could choose to appoint a special prosecutor to take over a case if the jury determined that the original prosecutor had a conflict of interest.[10]

During her career, Jordan sought legislative remedies to expand the reach of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Voting Rights Act of 1965. "The momentum of the 1960's has run out," Jordan declared. "Congress will be called upon to defend progress already made rather than undertake new initiatives." In 1973, she amended a reauthorization bill for the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (LEAA)—an agency tasked with distributing grants to state and local law enforcement agencies—to require it enforce Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibited racial discrimination in programs that receive federal funding. Under the law, the LEAA could withhold funding or bring suit against recipients of its grants if they were found to have engaged in racial or gender discrimination. When policymakers discovered that the LEAA failed to challenge any civil rights violations, Jordan successfully passed legislation to strengthen the LEAA's antidiscrimination program in 1976. From her seat on the Government Operations Committee, she pursued similar legislation to require the Office of Revenue Sharing to enforce Title VI when distributing funds to state and local governments. In 1977, she cosponsored an ambitious bill with William Donlon "Don" Edwards of California to require all agencies to enforce Title VI, though it did not become law. She also joined seven other members on the Judiciary Committee in opposing Gerald R. Ford's nomination as Vice President after the resignation of Spiro T. Agnew, citing what they said was his mediocre civil rights record.[11]

In 1975, a decade after the passage of the Voting Rights Act, Jordan supported legislation to extend the act's provisions for an additional 10 years, noting that state and local officials had continued to implement policies aimed at suppressing voters of color. "The barriers continue," Jordan said. "And so must the Voting Rights Act—the most effective statute minorities have to guarantee that one day those barriers will come down." She introduced legislation to extend the act's voter protections to language minorities, particularly Hispanic Americans. Under her bill, states and local jurisdictions in which more than 5 percent of the population spoke a single language other than English would be subject to Voting Rights Act's special provisions if officials only printed election materials in English. The bill also required areas covered by the Voting Rights Act to seek approval from federal authorities before implementing changes to their voting procedures. Her legislation was incorporated into the Voting Rights Act's 1975 reauthorization.[12]

As a legislator, Jordan sought to improve the lives of her working-class constituents. She sponsored bills to extend Social Security benefits to homemakers and provide a tax credit to low-income employed and self-employed people. To combat rising inflation rates, Jordan introduced legislation to prohibit manufacturers from fixing the retail prices of their products, which became law in 1975.[13]

In 1976, Jordan became the first woman and the first African-American keynote speaker at a Democratic National Convention. Appearing after a subdued speech by Ohio Senator John Herschel Glenn Jr., Jordan energized the convention with her soaring oratory. "We are a people in

search of a national community," she told the delegates, "attempting to fulfill our national purpose, to create and sustain a society in which all of us are equal. … We cannot improve on the system of government, handed down to us by the founders of the Republic, but we can find new ways to implement that system and to realize our destiny." Amid celebration of the national bicentennial, and in the aftermath of the Vietnam War and Watergate, Jordan's message of hope and resilience, like her commanding voice, resonated with Americans. She campaigned widely for Democratic presidential candidate James Earl "Jimmy" Carter, who defeated President Ford in the general election. Though it was widely speculated that Carter was considering Jordan for Attorney General, he offered her the job as ambassador to the United Nations. Jordan did not accept the offer, explaining that she would only accept a position "consistent with my background."[14]

In 1978, downplaying reports about her poor health, Jordan declined to run for what would have been certain re-election to a fourth term, citing her "internal compass," which she said was pointing her "away from demands that are all consuming." She also said she wanted to work more directly on behalf of her fellow Texans. Jordan was appointed the Lyndon Johnson Chair in National Policy at the Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs at the University of Texas in Austin, where she taught until the early 1990s. She continued to lecture widely on national affairs. In 1988 and 1992, she delivered speeches at the Democratic National Convention; she gave her 1992 keynote address amid a lengthy battle with multiple sclerosis. In 1994, President William J. Clinton appointed her to lead the Commission on Immigration Reform, a bipartisan group that delivered its findings in September of that year. Jordan received nearly two dozen honorary degrees and, in 1990, was named to the National Women's Hall of Fame in Seneca, New York.[15]

Jordan died in Austin, Texas, on January 17, 1996, from pneumonia that was a complication of leukemia. Newspapers across the country published extensive obituaries that celebrated her oratory, her defense of the Constitution, and the role she played in inspiring generations of minority women in politics. "She left Congress after only three terms, a mere six years," the editors of the *New York Times* wrote. "No landmark legislation bears her name. Yet few lawmakers in this century have left a more profound and positive impression on the nation than Barbara Jordan."[16]

Manuscript Collection

Texas Southern University (Houston, TX). *Papers*: 1936–2011, 600 linear feet. The papers document the political and professional career of Barbara Jordan and are divided into three series: Texas state senate, U.S. House of Representatives, and personal. The bulk of the materials date between 1966 and 1979. The state senate papers document Jordan's campaign activities, bills, her governor-for-a-day honor, her involvement with the Democratic National Convention, and the Prairie View voting rights case. The U.S. Representative papers contain records on constituents, legislation, committees, office administration, and campaigns. Other records include personal correspondence, press/media files, appointment logs, schedules, invitations, arrangements, job recommendations, and appointments to political offices. Jordan's involvement with other Members of Congress is represented, as is correspondence reacting to her keynote speech at the 1976 Democratic Convention. A finding aid is available in the repository and online.

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Andrew Young

1932–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1973–1977

Democrat from Georgia



Image courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration

As a senior aide to Martin Luther King Jr. in the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) during the 1960s, Andrew Young helped shape the civil rights movement and its philosophy of nonviolent resistance. When he was sworn into Congress in 1973, Young worked to bring King's vision of human rights to the nation and the world. Young's experiences in the grass-roots politics of the civil rights movement and his diplomatic perspective allowed him to take principled but pragmatic stands for his constituents. Looking back on his decision to run for the House, Young remembered viewing "political office as a way of sustaining what we had done and needed to do again rather than as a deviation from our history of collective struggle."[1]

Andrew Jackson Young Jr. was born in New Orleans, Louisiana, on March 12, 1932, to Andrew and Daisy Fuller Young. His father was a dentist, and his mother was a schoolteacher. Growing up, Andrew and his younger brother Walt lived in what was described as "a middle-class, predominantly Irish and Italian" community in New Orleans; they were the only Black children in the neighborhood. After graduating from Gilbert Academy in 1947, he attended Dillard University, a historically Black university in New Orleans, Louisiana, for one year and then transferred to Howard University, a historically Black university in Washington, DC. Young earned a bachelor's degree in biology in 1951. After graduating from Howard, Young considered a career in dentistry, but decided to join the ministry instead. He attended the Hartford Theological Seminary in Hartford, Connecticut, earning a bachelor of divinity degree in 1955, and was ordained a minister in the United Church of Christ. After graduating from the seminary, Young served as a pastor and teacher in Marion, Alabama, and in Thomasville and Beachton, Georgia, until he was invited to work in the Youth Work Division of the National Council of Churches in New York City, where he served as assistant director from 1957 to 1961. In 1961, Young returned to the South to participate in a voter education program sponsored by the United Church of Christ. He moved from New York to Atlanta and joined the SCLC. Young married the former Jean Childs, a teacher, in 1954. They had four children: Andrea, Lisa, Paula, and Andrew III. After his wife died of cancer in 1994, Young married Carolyn Watson, an elementary school teacher.[2]

Young first became connected with the SCLC through his work organizing a citizenship education program in Dorchester, Georgia. By mid-1962, he began to work

closely with Reverend King's staff. When King and Ralph Abernathy, another SCLC leader, were arrested and imprisoned for seven weeks for training students to register voters, they relied on Young to handle various duties while they were incarcerated in Albany, Georgia. Young also served as a mediator between the SCLC and the Albany police. He subsequently volunteered to mediate between the SCLC and White southerners during other demonstrations. In 1964, King named Young executive director of the SCLC. In his leadership role, Young provided logistical and legal support for prominent demonstrations and legislation such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965.[3]

When civil rights activist and member of the Georgia house of representatives Julian Bond declined to run in the Democratic primary for the congressional district encompassing metropolitan Atlanta, Georgia, and its northern suburbs, Young resigned from the SCLC in 1970 to enter the race. Young suggested his campaign was motivated by the belief that he could initiate change from inside the political power structure, rather than from outside: "There just comes a time when *any* social movement has to come in off the street and enter politics." Young advocated what he called the New South Coalition, which he defined as "black votes, liberal votes, [and] white labor votes." It was a balancing act, he said. "The problem is to involve those new white voters without stirring up the dyed-in-the-wool racists in the process." Young and other Atlanta politicians such as then-Mayor Sam Massell and future Mayor Maynard Jackson, who would become the first African American to lead a major southern city, relied upon the New South Coalition as a base of electoral support. In the Democratic primary, Young defeated Wyman C. Lowe, a White lawyer, in a runoff election, with 60 percent of the vote. In the general election, however Young lost to two-term incumbent Republican Standish Fletcher Thompson, who garnered 57 percent of the vote. After his loss, Young chaired Atlanta's Community Relations Commission, a city-run agency created as a community sounding board to hear claims of discrimination and monitor race relations. This position allowed Young to acclimate himself with the political environment of Georgia's Fifth District and provided him greater exposure to local constituents.[4]

In 1972, Young orchestrated a second campaign for the House when the incumbent, Thompson, ran for the U.S. Senate. After defeating three opponents in the Democratic primary with 60 percent of the vote, he ran in the general election against Republican Rodney Cook, a veteran politician who served four terms in the Georgia house and was also an Atlanta alderman. As part of his platform, Young described a four-point plan for improving public education that advocated federal and state grants instead of property taxes for funding greater community involvement, a curriculum that was relevant to its urban constituents, and racial integration at all levels of the system. Young also directed an aggressive voter registration drive and a coordinated media blitz. He benefited from redistricting that added African-American communities while reducing the number of conservative White voters. After redistricting, the proportion of Black voters increased from about 30 percent to 38 percent. On Election Day, Young defeated Cook in the majority-White district, winning an estimated 95 percent of the Black vote and 23 percent of the White vote.[5]

Young was the first Black Representative from Georgia since Jefferson F. Long's election a century earlier. Young and fellow first-term Representative Barbara Jordan of Texas served as the first Black Members from former-Confederate states since 1901. "I consider this victory a little more than just being the first Black man to go to Congress from this deep South state," Young noted. "I see this as a city-wide mandate of people of both races working together to achieve the kind of representation that this area so badly needs." Young comfortably won re-election in 1974 and 1976.[6]

During the 93rd Congress (1973–1975) Young served on the Committee on Banking and Currency. In the 94th Congress (1975–1977), he left Banking and Currency to become the first Black Representative appointed to the House Rules Committee. The Rules Committee, one of the most powerful panels in the House, controls the flow of legislation to the House Floor. Young remained on the Rules Committee for the remainder of his career. Young also joined the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC), where he was elected treasurer and was an executive committee member.[7]

During his first term, Young worked to direct government resources to underserved communities and promoted expanded political participation in civic affairs. One of his early initiatives was an amendment to the Urban Mass Transportation Assistance Act, legislation that facilitated the building of mass transit systems such as MARTA in Atlanta. Young's amendment, which he sponsored from his seat on the Banking and Currency

Committee, would have required federal funding of projects to be dependent on the participation of local advisory councils that reviewed planning, construction, and operations of mass transportation systems. For Young, local advisory councils promised to help incorporate new and diverse voices into regional decision-making processes. Moreover, the councils would enable local communities to exercise more control over the distribution of funds for building and maintaining important infrastructure projects. "I hope we can begin to write mass transit bills so that the people who live in the inner city can be in on the early planning … and be in on the contracts." During debate on the legislation, however, the House voted in favor of an amendment to remove Young's citizen advisory councils.[8]

Young's approach to lawmaking was reflected in his constituent services. He made it a point to visit his district on weekends because he understood the importance of being visible in his community and among Black voters in Atlanta. "[W]e're terribly cynical about people we don't see," Young once remarked about politicians generally. "We don't read too much about our men in the paper, so it's their physical presence and accessibility that counts."[9]

Young established a liberal voting record on domestic issues. He rejected cuts in federal spending for people with low incomes while supporting an increase in wages for young workers and domestic workers. "Domestic workers ought to be included in any minimum wage considerations for our society has thrived too long on their suffering and sacrifice," he said in 1973. Young also criticized cuts to rural spending programs by the Richard M. Nixon administration. He argued that both Black and White middle-class families could suffer because of Nixon's economic policies, such as the federal moratorium on financing new housing. Throughout his congressional career, both on his own and through the CBC, Young challenged President Nixon to preserve legislation that benefited his Black constituents. He denounced the Nixon administration for an antibusing bill and for failing to support mass transit. In a CBC forum called the "True State of the Union," Young declared, "the overall goal [for Congress] must be to return the economy to a system which generates growth and production instead of death and destruction," and to "provide the aggressive leadership in rebuilding an economy of peace and justice."[10]

In the House, Young developed a keen interest in U.S. foreign policy, especially concerning Africa, Asia, and Latin America. One of his earliest bills called for barring U.S. government contracts to companies that practiced racial discrimination in South Africa. In July 1973, Young successfully lobbied for a provision in a foreign aid bill that authorized the President to cancel aid that Portugal would use for military action in its African colonies. "This House," Young implored, "should take a very simple step to indicate that we will no longer participate, directly or indirectly, in the Portuguese crimes against the African people of Angola, Guinea-Bissau, and Mozambique." The amendment passed the House. Young also supported the United Nations sanctions against Rhodesia and called for a boycott of chrome from the White-minority controlled African country. In 1975, Young testified before the Senate against the nomination of Nathaniel Davis for Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, due to his ambassadorship to Chile during a CIA-sponsored coup d'état against its president in 1973. Young also made congressional visits to South Africa in 1972 and to Zambia, Kenya, and Nigeria in 1975.[11]

In the summer of 1975, Young worked to pass an extension of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. As a member of the Rules Committee, he introduced the legislation for debate and delivered remarks outlining the successes of the Voting Rights Act: increasing the number of Black elected officials in the South, boosting Black voter turnout, and initiating monitoring by federal examiners and observers. He believed the Voting Rights Act was necessary to ensure minority participation in voting and argued that the act allowed politicians to appeal to a cross-section of society instead of only to a privileged few. "There was a time, when, in order to be elected from our part of the country, you had to present yourself at your worst," Young observed. "The man who was the chairman of my campaign … had to run as a segregationist when he wanted to run statewide." Following these deliberations, the House voted 341 to 70 to extend coverage of the Voting Rights Act.[12]

For the remainder of the Congress, Young continued to seek ways to improve the lives of his constituents. He sponsored bills that outlined comprehensive health care plans and testified on behalf of bills that supported economic development in his district and in Africa. Young sponsored the Food Stamp Act of 1976, which proposed an overhaul of the anti-hunger program to make it more readily accessible by eliminating the requirement to purchase stamps.[13]

Young worked successfully with Republicans across the aisle by approaching them one-on-one to discuss political

issues. He reached compromises with political allies and opponents using negotiating skills he honed in the SCLC. Although Young clearly staked out liberal positions, he exhibited a shrewd political pragmatism that surprised his allies. New York Representative Shirley Chisholm noted that Young had "an ability to mediate, arbitrate—to speak with all kinds of persons within the Republican and Democratic parties." Young himself observed that "[s]ome of the people I disagree with the most are some of the people I have come to respect the most … I can usually swing Democratic support, but unless you can get Republican support, nothing happens around here. I'm not going to ask them … to do anything that's going to hurt them politically and they know better than to ask me." In October 1973, after the resignation of Vice President Spiro T. Agnew, Young was the only CBC member who voted for Republican Minority Leader Gerald R. Ford of Michigan to succeed Agnew. "I decided that here was a guy I wanted to give a chance," Young said of his vote. "He was certainly better than a Reagan or any of the other alternatives at the time. Besides, Atlanta was going to need to work very closely with the next administration."[14]

During the early 1970s, Young became acquainted with James Earl "Jimmy" Carter, who was the governor of Georgia. Carter's sincerity and the men's mutual interest in promoting human rights formed the basis for a strong relationship. The Georgia Representative supported Carter's bid for the presidency in 1976 with a seconding speech at the Democratic National Convention in New York City and he organized voter registration drives in urban areas for the successful Carter campaign. On January 29, 1977, after accepting President Carter's offer to serve as U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, Young resigned from Congress.[15]

As the U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, Young became the initial point of contact for the Carter administration's foreign policy in Africa and Asia in an era when the United States competed for influence with the Soviet Union in developing countries. By using the network of contacts that had been developing since the 1950s, he played an active role in articulating Carter's position on human rights in Rhodesia, South Africa, and Angola. Young resigned the ambassadorship in 1979 in the wake of severe criticism following his meeting with Zehdi Labib Terzi, the U.N. observer for the Palestine Liberation Organization. From 1982 to 1990, he served as mayor of Atlanta. He traveled extensively to promote Atlanta's reputation as a financial competitor on the world stage. While mayor, Young also played an active role in bringing the 1996 Olympic Games to Atlanta. In 1990, he launched a gubernatorial bid, but lost to Lieutenant Governor Zell Bryan Miller, who garnered 65 percent of the vote in a runoff election. He eventually formed a consulting firm dedicated to fostering economic development in Africa and the Caribbean. In 2003, Young considered a run for the U.S. Senate, but declined because "[w]inning would mean I would spend the next seven years of my life in Washington, and Washington is not always the center of action." Young remains involved with several consulting firms and nonprofit organizations in the Atlanta area.[16]

Manuscript Collection

The Auburn Avenue Research Library on African American Culture and History (Atlanta, GA). *Papers*: ca. 1910–2007, 474 linear feet. The Andrew Young papers document his career and family life spanning more than 50 years, including his positions as a minister, civil rights activist, U.S. Representative, Ambassador to the United Nations, mayor of Atlanta, co-chair of the 1996 Atlanta Committee of the Olympic Games, and his involvement with Law Companies Group, Inc., and GoodWorks International. The collection contains correspondence, speeches, press releases, calendars, books, minutes, reports, publications, articles, photographs, scrapbooks, artifacts, textiles, trophies and awards, artwork, posters, programs, campaign memorabilia, manuscripts, travel documents, notes, sermons, ephemera, and audiovisual material. A finding aid is available in the repository and online.

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Cardiss Collins

1931–2013

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1973–1997

Democrat from Illinois



Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

Elected to 12 consecutive terms in the U.S. House of Representatives, Cardiss Collins ranks as one of the longest-serving women of color in the history of Congress. Succeeding her late husband, Representative George W. Collins, after his death in 1972, Cardiss Collins was one of only a handful of women to serve in Congress for more than 20 years, and for six years she was the only Black woman in the chamber. Collins, a member of the powerful Chicago Democratic organization headed by Mayor Richard J. Daley, was a dedicated legislator who focused on the economic and social needs of her urban district. "We must have housing, jobs and an energy policy that doesn't tell our people 'make a decision between heating and eating,'" she said.[1]

Cardiss Collins was born Cardiss Hortense Robertson on September 24, 1931, in St. Louis, Missouri, to Finley, a laborer, and Rosia Mae Robertson, a nurse. Upon graduating from the Detroit High School of Commerce in Michigan, she worked in a factory tying mattress springs while living with her maternal grandmother in Chicago. She later found employment as a stenographer at a carnival equipment company. Attending night classes at Northwestern University, she earned a business certificate in 1966 and a diploma in professional accounting one year later. After graduation, Collins remained in Chicago, where she worked for the Illinois department of labor as a secretary and later with the Illinois department of revenue as an auditor.[2]

Collins gained her first political experience serving as a committeewoman for Chicago's Democratic ward organization. In 1958, she married George Collins and participated in his various campaigns for alderman, committeeman, and U.S. Representative while raising their son, Kevin. On November 3, 1970, George Collins won both a special and a general election to fill a U.S. House seat representing Chicago that had been left vacant following the death of Illinois Representative Daniel John Ronan. Known as a diligent but quiet Member who rarely spoke on the House Floor, George Collins had close political ties to Richard J. Daley.[3]

In December 1972, shortly after George Collins won election to another term in Congress, he died in an airplane crash near Chicago's Midway Airport. Attention immediately turned to Cardiss Collins to fill his seat. "I never gave politics a thought for myself. When people started proposing my candidacy right after the crash, I was

in too much of a daze to think seriously about running," she said. As she mourned, Collins announced her candidacy for the special election to fill the congressional seat held by her late husband that encompassed the predominantly African-American West Side of Chicago. Newly drawn after court-ordered redistricting, the district stretched east to west across the city and was about 60 percent Black. Its borders took in some of the wealthiest and some of the poorest neighborhoods in Chicago. With the solid backing of Mayor Daley's Cook County Democratic organization, Collins handily defeated her opponents Otis Collins, a former state representative, and Milton Gardner, a law student, in the Democratic primary, winning 84 percent of the vote. On June 5, 1973, she became the first African-American woman to represent the state of Illinois in Congress by defeating Republican contender Lar Daly and Independent Angel Moreno with an overwhelming 92 percent of the vote.[4]

Collins, who was reserved by nature, was eager to begin legislating and set out to learn and master the lawmaking process in an institution often dominated by big personalities. A few years after taking office, she noted, "Once people learned I had something to say, I gained confidence." In 1973, Collins commented that her primary objective as a Representative was to "provide better living and working conditions for people [on Chicago's west side] and other low- and moderate-income people throughout the country." Known for her commitment to the issues directly affecting her constituents, Collins spent eight days each month in her district to ensure that she stayed abreast of their concerns. The close attention Collins paid to her district reaped benefits at the polls. For more than two decades, Collins won by comfortable margins in the strongly Democratic district, typically defeating her Republican opponents by more than 80 percent. Collins did, however, experience some difficult primary races during the mid-1980s against Danny K. Davis, who later succeeded her—a consequence of the decline in power of the Cook County Democratic organization that accelerated with the death of Richard J. Daley in 1976. Still, Collins proved to be a resilient and popular lawmaker.[5]

During her first term in Congress, Collins served on the Committee on Government Operations. As a member of the panel throughout her tenure in Congress, Collins chaired two Government Operations subcommittees: Manpower and Housing; and Government Activities and Transportation. She eventually rose to the position of ranking Democrat of the full committee during the 104th Congress (1995–1997). Collins also served on the Committee on International Relations from 1975 to 1980, the District of Columbia Committee during the 95th Congress (1977–1979), and the influential Committee on Energy and Commerce from the 97th through the 104th Congress (1981–1997). She was the first Black woman to serve on the panel and eventually chaired the Commerce, Consumer Protection, and Competitiveness Subcommittee in the 102nd and the 103rd Congresses (1991–1995). In 1975, Collins was the first African American and woman selected as an at-large Democratic whip.[6]

During the 96th Congress (1979–1981), Collins became chair of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC), giving her a powerful position with which to influence the lawmaking process. As only the second woman to lead the CBC and as the fourth Black woman ever to serve in the U.S. House, Collins found herself in the spotlight. The high visibility of her position encouraged her to become more outspoken. As chair, Collins voiced disapproval with President James Earl "Jimmy" Carter's record on civil rights, and she criticized the President for failing to gather congressional support to make Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday a federal holiday. Collins also disparaged the House for its failure to pass the bill, saying that "racism had a part in it." At one fundraiser, Collins called for unity within the CBC as many Black lawmakers grew disillusioned with the Carter administration, declaring, "We will no longer wait for political power to be shared with us, we will take it." Members of the CBC praised Collins, citing her ability to lead with fairness and to create an atmosphere that encouraged unity through open debate.[7]

Throughout her 24 years in Congress, Collins dedicated herself to the advancement of African Americans and other minority communities. Collins was an advocate for affirmative action in hiring and federal contract set-asides for minority-owned businesses. According to Collins, some federal agencies—including the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Federal Trade Commission, and the U.S. Department of Justice—were not upholding the provisions of the Civil Rights Act requiring agencies that received federal funding provide information on their affirmative action programs. Her 1984 findings as chair of the House Subcommittee on Government Activities and Transportation led her to ask Congress to curb funding to

specific agencies, arguing, "Laws that have been debated and passed by the courts cannot arbitrarily be negated by individuals." She continued her defense of affirmative action by drawing attention to the hiring practices of U.S. airlines, which rarely placed African Americans in professional positions. In her push for equality in the aviation industry, Collins successfully amended the Airport and Airway Safety, Capacity, and Expansion Act of 1987, requiring that 10 percent of all concession stands in airports be run by minority- and women-owned businesses.[8]

Collins also worked to prevent federal tax write-offs for advertising firms that discriminated against minority-owned media companies. Hoping to "provide black and other minority station owners with a mechanism for redress," Collins argued that financial penalties for offending agencies would help combat discrimination and level the playing field for all media organizations. She also used her Energy and Commerce Committee seat to crusade against gender and racial inequality in broadcast licensing. On several occasions, Collins introduced legislation to preserve Federal Communications Commission policies designed to increase the number of women and minorities who owned media companies.[9]

As a Government Operations subcommittee chair, Collins held oversight hearings on an array of topics, including safety in air travel and the transportation of toxic materials. After Congress passed the McKinney–Vento Homeless Assistance Act in 1987, Collins monitored the implementation of a provision that encouraged the federal government to make its surplus properties available to local governments and nonprofits to assist people experiencing homelessness. She authored legislation to facilitate the transfer of a federal building near the Capitol to the District of Columbia government for use as a homeless shelter.[10]

As chair of the Energy and Commerce Committee's Subcommittee on Commerce, Consumer Protection, and Competitiveness, Collins pursued legislation to regulate children's products. She sponsored the Child Safety Protection Act, which required warning labels on toys with small parts and required the Consumer Product Safety Commission to establish standards for the manufacture of children's bicycle helmets. The act was signed into law in 1994.[11]

To promote equal opportunities for women who participated in collegiate sports, Collins introduced the Equity in Athletics Disclosure Act on February 17, 1993. The amendment to the Higher Education Act of 1965 directed colleges and universities to publicize the rate of program participation by gender. "Putting the public spotlight on athletic schools with records of sex discrimination in their programs will increase pressure for change," she said. In recognition of her commitment to gender equity in athletics, Collins was inducted into the Women's Sports Hall of Fame in 1994.[12]

To expand access to health care, Collins cosponsored the Universal Health Care Act (1991) and the Health Security Act (1993) and urged the National Institutes of Health to direct resources to study health and wellness issues that concern minorities. "It can no longer be assumed that the entire American population has one uniform set of health care needs and medical responses," she said. A longtime advocate of increasing breast cancer awareness, Collins drafted legislation to help women older than age 34 receive Medicare coverage for mammograms and introduced a law designating October as National Breast Cancer Awareness Month.[13]

Collins declined to run for re-election to the 105th Congress (1997–1999). She vowed to remain active in Democratic politics but decided that the time had come to end her career in elective office. "I'm going to be 65 next year, and that's the time many people retire," she said. After Congress, Collins returned to Chicago, Illinois, and, later, moved to Alexandria, Virginia, where she died on February 3, 2013, at the age of 81.[14]

Manuscript Collection

University of Illinois at Chicago, Special Collections and University Archives Department, Richard J. Daley Library (Chicago, IL). *Papers*: 1970–1996, 287 linear feet. The Cardiss Collins papers include U.S. House of Representatives reports, legislation, resolutions, certificates, artifacts, records of activity of the Congressional Black Caucus, correspondence, election campaign documents, newsletters, photographs, audio recordings of speeches, newspaper clippings, travel records, videos, legislative and hearing records, newspaper clippings, and memorabilia. The collection also includes the papers of Collins's husband, former U.S. Representative George W. Collins.

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Harold E. Ford

1945–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1975–1997

Democrat from Tennessee



Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

The first African-American lawmaker to represent Tennessee in the U.S. Congress, Harold E. Ford transformed his family's entrepreneurial success into a political dynasty that shaped state and national politics. Ford's membership on the influential House Ways and Means Committee enabled him to build support among his constituents by directing ample federal funding to his district. Elected at age 29, Ford was one of the youngest Members ever to chair a subcommittee on Ways and Means. During his more-than-two-decade career in the House, Ford strongly advocated government assistance for Americans experiencing poverty and set out to reform welfare in the United States. "No one in this prosperous country should be forced by economic conditions to go hungry or homeless or lack adequate health care," he said. "A budget that makes the poor poorer makes us all poorer."[1]

Harold Eugene Ford was born on May 20, 1945, in Memphis, Tennessee, one of 15 children of Newton, an undertaker, and Vera, a homemaker. Ford earned a bachelor of science from Tennessee State University, a historically Black university in Nashville, Tennessee, in 1967, and an associate of arts degree in mortuary science from John Gupton College, also in Nashville, in 1969. Ford later earned a master's degree in business administration from Howard University, in Washington, DC, in 1982. On February 10, 1969, he married Dorothy Bowles. The couple had three children, future Representative Harold E. Ford Jr., Newton Jake, and Sir Isaac, before divorcing in 1999.[2]

Following college, Ford entered the family mortuary business. One day, after meeting a candidate for state office at his business, Ford decided to run for a seat in the Tennessee state house of representatives himself. "This fellow came in looking for a campaign contribution for his race for the state legislature," Ford later recalled. "When he stepped out the door, I decided to run." Ford lobbied support from churches, civic clubs, and other African-American groups in Memphis. His well-organized campaign also tapped into his family's business network—an invaluable community that laid the groundwork for his victorious bid for the state legislature in 1970. Ford made his mark early in the Tennessee house of representatives. Named majority whip in his first term, he also chaired a legislative committee that investigated utility rates and practices. Though Ford was not the first in his family to run for office—his great-grandfather held a county office, and his father campaigned unsuccessfully for a seat in the Tennessee house—his election

to the state house set the foundation for a new family-run political machine. Within five years, Harold Ford held a seat in Congress, his brother Emmitt served in the Tennessee state house, and his brother John simultaneously served in the state senate and on the Memphis city council. The Ford family also benefited from changes in the political landscape. In the 1970s, African Americans moved to Memphis in greater numbers in search of employment, while many White residents fled to the suburbs after court-ordered busing desegregated the city's public schools.[3]

After two terms as a state legislator, Ford, at the urging of local Black politicians, ran for a seat in the U.S. House in 1974. He easily defeated his three opponents—Mary A. Guthrie, a Catholic nun; Joan Best, a schoolteacher; and Lee Whitman, a lawyer—in the Democratic primary with 63 percent of the vote. Ford faced Dan Heflin Kuykendall, a four-term incumbent Republican, in the general election. The southwest Tennessee congressional district was the site of rapid demographic change. In just two years, the district's Black population grew from 29 to 45 percent, though it retained a narrow White majority. To strengthen his standing with Black voters and Democratic White voters in the district, Ford's platform emphasized economic development for the community. "Inflation knows no color … that's what the people will vote on," Ford remarked. His campaign enlisted an army of paid workers and volunteers, both Black and White, and received financial support from Black churches and luminaries such as the singer Isaac Hayes. An energetic campaigner, Ford "organized the headquarters and phone banks … put together caravans that … would wind slowly through residential neighborhoods carrying campaign workers who would put up yard signs and hand out candy to kids." With the Watergate scandal as a backdrop to the early part of the campaign, Ford called for the immediate impeachment of President Richard M. Nixon. Kuykendall, who had faced little previous opposition, had difficulty separating himself from the embattled President. After contesting the initial results, Ford narrowly won the general election by 744 votes, becoming the first Black Representative from Tennessee. He joined an influx of first-term Members of the House elected to the 94th Congress (1975–1977). Dubbed the "Watergate Babies," the 75 new Democratic Representatives capitalized on an anti-Nixon sentiment in the wake of the scandal.[4]

Ford typically won re-election by comfortable margins. He locked in the Black vote and a larger number of White voters in his district to win 61 percent of the vote in 1976. By the 1980s, Ford's district had become majority Black, and the Tennessee Representative increased his margins of victory, typically garnering more than 70 percent of the vote. In his later terms, despite a series of legal issues, Ford continued to win re-election with smaller margins of victory.[5]

During his first term, Ford was assigned to the Committee on Banking, Currency, and Housing, the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, the Select Committee on Aging, and the Select Committee on Assassinations. In September 1975, the Tennessee Representative resigned from the Banking and Veterans' Affairs Committees to become the second African American, after Charles B. Rangel of New York, selected to serve on the prestigious House Ways and Means Committee, which set federal tax and revenue policy. Ford served on the Ways and Means Committee for the remainder of his House career and remained on the Select Committee on Aging through the 102nd Congress (1991–1993). In 1987, Speaker of the House Jim Wright of Texas appointed Ford to the powerful Democratic Steering and Policy Committee, which makes committee assignments for Democratic Members of the House.

Throughout his career, Ford focused on improving the nation's welfare system to provide low-income Americans with a social safety net and job training. He also sought economic development initiatives to bring new businesses and revenue to Memphis. During the 95th Congress (1977–1979), Ford attempted to cultivate public support for President James Earl "Jimmy" Carter's comprehensive urban policy plan—an initiative to invest in American cities that had suffered economic setbacks. Ford informed his constituents that they were "in a position to impact directly upon the 5-10 pieces of legislation which are required to implement these proposals. … Only through such actions can we as black people ever make the 'system' work as it should."[6]

As a member of the Select Committee on Aging, Ford worked to assist senior citizens who needed health care in his district. He cosponsored the extension of the Older Americans Act, which was due to expire in 1978. To draw constituent support for the measure, Ford participated in a field hearing in his district. "The response … has been overwhelming with 'aging' enthusiasts in my district who are anxious to have their voices heard," Ford wrote.[7]

As a Member of the Ways and Means Subcommittee on Health, Ford criticized President Ronald Reagan's

efforts to curtail Medicare funding. In 1981, the Tennessee Representative also attempted to block a measure by the Ways and Means Committee to cut more than $1.7 billion from Medicare and sponsored legislation that would have expanded the federal health insurance program's coverage to include hearing aids, eyeglasses, and dental care. "Good and accessible health care … is almost as basic of a right as freedom of speech," Ford said. "I cannot buy the argument that we can't afford a national health plan."[8]

In the 97th Congress (1981–1983), Ford became chairman of the Ways and Means Subcommittee on Public Assistance and Unemployment Compensation, a position he used to secure federal government aid for unemployed workers who had exhausted state benefits. In 1981, in response to an economic recession, Ford cosponsored legislation to establish the Federal Supplemental Compensation program, which extended unemployment payments for up to 10 weeks. The following year, Ford held a hearing to consider his bill to extend federal compensation for an additional three to seven weeks per recipient. Criticizing the Reagan administration, Ford declared, "The President's policies have included recession, and American workers are the innocent victims." His bill did not make it out of committee. In 1983, he helped manage a bill to extend the compensation program and again expand the number of weeks that an unemployed worker could receive benefits. The bill was signed into law with some of the expanded benefits intact.[9]

In 1987, Ford introduced the Family Support Act—an overhaul of the federal welfare program, Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), that linked benefits to work. The legislation amended AFDC to require states to establish work, education, and training programs and required parents who received AFDC support to participate. The amendment also required states to provide a minimum level of cash assistance and improve the availability of child care services. Although the initial cost was high, Ford pointed out, "We will save revenue for the federal government three to four years down the road." After nearly two years of legislative maneuvering, a pared-down version of Ford's initial proposal was signed into law.[10]

In 1987, Ford was indicted on 19 federal counts that included charges of obstruction against the Internal Revenue Service, mail and bank fraud, and embezzlement. The Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) publicly backed Ford, pledging to raise $250,000 to help pay his legal bills. Ford and the CBC questioned the legitimacy of the investigation, arguing that it was racially or politically motivated.[11]

Following his indictment, Ford resigned as subcommittee chair but continued to work on issues important to his constituents. He supported a bill to raise the ceiling on the number of immigrants admitted to the United States and introduced legislation that would provide college scholarships and job training for low-income people. In his district, Ford helped secure a multimillion-dollar development project for downtown Memphis. During his congressional tenure he also obtained federal funding for public housing improvements and upgrades for Memphis International Airport, as well as increased opportunities for minority businesses in his Tennessee district.[12]

After a mistrial was declared in April 1990, a federal judge ruled that Ford's second trial would take place in Memphis, but that jurors would be selected from several outlying counties due to the publicity of the first proceeding. House leaders filed an amicus curiae brief on Ford's behalf arguing that the Representative's right to a fair trial had been violated by the decision to bus jurors in from rural western Tennessee. Ford's defense team and the CBC made an unsuccessful request for a review by the U.S. Department of Justice. In April 1993, a predominantly White jury acquitted Ford of all charges.[13]

After his acquittal, Ford's seniority privileges were restored, and he reclaimed his position as chair of the Ways and Means Subcommittee on Human Resources following a six-year absence. The Tennessee Representative also continued his pursuit of welfare reform. He served as an intermediary between the William J. Clinton administration and the CBC, which had differing priorities on welfare reform. Ford generally supported Clinton's proposals, though he shared the CBC's wariness over time limits on cash assistance and emphasized that adequate employment should be made available to recipients. "The problem is not that welfare recipients choose not to work, but that welfare recipients do not have the job skills to get jobs that will support their children," he said. Ford proposed a more gradual approach to helping people transition off of welfare that included standardizing and increasing benefits rather than abruptly ending services. He also put forward a more ambitious welfare-to-work plan that would pay workers a minimum of $9 to $9.50 an hour. In return for receiving double the minimum wage, workers would relinquish welfare benefits such as food stamps and housing subsidies.

"What I'm looking at, on a national level, is replacing welfare with a jobs program," Ford noted. Ultimately, the 1996 welfare reform bill signed into law by President Clinton failed to include Ford's comprehensive initiatives.[14]

For several years, speculation swirled around Ford's possible retirement from the House. "I didn't want history to show I was on my way down," Ford said when asked if he had thought of stepping down after his legal vindication in 1993. Three years later, Ford announced his decision to leave Congress. "I'm going to leave while I'm on top," he remarked. "I've been there (in Congress) a long time. I've seen how members of Congress stayed beyond the level of capacity where they can really be effective." Ford's son, Harold E. Ford Jr., won his father's House seat for the 105th Congress (1997–1999), making Harold Ford the first African-American Representative whose son succeeded him in Congress. After his career in the House, Ford managed a political consulting firm in Tennessee and remained active in his family's funeral home business.[15]

Notes

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2 *Congressional Record*, House, 104th Cong., 2nd sess. (26 September 1996): 25249–25251; *Almanac of American Politics, 1994* (Washington, DC: National Journal Inc., 1993): 1432; James W. Brosnan, "Harold, Dorothy Ford Avoid Divorce Trial With Agreement," 31 March 1999, *Commercial Appeal* (Memphis, TN): B2.

3 Dorothy Gilliam, "Harold Ford," 23 February 1975, *Washington Post*: H1; Charles Bernsen, "Political Machine of Ford Clan Took a Century to Build," *Commercial Appeal*, 1 July 1990: A1; Charles Bernsen, "Ford Team Scored Big in 1974," 2 July 1990, *Commercial Appeal*: A1; Bernard Garnett, "Going Home: More Black Americans Return to the South from 'Exile' in the North," 10 November 1972, *Wall Street Journal*: 1; *Almanac of American Politics, 1996* (Washington, DC: National Journal Inc., 1995): 1253.

4 Bernsen, "Ford Team Scored Big in 1974"; *Almanac of American Politics, 1976* (Washington, DC: National Journal Inc., 1975): 809–810; Bill Terry, "Nun, Mortician Vie in Tenn. Hill Race," 1 August 1974, *New York Times*: A12; Gilliam, "Harold Ford"; Haynes Johnson, "Nixon's the One Hurting the GOP," 27 October 1974, *Washington Post*: C1; *Politics in America, 1982* (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Inc., 1981): 1140–1141; Office of the Clerk, U.S. House of Representatives, "Election Statistics, 1920 to Present," https://history.house.gov/Institution/Election-Statistics/; "Freshmen Have Never Been Treated So Well," 15 January 1975, *Washington Post*: B1.

5 Henry Mitchell, "A Symbolic Gathering," 6 January 1977, *Washington Post*: D9; *Politics in America, 1982*: 1141; "Election Statistics, 1920 to Present." For example, Ford won 82 percent of the vote in 1988. Two years later, he garnered 58 percent in the general election.

6 Harold Ford, "Carter's Urban Policy: A Workable Mish–Mash?," 20 April 1978, *Atlanta Daily World*: 4.

7 Hearing before the Select Committee on Aging, *Special Needs and Problems of the Elderly in Memphis*, 95th Cong., 2nd sess. (1978); Comprehensive Older Americans Act Amendments, H.R. 12527, 95th Cong. (1978); Comprehensive Older Americans Act Amendments, Public Law 95-478, 92 Stat. 1513 (1978); *Congressional Record*, Extensions of Remarks, 95th Cong., 1st sess. (4 November 1977): 37420.

8 A bill to provide coverage for eyeglasses, hearing aids, and dentures under the medicare program, H.R. 2020, 97th Cong. (1981); H.R. 3757, 97th Cong. (1981); *Politics in America*, *1982*: 1140; *Special Needs and Problems of the Elderly in Memphis*: 2.

9 Hearing before the House Committee on Ways and Means, Subcommittee on Public Assistance and Unemployment Compensation, *Additional Weeks of Unemployment Benefits*, 97th Cong., 2nd sess. (1982): 1–2, 6; Tax Equity and Fiscal Responsibility Act of 1982, Public Law 97-248, 96 Stat. 324 (1982); A bill to increase the number of weeks for which Federal supplemental unemployment compensation is payable, H.R. 7327, 97th Cong. (1982); "House Unit Clears Bill Boosting Weeks of Jobless Benefits," 9 December 1982, *Wall Street Journal*: 3; Federal Supplemental Compensation Amendments of 1983, Public Law 98-135, 97 Stat. 857 (1983); *Congressional Record*, House, 98th Cong., 1st sess. (29 September 1983): 26423, 26444; David Rogers, "Congress Ok's Benefit Extension for Jobless," 22 October 1983, *Boston Globe*: 3.

10 "Top House Democrats Back 'Workfare,'" 20 March 1987, Associated Press; Family Support Act of 1988, H.R. 1720, 100th Cong. (1987); Family Support Act of 1988, Public Law 100-485, 102 Stat. 2343 (1988); "Congress Completes Overhaul of Welfare," 1 October 1988, *Chicago Tribune*: 3.

11 Howard Kurtz, "Tennessee Rep. Ford Indicted on Tax, Bank Fraud Charges," 25 April 1987, *Washington Post*: A1. The most controversial aspects of the case stemmed from the establishment of a "sham corporation" that processed a $350,000 loan from the financiers to Ford's funeral home business. The indictment alleged that instead of using the money for those purposes, Ford used the loan for personal reasons. C.H. Butcher Jr., a bank financier, pleaded guilty to conspiracy and bankruptcy fraud charges and agreed to cooperate with prosecutors. Another member of the Butcher family was serving a 20-year prison term for defrauding depositors; Woody Baird, "Congressman Says His Indictment Racially Motivated,"28 April 1987, Associated Press; Kenneth B. Noble, "Blacks in Congress Join to Help Indicted Colleague," 28 May 1987, *New York Times*: A20; William L. Clay, *Just Permanent Interests: Black Americans in Congress, 1870–1991* (New York: Amistad Press, Inc., 1992): 332–334.

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Clinton Welfare Plan," 25 June 1994, *Afro-American Red Star* (Washington, DC): A1; James Wright, "Blacks and Whites Differ on Welfare Reform," 9 April 1994, *Afro-American Red Star*: A15; *Congressional Record*, House, 103rd Cong., 1st sess. (9 November 1993): 27967; Leslie Phillips, "For Congressman, Reputation Retrieval," 21 April 1993, *USA Today*: 8A; Kenneth J. Cooper, "Rep. Ford Finds New Faces, Old Issues; Long-Absent Subcommittee Chairman Retakes Helm and Tackles Welfare Overhaul," 22 April 1993, *Washington Post*: A21; William M. Welch, "Ford 'Ready' to Redo Welfare," 27 January 1994, *USA Today*: 5A; Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, Public Law 104-193, 110 Stat. 2105 (1996).

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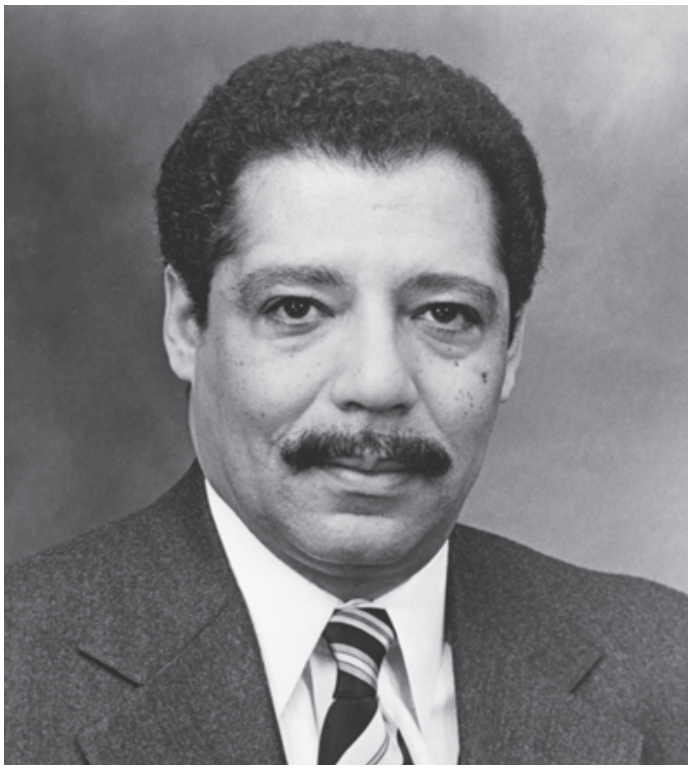
Julian C. Dixon

1934–2000

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1979–2000

Democrat from California



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Julian C. Dixon, who was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives from a Los Angeles district in 1979, became the first African-American lawmaker to head an Appropriations subcommittee. During his two decades in Congress, House leaders entrusted Dixon with sensitive, high-stakes responsibilities. As chair of the Committee on Standards of Official Conduct, he led the investigation into allegations that Speaker Jim Wright of Texas had violated House Rules, and he held a high-ranking position on the Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence. Dixon's low-key, evenhanded approach helped him thrive in such key committee assignments. "I don't mean to be critical of anyone else's style, but I think it's better to have an impact on the issue than to give a speech that gets picked up in the national press," Dixon said.[1]

Julian Carey Dixon was born in Washington, DC, on August 8, 1934. His father Henry Dixon was a longtime postal worker. Dixon attended Monroe Elementary School in northwest Washington, DC, before moving to the Culver City section of Los Angeles County, California, with his mother Corinne Carey Gleed at age 11. He graduated from Susan Miller Dorsey High School in 1953. From 1957 to 1960, Dixon served in the U.S. Army, attaining the rank of sergeant. In 1962, he graduated with a bachelor's degree from Los Angeles State College; five years later, he earned a law degree from Southwestern University in Los Angeles. Dixon married Felicia Bragg, and the couple had a son, Cary Gordon, before divorcing. Dixon later married Bettye Lee.[2]

Dixon's political career began as a legislative aide to California state senator and future U.S. Representative Mervyn M. Dymally. In 1972, Dixon won election to the California assembly, filling the seat of Yvonne Brathwaite Burke, who embarked on a successful campaign for a Los Angeles-based seat in the U.S. House. Dixon registered as an immediate force in Sacramento, chairing the assembly's Democratic caucus—he was the first freshman legislator to hold that post—and attaining positions on the influential ways and means and criminal justice committees. His signature piece of legislation was a criminal and juvenile justice measure that brought $55 million in state funding to California counties. Dixon built a network of important allies in addition to Dymally and Governor Jerry Brown, including assembly speaker Leo T. McCarthy, assemblyman Henry Arnold Waxman, and assembly majority leader Howard Lawrence Berman. The latter two eventually served alongside Dixon in the U.S. House.[3]

When Yvonne Burke announced she was retiring from Congress to run for California attorney general in 1978, Dixon entered the race for the vacant House seat. The district encompassed much of West Los Angeles, including Culver City, Inglewood, and Palms, a neighborhood adjacent to Beverly Hills. With registered Democrats composing 76 percent of the constituency, the district contained a cross section of wealthy, middle-class, and working-class voters and a plurality-Black population (about 38 percent of the district); the constituency also included a large White population and a growing Hispanic segment. Dixon was one of three major contenders in a field of eight that vied for the Democratic nomination, including two other prominent African-American candidates: California state senator Nate Holden and Los Angeles City councilman David S. Cunningham Jr. During the primary, Dixon relied on his connections to state legislators such as Berman and Waxman, using their help to launch a direct-mail campaign that challenged Holden's credentials as a state legislator. Dixon handily won the September primary with 48 percent of the vote; Holden was runner-up with 34 percent. That win assured Dixon a House seat. Without an opponent in the general election, he did not maintain a campaign headquarters and did little campaigning; during his relatively few appearances, he emphasized health care, affordable housing for seniors, and energy issues. Redistricting after the 1980 and 1990 censuses changed the geography of the district, eliminating some precincts, but did not dilute the district's heavily Democratic composition; African Americans still accounted for roughly 40 percent of the population after 1980, and that percentage remained steady through 2000. In his subsequent 11 re-elections, Dixon won by lopsided margins, capturing between 73 and 87 percent of the vote.[4]

When Dixon claimed his House seat in January 1979, he won a coveted assignment on the Appropriations Committee—a rare coup for a first-term Member. Dixon later claimed that he had convinced party leaders to give him the seat "using three hats": first, his predecessor, Yvonne Burke, had served on the panel for the previous two Congresses; second, he had experience in the appropriations process in the California assembly; and third, he suggested the panel needed more minority representation. Dixon remained on the Appropriations Committee throughout his long House career. In 1980, he became the first African American to win a subcommittee chair on Appropriations, taking over as head of the District of Columbia Subcommittee. In the 98th Congress (1983–1985), Dixon received an additional assignment on the Committee on Standards of Official Conduct (widely known as the Ethics Committee). He served on the Ethics Committee until the end of the 101st Congress (1989–1991). In 1993, House leaders tapped Dixon for a seat on the influential Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, where he remained through the 106th Congress (1999–2001), by which time he had become the panel's ranking Democrat.[5]

Dixon quickly earned a reputation as an institutional player who worked effectively behind the scenes and shunned the limelight. "I do not work the press," he said. "I never had a press aide, as such. I realize that there are sexy issues one can get a lot of public attention working on. I have not avoided those issues but I have not pursued them." Dixon's quiet but effective approach brought him several difficult assignments, demonstrating the level of trust House leadership placed in him. He was eventually tapped as chair of the rules committee for the 1984 Democratic National Convention—another first for an African American.[6]

At the start of the 99th Congress (1985–1987), House leaders chose Representative Dixon to chair the Ethics Committee. It was a sensitive post given that the committee dealt with the behavior and actions of their colleagues in the House. The following Congress, Dixon presided over an investigation into a book deal that critics suggested had earned Speaker Jim Wright outside income in violation of the House Rules. Numerous other complaints were filed against Wright after the investigation began. Under Dixon's leadership, the Ethics Committee released a 456-page report by an outside counsel indicating that the Speaker had violated the House Rules on numerous counts. When the committee signaled its willingness to investigate the allegations in the report, Wright stepped down in June 1989. Dixon was lauded as a fair-minded, effective leader who imparted a bipartisan ethos to the committee's deliberations and conclusions. Nevertheless, Dixon dodged publicity, voicing his plan to leave the committee in early 1989. "It is no secret that I had no desire to serve any longer," he said. Dixon followed House precedent which required the Ethics Committee chairman to be retained during an ongoing investigation, though he left the post at the end of the 100th Congress (1987–1989).[7]

Dixon also chaired the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) in the 98th Congress. His role as a conciliator

sometimes caused friction among the members of the caucus. Every year, the CBC offered an alternative federal budget which highlighted the legislative needs and programs that were important to Black communities. But in 1983, Speaker Thomas P. "Tip" O'Neill Jr. of Massachusetts asked Dixon to not introduce the CBC's budget, allowing Democratic leadership to deny other budget proposals that may have derailed passage of the leadership's legislation. Some CBC members criticized Dixon for agreeing to withhold the caucus's budget, but he had not acted unilaterally; rather, a majority of the CBC voted to not propose their alternative. Dixon later praised the leadership's budget for including 75 percent of the provisions in the CBC's alternative budget. "Our purpose, hopefully, is not to go down to defeat with honor," Dixon explained. "Our purpose is to have some success."[8]

In addition to his work on the Ethics Committee, Dixon's other principal focus was the District of Columbia Subcommittee of the Appropriations Committee. He took over the post from Representative Charles Wilson of Texas in early 1980. "Because of my background in dealing with urban problems in the state legislature, and my fondness for the District by way of birth, I would take it if it became available," Dixon had said. Some Members considered the post an unrewarding burden because it afforded little opportunity to address issues in their home districts. For example, Louis Stokes of Ohio, who was next in seniority, declined to serve as chair. Dixon, however, believed his subcommittee chair dovetailed with the interests of his urban and working-class constituents: "My people aren't parochial," he explained. "They have expanded horizons."[9]

As chair, Dixon balanced competing tensions and political impulses in the House between those seeking to grant the federal city greater autonomy on the path to complete home rule—the right of the District's residents to self-government—and those who sought to exercise a greater oversight role of the capital. Throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, Dixon sought to help manage the District of Columbia's budget while appropriating federal dollars for important programs. These programs included youth training initiatives, subsidized mental health care for low-income individuals, and federal support for District efforts to collect fees for parking and traffic violations committed by foreign embassy vehicles. Some political observers noted that he had as much impact on the city as its congressional Delegates during that period. During his early years as subcommittee chair, Dixon maintained a hands-off approach and deferred to local leaders. Eventually, Dixon grew disillusioned with the actions of city officials as the city fell deeper into debt and Mayor Marion S. Barry Jr. was beset by legal issues. "I have personally come to the conclusion that the District government has not acted in good faith with the Congress," Dixon said at an Appropriations Committee hearing in 1995. "I wanted to think the best. Now I believe the worst." Dixon urged city officials to repeal a 1994 law that prevented privatization of city functions, a practice Dixon felt necessary to chip away at the city's debt. Even then, he fought efforts by the Republican-led House to cut the city's federal funding. "The train is coming down the track in Congress, and I don't want to see it," Dixon warned the district's government in 1995. "Repeal it."[10]

Dixon also served on the Appropriations Subcommittee on Foreign Operations from 1979 through 1989, where he influenced U.S. assistance to foreign countries. Dixon drafted bills requesting the President and Secretary of State avoid inviting South African officials to visit until apartheid ended and for the United States to oppose loans by the International Monetary Fund to any country that employed apartheid. He also urged congressional support of Namibia against "South Africa's illegal occupation." In December 1984, Dixon joined California Representative Howard Berman and the mayor of Annapolis, Maryland, Richard Hillman, in a peaceful demonstration outside the South African Embassy in Washington, DC, against the minority-White apartheid government, prompting the arrest of Dixon and his fellow protestors. Dixon cosponsored the landmark Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act of 1986, which placed economic sanctions on South Africa. Dixon also authored two resolutions recommending sanctions against the Haitian government and Jean-Claude Duvalier, its former president.[11]

Dixon pursued legislative items pertaining to issues that were important to the African-American community. He authored a resolution, passed by the House, to award the Presidential Medal of Freedom to Dr. Benjamin Mays, the longtime president of Morehouse College in Atlanta, Georgia, and a mentor to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. He also sponsored a resolution designating September 1983 Sickle Cell Anemia Awareness Month.[12]

Dixon's position on the Appropriations Committee left him well-placed to direct funding to his Los Angeles district, including initiatives to establish a mass transit system in the

city, for which he secured more than $3.8 billion in federal funding from 1983 to 2000 and programs to promote affordable housing and better access to health care. He also helped secure federal relief funding after violence and looting broke out in Los Angeles in 1992 and in the aftermath of the 1994 Northridge earthquake. In a 1997 omnibus measure, he managed to win several million dollars for the development and upgrade of the Alameda Corridor, which connected the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach with national rail lines. Dixon also worked to create a loan guarantee program for small businesses and contractors that were hurt economically by military base closings in Southern California, and he helped to secure federal grants for museums and educational opportunities in his district. At several points, Dixon was mentioned as a possible candidate for a seat on the powerful Los Angeles County board of supervisors (where his predecessor served after she left the House), but he chose to remain on Capitol Hill.[13]

As a member of the Permanent Select House Committee on Intelligence, Dixon advocated for increased transparency among the nation's intelligence agencies. In 1999, Dixon helped shepherd passage of the appropriations bill for intelligence agencies. Colleagues praised Dixon for his role in shaping the bipartisan bill, though Dixon repeatedly expressed regret at the classified nature of the funding totals. "I believe that no harm to the national security would be caused by making the aggregate budget request, the aggregate authorization, or the aggregate appropriations public," he said during debate. Dixon's service on the select committee complemented his interests on the national security subcommittee under Appropriations. Dixon generally sought to limit defense spending, though he joined other Californians in voting to restart the B-2 stealth bomber program headquartered in his state.[14]

Just one month after being re-elected to a twelfth consecutive term, Representative Dixon died of a heart attack on December 8, 2000, in Los Angeles. A close friend and fellow House Member from Los Angeles, Howard Berman, described Dixon as "unique for the political class because he had his ego under control. … His interest was in accomplishing things and in loyalty to the institution." Recalling his service on the Appropriations Subcommittee on the District of Columbia, the *Washington Post* eulogized Dixon, a native of the District, for his "unfailing respect for city residents." Dixon, the *Post* wrote, "never forgot his roots," making him "one of the best friends the District ever had."[15]

Manuscript Collection

California State Archives (Sacramento, CA). *Papers*: 1973–1978, 5.5 cubic feet. The collection includes material from Julian C. Dixon's time as a California assemblyman: bill files, 1973–1978; committee files, 1973–1977; and subject files, 1973–1976. The bill files contain amendments, analyses, letters, resolutions, telegrams, testimony, position statements, legislative counsel opinions and conflict letters, floor and committee statements, press releases, newspaper editorials and clippings, background reports, and other data. Committee files include correspondence received and sent, memos, bill analyses, background documentation, as well as general information received on legislation and issues under consideration. Subject files contain correspondence, reports, newspaper clippings, press releases, speeches, opinions, and background materials, related to proposed and pending legislation, community activities, and district affairs. A finding aid is available in the repository and online.

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Melvin H. Evans

1917–1984

DELEGATE

1979–1981

Republican from the U.S. Virgin Islands



Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

In 1979, Melvin H. Evans became the first Black Delegate to represent the U.S. Virgin Islands in Congress. Evans, who had also been the first popularly elected governor of the Virgin Islands, used his political experience to promote health care, education, and other areas of concern to his constituents during his one term in the U.S. House of Representatives. "We of the Virgin Islands believe that the significance of our progress towards full membership in the American system reaches beyond the hearts and minds of our small numbers," he declared.[1]

Melvin Herbert Evans was born to Charles and Maude Evans in Christiansted, St. Croix, on August 7, 1917, only months after the United States purchased the Virgin Islands from Denmark. After graduating from Charlotte Amalie High School on St. Thomas, Evans received a bachelor's degree in 1940 from Howard University and a medical degree from Howard University College of Medicine in 1944. In 1945, Evans married Mary Phyllis Anderson, a nurse he met in a New York hospital; the couple had four sons: William, Melvin Jr., Robert, and Cornelius. During the next 15 years, Evans served in a variety of medical and public health positions at hospitals and institutions in the mainland United States and the Virgin Islands. From 1959 to 1967, Evans served as the commissioner of health for the Virgin Islands; he also chaired the governor's commission on human resources from 1962 to 1966. In 1967, he received a master's degree in public health from the University of California at Berkeley. He returned to private practice for two years before President Richard M. Nixon appointed him governor of the Virgin Islands. In August 1968, Congress passed the Virgin Islands Elective Governor Act, providing for the election of a governor by the territory's residents. Evans was elected as a Republican to the governor's office in 1970 and served until 1975. After his unsuccessful bid for re-election in 1974, he was Republican National Committeeman from the Virgin Islands and chair of the board of trustees of the College of the Virgin Islands.[2]

As governor, Evans frequently appeared before the House Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs to testify in favor of legislation to provide the Virgin Islands a nonvoting Delegate in the House of Representatives. "Representation in Congress for the U.S. Virgin Islands is an urgent and necessary step in our American democratic process," he explained. In 1972, Congress authorized nonvoting Delegates for the Virgin Islands and Guam. When the first Delegate of the Virgin Islands, Democrat Ron de Lugo,

announced his decision to leave the House at the end of the 95th Congress (1977–1979) and run for governor back home, Evans entered the 1978 election to fill the open seat. Unopposed in the Republican primary, Evans faced Democrat Janet Watlington, a congressional aide to de Lugo. Evans ran on his record as governor, while Watlington emphasized her Capitol Hill experience and argued that she could collaborate more effectively with the Democratically controlled House. Either candidate would have been the first Black Delegate to represent the island territory, which was about 80 percent Black. In a tight race, Evans narrowly defeated Watlington with 52 percent of the vote. Sworn in to the 96th Congress (1979–1981) on January 15, 1979, Evans served on the Armed Services and Merchant Marine and Fisheries Committees, as well as the Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs, which held jurisdiction over legislation affecting the territories.[3]

During his congressional career, Evans focused on improving education and health care in the Virgin Islands. He secured federal funds to provide the territory's public education system with additional programs and services for its expanding school-aged population. After a career in medicine, Evans worked to alleviate the critical shortage of doctors at local health facilities by introducing legislation permitting foreign physicians to practice in the Virgin Islands. "I firmly believe that the 120,000 people of the U.S. Virgin Islands, in addition to the 1½ million tourists who annually visit our islands, must be provided adequate medical assistance to which they are entitled," he said on the House Floor. He also urged the House to appropriate funding to build two hospitals to accommodate the growing population of the territory.[4]

Determined to improve the quality of life on the Virgin Islands, Evans used his position in Congress to bring awareness to a variety of local issues and concerns. In 1979, Evans introduced legislation making farm credit loans available to local fishing and agricultural industries, which had been denied access after Congress failed to include the Virgin Islands in the 1971 Farm Credit Act. Evans successfully amended the Justice System Improvement Act of 1979 to ensure that the Virgin Islands would remain classified as a state for the purpose of receiving federal law enforcement funding. Following the devastation wrought by Hurricane David and Tropical Storm Frederic in 1979, Evans urged Congress to approve flood control measures for the islands, with an emphasis on mitigating future hazards. "Simply restoring things as they were before is to set the stage for a repetition every time there are storms," he said before an Appropriations Subcommittee. In 1980, he organized congressional hearings in St. Croix and St. Thomas to investigate chronic delays in mail delivery between the continental United States and the Virgin Islands. Evans also sponsored a bill, that later became law, allowing federal recognition for National Guard officers from the Virgin Islands. As a member of the Merchant Marine and Fisheries Committee, Evans accompanied members of the Coast Guard Subcommittee on a trip to the Virgin Islands to examine the effects of drug trafficking. He cosponsored legislation to bolster the Coast Guard's enforcement of drug laws; the measure was approved in 1980.[5]

Evans also worked to secure and expand the rights of African Americans. Shortly after joining the House, he remarked, "No one who has not been disenfranchised does not understand what it means to be disenfranchised." He added, "I'm from an area, you know, that got its first delegate to Congress only six years ago." Evans was one of only 17 Black Members serving in the 96th Congress, and despite his Republican affiliation the entirely Democratic Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) welcomed him as a member, contending that partisanship should not play a role in advancing the rights of communities of color. Evans was both the first Virgin Islands Delegate and the first Republican caucus member. "Not only do I speak with a Republican point of view but I represent it in the caucus," he said. During his only term, Evans cosponsored the bill that established the Martin Luther King, Jr. National Historic Site in Atlanta, and supported efforts to designate a national holiday in remembrance of the civil rights leader. He strongly opposed a proposed constitutional amendment to eliminate court-ordered busing in public schools: "When people protest how strongly they favor civil rights and how vehemently they oppose segregation and then seek to remove one of the only, if not the only, remedies, however imperfect, without offering viable alternative, it causes serious concern." Evans's dedication to civil rights also extended to international politics. He joined many of his House colleagues in expressing outrage against the South African government's practice of racial segregation.[6]

As a Delegate, Evans could not vote on the House Floor. But his ability to vote in committee nevertheless gave him considerable influence over the legislative process. On the Interior and Insular Affairs Committee, Evans

made headlines when he voted against a public lands bill championed by congressional Democrats and U.S. Interior Secretary Cecil Andrus that would have prohibited commercial activity on 80 million acres of Alaskan wilderness. Evans was a swing vote that led to the bill's demise—the committee then approved an alternative bill that halved the amount of protected land and opened the Alaska National Wildlife Refuge to oil and gas exploration. The vote worried many of his constituents who feared that Evans's actions had jeopardized the Virgin Islands' standing among influential members of the Interior Committee.[7]

In 1980, Evans lost re-election to former Delegate Ron de Lugo, who had returned to seek his old seat after failing to win his bid for governor of the territory. Evans garnered 47 percent of the vote. Many Members of the House paid tribute to the retiring Evans, commending his commitment to the Virgin Islands. "A man of conviction and high integrity, Congressman Evans would not be swayed from his principles," asserted Representative Donald Clausen of California. "A spokesman for the common man, he assured that the interests of his constituents were never overlooked." In 1981, President Ronald Reagan nominated Evans as United States Ambassador to Trinidad and Tobago. Evans served as ambassador until his death of a heart attack in Christiansted on November 27, 1984.[8]

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William H. Gray III

1941–2013

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1979–1991

Democrat from Pennsylvania



Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

A community activist and third-generation pastor of a large Baptist church in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, William H. Gray III defeated a longtime incumbent to take his seat in the U.S. House of Representatives. Though new to elective office, Gray proved adept at congressional politics, rising meteorically in power during his 12 years in Congress. Gray was the first Black Member of Congress to chair the powerful Budget Committee, where he oversaw national spending priorities. Gray continued up the leadership ladder to become the first Black Majority Whip. At the height of his political career, he abruptly resigned to take a position to assist historically Black colleges and to return to the pulpit. Soon after he announced his retirement from Congress, Gray told his congregation, "I want people to be able to say, 'He was a preacher and a public policy leader, but most important, he opened the doors for a whole new generation of black people.'"[1]

William Herbert Gray III was born in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, on August 20, 1941. The second child of Dr. William H. Gray Jr. and Hazel Yates Gray, he had an older sister, Marion. William Gray spent the first nine years of his life in St. Augustine and Tallahassee, Florida, where his father served as president of Florida Normal and Industrial College (now Florida Memorial College) and Florida Agricultural and Mechanical College (now Florida A&M University). His mother was a high school teacher and once served as dean of Southern University in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. When William Gray III's grandfather and namesake died in 1949, the Grays moved to North Philadelphia, where William Gray Jr. took over his father's pastoral position at Bright Hope Baptist Church, which William Gray Sr. had held since 1925. William Gray graduated from Simon Gratz High School in Philadelphia in 1959 and earned a bachelor's degree from Franklin and Marshall College in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, in 1963. Gray majored in sociology, but one of his professors encouraged him to become involved in politics. During his senior year in college, Gray interned for Philadelphia Representative Robert N.C. Nix Sr.[2]

After college, Gray followed his father and grandfather into the ministry. He received a master's degree in divinity from Drew Theological Seminary in Madison, New Jersey, in 1966 and a master's degree in theology from Princeton Theological Seminary in 1970. He became a community activist in 1970 while living in Montclair, New Jersey, after he won a housing discrimination suit against a landlord

who denied him an apartment because of his race. The case generated national attention and the New Jersey superior court awarded him financial damages, setting a legal precedent. Gray founded the nonprofit Union Housing Corporation in Montclair to build affordable homes for low- and moderate-income tenants. In 1971, he married Andrea Dash, a marketing consultant. They raised three sons: William IV, Justin, and Andrew. After his father died in 1972, Gray assumed the pastor's position at Philadelphia's Bright Hope Baptist Church. The congregation swelled to more than 4,000 members, and Gray continued his community activism. In 1975, he cofounded the Philadelphia Mortgage Plan, an organization that helped people in low-income communities to obtain mortgages.[3]

Concern about community housing issues and the high unemployment rate in his West Philadelphia neighborhood drew Gray into politics in 1976. Having never held elected office, Gray took an interest in the northwest Philadelphia congressional district that was represented by his former boss, Robert Nix, a longtime Representative and a Philadelphia political powerbroker. Gray had become disillusioned with what he perceived as Nix's unresponsiveness to his constituents, nearly one-third of whom lived below the poverty line. Gray challenged Nix in the Democratic primary but lost by only around 300 votes. Gray returned in 1978 to challenge the incumbent again, dubbing Nix "the phantom" because of the infrequency of the aging Representative's visits to his district. Gray also called attention to the district's ailing economy, which had the highest unemployment rate in the state. Encouragement from former Representative Andrew Young of Georgia, who was serving as U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, gave Gray the confidence to enter elective politics. "Bill, if you can pastor Bright Hope Baptist Church, Congress will not be difficult," Gray recalls Young telling him. "It is essentially pastoring, ministering to the folks in your district." Bright Hope Baptist members played an integral part in Gray's campaign, hosting events and helping him plan strategy. Gray defeated Nix in the 1978 primary, winning 58 percent to 41 percent. Winning the primary was tantamount to victory in the district, which was overwhelmingly Democratic and about 65 percent Black.[4]

Unconcerned about the general election, Gray spent the time between the primary and the November election lobbying for choice committee posts. His friendship with Young provided Gray with important connections in Washington. After winning the general election by a wide margin over Republican Roland Atkins, Gray received several plum committee assignments in the 96th Congress (1979–1981) as a result of his earlier lobbying efforts. In addition to a seat on the Committee on the District of Columbia, the only post he would hold for his entire career, Gray also occupied seats on the prestigious Budget and Foreign Affairs Committees. House Democratic leadership as well as the leaders of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) took note of his political acumen and pegged him as a rising star. CBC chair Parren J. Mitchell of Maryland called Gray's skills "top flight." The caucus elected Gray as its secretary, and in his second term he served as vice chair. Gray's fellow first-term Democrats also elected him as their representative to the Steering and Policy Committee, which sets committee assignments for Democratic Members and writes party policy. Gray left the Foreign Affairs Committee after his first term. He served on the Budget Committee in the 96th Congress and again from the 98th through 100th Congresses (1983–1989). He became the first Black Member to chair the Budget Committee in 1985, a position he held until 1989. Gray initially left the Budget Committee in 1981 for a spot on the Appropriations Committee, where he remained for the rest of his career, but returned to the Budget Committee in 1983. Gray later chaired the Temporary Joint Committee on Deficit Reduction in the 99th and 100th Congresses (1985–1989) and served on the House Administration Committee during the 102nd Congress (1991–1993).[5]

Gray typically won re-election with little opposition, generally garnering margins of at least 90 percent. Careful not to suffer the same fate as Nix, he kept in close contact with the district and remained attentive to the needs of the Black community. Throughout his congressional career, Gray continued to preach two Sundays per month at Bright Hope Church. "I was elected to Congress," he once told the *Washington Post*, "I was called to preach. One I do because people allow me to do it. The other I have to do." In May 1985, Gray's dedication to his constituents was tested. His district was the scene of disaster after members of MOVE, a radical Black liberation group, clashed with police. Following a shootout with the organization, Philadelphia police dropped a bomb from a helicopter onto the MOVE townhouse, killing 11—six MOVE members and five children who were in the house—and burning several city blocks in a West Philadelphia neighborhood.

The bombing caused a national uproar. Gray responded to his constituents' needs by touring the scene of the destruction and obtaining federal aid for the victims from the Department of Housing and Urban Development.[6]

Gray's work on the Foreign Affairs Committee focused on Africa. In 1980, he joined a delegation led by Andrew Young and W. Averell Harriman to observe the independence ceremony in Zimbabwe. Gray called this the "highest moment in my life in Congress." "Have you ever heard the sound of freedom being born in a nation that is black?" he added. As a member of the Foreign Affairs Committee, Gray sponsored a bill that created the African Development Foundation, which delivered U.S. aid to African villages. Gray continued to advocate for better resources and support the continent throughout his career. In a 1985 speech, he called for "a new Marshall Plan" for Africa, referring to an aid program that provided billions of dollars to war-torn Europe after World War II. "If we can do it for Europe, we can do it for Africa," he implored. In 1983, he sponsored a floor amendment guaranteeing minority-owned businesses, private organizations, and historically Black universities greater participation in international relief programs administered by the U.S. Agency for International Development. In 1984, Gray co-led a congressional delegation to Ethiopia to witness the country's ongoing famine. He criticized the Ronald Reagan administration for its delayed response in providing emergency food rations to the starving nation. Three years later, he made a rare break from his own party, supporting a Republican-sponsored bill to condemn Ethiopia's Communist leaders for human rights violations and for exacerbating the famine. Gray was the lead sponsor of the Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act of 1986, which imposed economic sanctions on South Africa until it ended its policy of racial apartheid.[7]

Gray received his initial position on the Budget Committee with the blessing of outgoing panel member, Representative Parren Mitchell, who was eager to find a CBC member to replace him on the committee in 1979. Serving his first term on the Budget Committee, Gray grew frustrated with committee Democrats' seemingly weak defense against cuts in social spending. When the committee proposed to balance the 1981 budget, partly through large cuts in social welfare spending, Gray declared, "There will be 17 votes—those of the Congressional black caucus—against this resolution when it comes to the floor." His prediction was correct. All 15 voting Members of the CBC voted against the resolution. Two CBC Members, Melvin H. Evans of the Virgin Islands and Walter E. Fauntroy of the District of Columbia, did not have voting privileges on the House Floor. Throughout his career, Gray continued to defend spending for social aid programs, but as he came to occupy a position of power, as chair of the Budget Committee and later in the Democratic leadership, he was more receptive to compromise. Gray often skillfully arbitrated differences between House and Senate versions of the federal budget.[8]

House Rules allowed Members to serve on the Budget Committee for a maximum of six successive years. In 1984, chair Representative James Robert Jones of Oklahoma faced the end of his allotted term. He and outgoing Representative Leon Edward Panetta of California, who also aspired to the chairmanship, sought a change in the rule so that they could continue serving, but last-minute opposition from Speaker Thomas P. "Tip" O'Neill Jr. of Massachusetts thwarted their plan. Having quietly secured support in case the rule had not changed, Gray was the only member of the panel who had enough votes for the chairmanship upon Jones's departure, despite a late bid by Democratic Texas Representative Jonas Martin Frost. Nearly 2,000 of Gray's proud constituents, organized by Bright Hope congregants, flooded the Capitol to watch his swearing-in as the first Black chairman of the Budget Committee. Gray downplayed the symbolism. "There is no title here called 'Black America Budget Chairman,'" Gray declared. "It's called House Budget Committee Chairman. I happen to be black and there is no conflict in that … it's been proven over the years that blacks can provide leadership in Congress."[9]

A natural politician, Gray tactfully managed the often-contentious, partisan Budget Committee as chair. Gray's colleague, Washington Democrat Michael Edward Lowry, speculated about the origins of Gray's ability to broker compromises: "It's maybe his professional training as a minister. He's a great judge of knowing how far he can push his members. He never gets mad." Gray often unified an increasingly diverse Democratic Party—and some Republicans—around a budget that incorporated his commitment to social spending, forging a strong coalition that spanned the party's broad fiscal spectrum. Surprisingly, Gray found allies in the "boll weevils," southern Democrats who tended to support the Reagan administration's cuts in social spending; two boll weevils, Representatives

James Marvin Leath and Charles Walter Stenholm, both from Texas, were among Gray's biggest supporters.[10]

Despite his reputation for compromise, Gray did not back down from creating a budget consistent with his liberal Democratic ideals. He guided four successive Democratic budget resolutions through the House—often over vehement protests from many committee Republicans. One observer remarked, "Gray treated the budget process as a political puzzle, not an economic problem; he saw the budget for what it is: a political statement rather than a blueprint for fiscal governance." However, the increasing federal deficit became a sticking point. Gray battled Republican attempts to reduce deficit spending. His focus was preserving funding for social programs, and he believed efforts to reduce the deficit should not override compassionate spending. "A balanced budget is good for the country, the affluent and poor alike," Gray noted. "I seek [a budget] that doesn't sacrifice programs for the poor and minorities, one that is fair and equitable." The Budget Committee under Gray virtually ignored the Gramm–Rudman–Hollings Act of 1985, and its revisions in 1987, which demanded automatic across-the-board budget cuts if the President and Congress did not cap the deficit at a specific annual level. As a result, Gray oversaw the first trillion-dollar budget in U.S. history for fiscal year 1988. Few rank-and-file Democrats voted against Gray's budgets. A record low of 15 Democrats refused to support their party's budget resolution in Gray's first year as chairman. A total of 53 Democrats voted against his first three budget resolutions combined; previously, this figure was more typical for a single year.[11]

By the late 1980s, Gray sought to move up in Democratic Party leadership. In 1987, Gray began lobbying to succeed Representative Richard Andrew Gephardt of Missouri as chair of the House Democratic Caucus in order to coordinate the party's political goals and dole out committee assignments. Gray's experience as Budget Committee chair and as the leader of the Democrats' platform drafting committee for the 1988 National Convention demonstrated his ability to unite the various party factions. The House Democratic Caucus overwhelmingly elected Gray as Democratic Caucus chair in December 1988. Again, Gray downplayed the milestone he had achieved as the first African-American chair of the House Democratic Caucus, noting that his new position called for building coalitions, not representing one arm of the Democratic Party. "I hope we can tie our ropes together so we can be one party and show the nation what we stand for as Democrats," Gray declared. Just six months later, Gray took one more step up the leadership ladder when he succeeded Representative Tony Coelho of California as Majority Whip. While he was running for the position, several media outlets reported that the FBI was conducting a preliminary investigation into allegations that an employee on Gray's office payroll was not showing up for work. The FBI soon clarified that Gray was not the target of its investigation, but the incident elicited anger among Gray and his Democratic colleagues, who suspected that the leak was an attempt to sabotage Gray's career.[12]

As Majority Whip, Gray was responsible for determining and organizing votes from the Democratic Members for issues of party interest. Gray, who held the third-ranking leadership position in the House, was the highest-ranking African American in congressional history. As Whip, Gray transitioned from budget specialist to generalist. "You have to develop expertise on every issue that's going to come to the floor," he noted. He wasn't afraid of tackling unpopular legislation, overseeing passage of a bill to raise the salaries of Members of Congress while restricting their ability to collect speaking fees and other forms of outside income.[13]

At the peak of his political power, Gray abruptly announced his resignation from Congress on June 20, 1991, effective the following September 11. Gray left Congress to head the United Negro College Fund (later known as the College Fund/UNCF)—which allocates federal money to augment the facilities, programs, and faculty at historically Black colleges and universities—saying his new duties were "just as important as being a member of the leadership in Congress." Gray's departure sent shockwaves through the political community. Gray served as president and CEO of the College Fund/UNCF until March 2004. In 1994, President William J. Clinton asked Gray to serve as his special adviser on Haiti, which was then embroiled in civil war. Gray's efforts to restore democracy to the island nation won him a Medal of Honor from Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide. Gray continued to serve as minister of Bright Hope until he retired in January 2007. Gray died suddenly on July 1, 2013, in London, England.[14]

Manuscript Collection

New York Public Library, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture (New York, NY). *Papers*: 1979–1991, 87.8 linear feet. The William H. Gray Congressional Records contain office, working, and research files used and created by Gray, his office staff, and the committees on which he served: Appropriations;

Budget; and Foreign Affairs. His involvement in the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa and the Anti-Apartheid Act of 1985, a precursor to the Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act of 1986, is also documented. There are also files for the Congressional Black Caucus, in addition to Gray's speeches, news releases, and press clippings that document his other legislative activities. *Audio-visual*: 1979–1991, 143 audiocassettes, 15 videocassettes. The collection spans Gray's congressional career.

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Mickey Leland

1944–1989

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1979–1989

Democrat from Texas



Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

In November 1978, Mickey Leland of Texas won election to the U.S. House of Representatives to replace Houston's pathbreaking Congresswoman, Barbara Jordan, who had decided to retire. Inspired by an extended stay on the African continent, Leland poured his energy into seeking solutions to a disastrous famine in East Africa and raising funds for relief efforts. Leland worked tirelessly as chair of the House Select Committee on Hunger, which he had lobbied Congress to create. Responding to critics who felt he should focus on domestic poverty first, Leland replied, "I am as much of a citizen of this world as I am of this country. To hell with those people who are critical of what I am able to do to help save people's lives. I don't mean to sound hokey, but I grew up on the Christian ethic which says we are supposed to help the least of our brothers." Leland ultimately gave his life to the cause. In 1989, he died in a plane crash while on a humanitarian mission to transport supplies to an Ethiopian refugee camp.[1]

George Thomas "Mickey" Leland III was born in Lubbock, Texas, on November 27, 1944, to George Thomas Leland Jr. and Alice Leland. It was Leland's maternal grandfather who nicknamed him Mickey. When Leland was young his parents separated, and he moved to Houston with his brother, Gaston, and their mom. His mother put herself through school, became a teacher, and later remarried. Mickey Leland graduated from Phyllis Wheatley High School in Houston in 1963 and attended Texas Southern University, a historically Black university in Houston. Earning his bachelor's degree in pharmacy in 1970, Leland worked as a clinical pharmacy instructor at Texas Southern before taking a job as a pharmacist. He also served with several university organizations, setting up free clinics and other aid for low-income people in the Houston area. In 1983, Leland married Alison Walton, a Georgetown University Law School graduate who worked in investment banking. In 1986, the couple celebrated the birth of their first son, Jarrett.[2]

Influenced by diverse doctrines—the writings of Black activists and the emphasis of his Roman Catholic faith on helping the disadvantaged—Leland was active in the civil rights movement as a student in the late 1960s, often participating in unruly protests, and describing himself as a "Marxist" and a "revolutionary." His arrest while demonstrating against police brutality in Houston proved to be a pivotal moment in his life, persuading Leland to work within the political system rather than against it. In 1971,

Leland made his first trip to Africa. He developed a deep affection for the continent, staying in Ethiopia, Kenya, and Tanzania for three months, rather than his scheduled three weeks. He drew inspiration from Tanzania's first president Julius Nyerere, a socialist and anticolonial activist who inspired pan-Africanists around the world. "Nobody knew where I was. … I got totally absorbed in Africa," Leland recalled. Leland was first elected to the Texas state house of representatives in 1972 and served his diverse Houston neighborhood from 1973 to 1979. He quickly earned a reputation as a militant, firebrand politician in the state legislature, appearing on the first day in a tie-dyed dashiki shirt, an Afro haircut, and platform shoes. Leland served as a delegate to the Democratic National Convention in 1972. He also served as a delegate to the Texas state constitutional convention in 1974, where he helped rewrite Texas's 97-year-old Jim Crow-era constitution, focusing on reforming the judicial and executive branches of the state government.[3]

In 1978, three-term Houston Representative Barbara Jordan announced her retirement from Congress. The first Member to serve the newly created district, Jordan represented central city neighborhoods where the population was almost three-quarters minority, mostly lower- and middle-class Black and Mexican Americans. Leland entered the May 6 Democratic primary, garnering 48 percent of the vote against seven other candidates. Falling short of the necessary 50 percent to win the nomination, Leland faced the primary runner-up, African-American candidate Anthony Hall, in a runoff on June 3. Though Jordan refused to endorse any one candidate, Leland's ability to garner support from both the district's Black and Hispanic constituents sealed his victory over Hall, with 57 percent of the vote. Without official opposition in the general election, Leland won 97 percent of the vote for the 96th Congress (1979–1981). He was re-elected five times, typically winning majorities of 90 percent or more.[4]

Upon his arrival in Washington, Leland won a seat on the powerful Interstate and Foreign Commerce Committee (renamed the Energy and Commerce Committee in 1981)—often sought after by Members because of its regulatory powers across a broad swath of industry. He was also assigned to the Post Office and Civil Service Committee, where he chaired the Subcommittee on Postal Operations and Services. In addition, Leland served on the Committee on the District of Columbia from the 96th Congress until his resignation from the panel in 1985. In the 98th Congress (1983–1985), Leland served on the Select Committee on Children, Youth, and Families. In 1984, Leland convinced the House to create the Select Committee on Hunger, a panel he chaired from its founding until his death. Leland was an active member of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC), which he chaired during the 99th Congress (1985–1987).

To best serve the large Mexican-American population in his district, Leland learned Spanish. He once surprised his colleagues by arguing in Spanish on the House Floor in favor of maintaining clauses in the Voting Rights Act that required local election offices to provide voting information in languages other than English. "Many of you cannot understand me," Leland said in Spanish. "And even though you cannot understand me when I speak Spanish maybe you can begin to understand the hypocrisy of our political system which excludes the participation of Hispanic-Americans only for having a different culture and speaking a different language." His bilingualism also allowed him to develop a controversial relationship with Cuban leader Fidel Castro. Leland disagreed emphatically with Castro's political philosophy but respected his influence among poorer nations. In 1979, Leland and Ronald V. Dellums of California met with Castro at the Cuban Mission to the United Nations in New York City.[5]

From his seat on the Energy and Commerce Committee, Leland sought to diversify the telecommunications industry. He took on television executives and advocated for the hiring of more minority employees for on- and off-screen positions. He supported the Federal Communications Commission's (FCC) policy to provide tax breaks to corporations that sold broadcast stations to women and people of color, which it adopted in 1978. In 1986, the FCC, under the Ronald Reagan administration, ended its minority preference programs, prompting Leland to introduce a bill to codify the reneged policies into law. The following year, Congress passed an appropriations bill that required the FCC to reinstate its minority preference policy.[6]

Leland was an early advocate for establishing an African-American history museum in the nation's capital. He authored a nonbinding joint resolution expressing support for the construction of such a museum on federal land, which was signed into law in 1986. In 1989, he introduced legislation alongside John Lewis of Georgia to authorize a Black history museum within the Smithsonian Institution. Leland's advocacy helped pave the way for the eventual

congressional approval of the National Museum of African American History and Culture in 2003.[7]

Leland used his seat on the Post Office and Civil Service Committee to shield the United States Postal Service (USPS) from annual budget battles. With the passage of the Postal Reorganization Act of 1970, the USPS had been required to cover its own operating expenses. The financially self-sufficient agency was then given "off-budget" status, meaning that its receipts and expenditures were not included in the federal budget or deficit, insulating it from political influence. In the mid-1980s, the Office of Management and Budget, under the Reagan administration, reincorporated the USPS into the budget, making it a target for budget cuts to help reduce the deficit. Leland sponsored a bill to permanently separate the agency's finances from the budget and exempt it from budget cuts and sequestrations. The bill passed the House and was incorporated into an omnibus reconciliation bill in 1989. As chair of the Subcommittee on Postal Personnel and Modernization, Leland held a series of hearings on mail scams, particularly those that targeted the elderly. He introduced a bill to enhance the Postal Inspection Service's investigatory powers to prevent fraud. A Senate version of the bill became law in 1983.[8]

As chair of the CBC, Leland twice presented the caucus's alternative budget, which outlined its members' priorities for federal spending. The 1985 and 1986 CBC budgets sought to redirect defense spending towards domestic social programs—including employment and education programs—while raising taxes on corporations and high-income earners. "A budget is not mearly [*sic*] a collection of stated ideas and goals, but the real life choice of how our Government cares and provides for its people," Leland stated.[9]

From the beginning of his congressional career, Leland looked abroad, focusing on international cooperation and exchange. One of his first acts in Congress was to fund a six-week trip to Israel to allow Black teenagers from the Houston area to learn about Jewish culture and to create a cross-cultural dialogue between young people in the two countries. Leland opposed the Reagan administration's Cold War policies in Latin America and criticized its efforts to block charitable organizations from providing humanitarian aid to Nicaragua while the administration was sending military aid to the Contras, the counter-revolutionary rebel groups opposed to the ruling socialist party in the Central American country. In an op-ed, Leland wrote that hunger and suffering were "compounded when humanitarian aid is allowed to become a tool of ideology or political strategy, instead of assessing the aid strictly on the basis on greatest need."[10]

Leland led the CBC at the height of its influence on U.S. foreign policy. A leading voice in the call for divestment in apartheid South Africa, Leland created the CBC's divestment task force and worked to identify the names of companies doing business in South Africa. Following the passage of the Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act of 1986, Leland discovered that South African companies continued to invest in the U.S. market through indirect means. He introduced a bill that would have blocked all investments by South African mining corporations or related entities in the U.S. capital market.[11]

Leland spent most of his congressional career attempting to redirect U.S. foreign policy away from the military imperatives of the Cold War toward examining the inequalities between rich and poor nations. When famine struck East Africa in the early-1980s, Leland was an outspoken advocate for alleviating hunger on the continent. Throughout his first two terms, he lobbied for the creation of a congressional committee to focus on world poverty and hunger. While sympathetic to his cause, many Members provided less support than Leland requested, as they believed it would only add to Congress's bureaucracy. Leland also worked to alleviate domestic poverty and hunger, proposing tax exemptions for American companies that donated to food banks. In 1987, he spent a night on a Washington, DC, steam grate to emphasize the experience of people without housing, and he regularly raised aid for Houston-area food banks. He also introduced numerous bills aimed at boosting housing, food, health care, and education assistance programs for people experiencing homelessness. Leland often invoked two images from his frequent trips to Ethiopian refugee camps: a throng of starving people rubbing their stomachs and pleading for food and an Ethiopian girl who died in his arms as he turned to ask her caretakers about her condition. "Every day I see her face," Leland recalled.[12]

After gathering 258 cosponsors and the support of 60 national organizations, Leland realized his goal in 1984 of creating a congressional committee to examine global hunger and poverty when his resolution passed on February 22 by a vote of 309 to 78. He was appointed the first chair of the Select Committee on Hunger in the 98th Congress. Modeled after the Select Committee on Children, Youth

and Families, the Hunger Committee studied the effects of domestic and international hunger and poverty. In 1984, partially aided by publicity from American and British musicians, Leland's committee helped push through Congress the African Famine Relief and Recovery Act, which included $800 million in aid. The committee also evaluated the effectiveness of the Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA), which coordinated federal aid to countries experiencing natural and man-made disasters. In a 1986 report, the committee determined that annual appropriations made to OFDA failed to keep up with inflation, while the number of victims of global disasters had increased greatly since the office's establishment in 1964. The committee report recommended doubling OFDA's annual appropriation from an average of $25 to $50 million, with a larger portion of the funds to be allocated towards long-term disaster mitigation projects. On the domestic front, the committee played a key role in the passage of the Hunger Prevention Act of 1988, which bolstered funding for food stamps and school meal programs and authorized the Agriculture Department to purchase greater amounts of agricultural commodities to make available for food banks.[13]

Leland traveled frequently to Africa, often guiding Members and their staffs to refugee camps so they could witness firsthand how aid money was being used. On August 7, 1989, he took advantage of the congressional summer recess to visit a refugee camp near the Sudanese-Ethiopian border. Shortly after his plane took off from Addis Ababa, it crashed over a mountainous region in Ethiopia while navigating a storm. All 15 people aboard were killed, including Leland and three congressional aides. Out of mutual respect for Leland, the United States and Ethiopia temporarily repaired their strained diplomatic relations, and Ethiopian military leader Mengistu Haile Mariam allowed American military planes to search for Leland's downed aircraft. The U.S. military discovered the wreckage after seven days of searching, and a congressional delegation accompanied Leland's remains to Texas for burial.[14]

Leland was widely eulogized. Visitors poured into his Capitol Hill office to offer their condolences. Staff in the neighboring office occupied by Representative George W. Crockett Jr. of Michigan helped field the overwhelming number of phone calls. Communities touched by Leland were quick to honor him: The CBC renamed its humanitarian award for him in 1989, Houston International Airport named its largest terminal for him, and the NAACP sponsored a project to plant trees in Africa in his name. The tragedy of Leland's death was compounded when Alison Leland gave birth in January 1990 to premature twin sons, Cameron George and Austin Mickey, five months after her husband's death. Democratic leaders in the House led a fundraiser to collect donations for Leland's three children. Alison Leland declined an offer to run for her husband's vacant House seat. With her support, Houston-area state legislator Craig A. Washington succeeded Leland in the December 9 special election. Without Leland's forceful support and leadership, the House disbanded the Select Committee on Hunger in the 103rd Congress (1993–1995).[15]

Manuscript Collection

Texas Southern University, Mickey Leland Center on Hunger, Poverty, and World Peace (Houston, TX). *Papers*: 1970–1989, 653 boxes. The collection documents Mickey Leland's public service career as a Texas state representative and as a U.S. Representative. Materials include correspondence, news clippings, artifacts, photographs, audio and videotapes, speeches, news releases, committee testimony, and casework. Topics include health care for the poor, prison reform, police harassment and brutality, racial discrimination, affirmative action, budget discrimination in higher education, labor legislation, political election organization, infant mortality, minority rights in business, health education, apartheid and global racial discrimination, developing countries, emergency shelters for the homeless, nutrients for the malnourished, and food security. A finding aid is available online.

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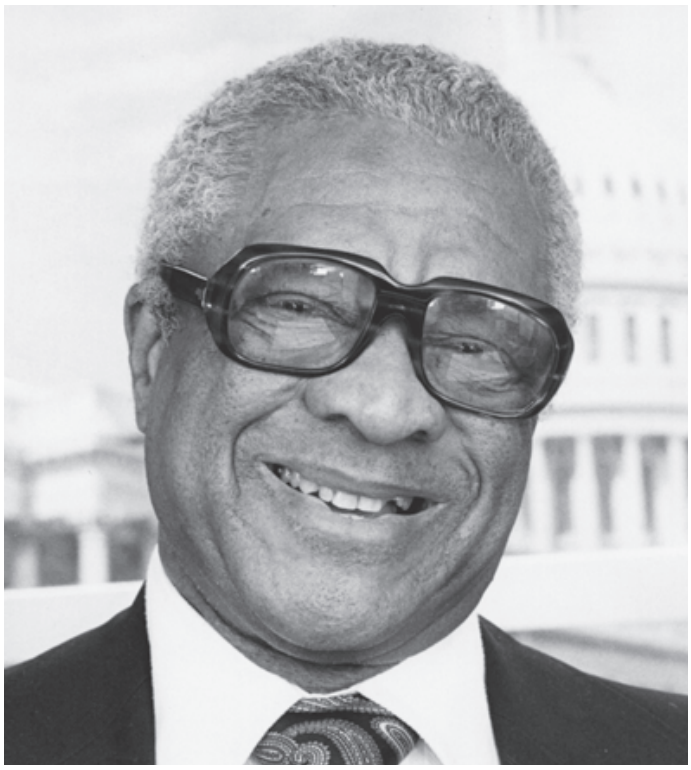
Bennett M. Stewart

1912–1988

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1979–1981

Democrat from Illinois



Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

Elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1978, Bennett M. Stewart continued a 50-year tradition of African-American representation in Congress from Chicago's South Side that began with the election of Representative Oscar De Priest of Illinois in 1928. Aligned with Chicago's waning political machine, Stewart used his seat on the powerful Appropriations Committee to direct federal resources to his district and advocate for economic and social development initiatives rather than defense funding. "Only when we transfer our national priorities from the arms race, will we address adequately the needs of the human race," he said on the House Floor.[1]

Bennett McVey Stewart was born in Huntsville, Alabama, on August 6, 1912, to Bennett Stewart and Cathleen Jones. He attended public schools in Huntsville and graduated from high school in Birmingham, Alabama, in 1932. In 1936, Stewart received a bachelor's degree from Miles College, in Birmingham, where he met his future wife, Pattye Crittenden. The couple married in 1938 and had three children: Bennett Jr., Ronald, and Miriam. From 1936 to 1938, Stewart served as assistant principal of Irondale High School in Birmingham. Stewart returned to Miles College as an associate professor of sociology from 1938 until 1940, when he began an 18-year career as an insurance company executive. When the insurance company expanded its operations to Illinois, Stewart was assigned to Chicago in 1950 to oversee its new offices. In 1968, Stewart left the private sector to work as an inspector with Chicago's building department and as an advisor for the city's department of urban renewal. His positions with the city sparked his involvement in politics, and, in 1971, Stewart won election to the Chicago city council from the twenty-first ward. A year later, he was elected to serve on the Democratic committee for the same ward; he held both offices until 1978.[2]

When Chicago Representative Ralph H. Metcalfe died unexpectedly only weeks before the general election in 1978, a power struggle to fill the vacant House seat erupted on the city's South Side. For decades, Mayor Richard J. Daley's political machine dominated Chicago's municipal government. Metcalfe, who had once been linked to Daley, had broken with the mayor over the issue of police brutality, significantly weakening the machine in Chicago's South Side Black neighborhoods. After Daley's death in 1976, his machine, although weakened, managed to maintain its hold over city hall. As a result, when Metcalfe died in 1978, the machine stepped in to dictate the terms of his replacement in Congress.[3]

To replace Metcalfe, Chicago's political bosses turned to Stewart, who had remained loyal to the Democratic city organization. Although some believed that Metcalfe's son would seek the Democratic nomination, or that Black leaders would stage a write-in campaign to re-elect Metcalfe posthumously in order to force a special election, the ten ward committeemen from the First Congressional District selected Stewart as the Democratic nominee. Many of Metcalfe's supporters in the district resented the closed nomination process and believed that Stewart had few qualifications for the job. In the general election, Stewart faced A.A. "Sammy" Rayner, a former alderman and perennial candidate for the congressional seat who ran as a Republican. Two years earlier, Metcalfe had dominated Rayner with 92 percent of the vote. But on Election Day in 1978, Stewart defeated Rayner with just 58 percent of the vote—an abnormal, narrow margin of victory in the heavily Democratic district. Stewart took his seat in the 96th Congress (1979–1981) and received a premier assignment on the Committee on Appropriations. Stewart and Julian C. Dixon of California, elected the same year, became just the third and fourth Black lawmakers in congressional history to serve on the Appropriations Committee.[4]

During his short tenure in the House, Stewart focused on the needs of his Chicago constituents. He vigorously supported federal loan guarantees for the Chrysler Corporation, which employed more than 1,500 workers in his district but faced financial collapse in 1979. As a member of the Appropriations Committee, Stewart backed federal emergency relief to provide low-income Americans with heating assistance. The funding, he said, was "a small price to pay to help alleviate the burdens imposed on the poor," including many of his constituents back home in Chicago. Stewart served on the Appropriations Committee's Subcommittee on the Department of Transportation and was appointed to the conference committees for the 1980 and 1981 transportation appropriations bills, working with members of the Senate to finalize the bills for the President's signature. He touted the 1981 transportation bill for allocating a minimum of $100 million for improvements to mass transit and highway systems in the Chicago area. Stewart also introduced a bill to extend the length of public service employment programs, citing the necessity for a longer transition period for residents of cities like Chicago, which had a higher rate of unemployment than the national average. In 1980, Stewart requested a General Accounting Office (GAO) analysis of the Chicago Housing Authority (CHA). Prompted by a charge of financial misconduct, the GAO revealed that inefficient management had driven the CHA to the verge of bankruptcy.[5]

In 1979, Stewart criticized a proposed constitutional amendment to prohibit public school busing. He recalled the humiliating segregation practices he had grown up with in Birmingham and called the proposal an "attempt to undermine the Fourteenth Amendment." "If we eliminate busing we re-create a system of segregation in the United States," he wrote. Like Representative Metcalfe before him, Stewart introduced legislation designating February as Black History Month. "We must not continue to permit the history and heritage of black people to be ignored," Stewart exclaimed. "If we educate our Nation's youth, black and white, about the heritage of our whole society we may be able to eliminate racial tensions that have existed in the past." Stewart also urged Congress to recognize the life of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. by creating a federal holiday in honor of King's work on behalf of civil rights and racial equality in America.[6]

Having secured the endorsement of Democratic leaders from the South Side for a second term in Congress, Stewart nonetheless faced mounting dissension in his party. Typically, the machine's nominee faced minimal opposition in the primary. But some local politicians continued to resent the strong-arm tactics of party leaders who chose Stewart to replace Metcalfe after his sudden death two years earlier. In 1980, Stewart faced three well-known opponents in the Democratic primary: Harold Washington, an Illinois state senator; John Stroger, a Cook County commissioner; and Ralph Metcalfe Jr., the son of the late Representative. In the end, Stewart placed a distant third behind Metcalfe and the winner, Washington, who captured nearly 50 percent of the vote.[7]

After leaving Congress, Stewart served as interim director of the Chicago department of inter-governmental affairs from 1981 to 1983 and served on the staff of Chicago Mayor Jane Byrne. Stewart lived in Chicago until his death on April 26, 1988.[8]

Manuscript Collection

Chicago History Museum, Research Center (Chicago, IL). *Papers*: 1971–1983, 0.5 linear feet. The papers include correspondence, speeches, awards, and aldermanic campaign disclosure material from Bennett M. Stewart's time as alderman of Chicago's 21st Ward (1971–1978) and as a U.S. Representative from the First Congressional District of Illinois (1979–1980). *Photographs*: ca. 1971–1985, 461

images. Visual materials span Stewart's political career as a Chicago alderman and U.S. Representative, including portraits of Stewart and group portraits with local and national political figures.

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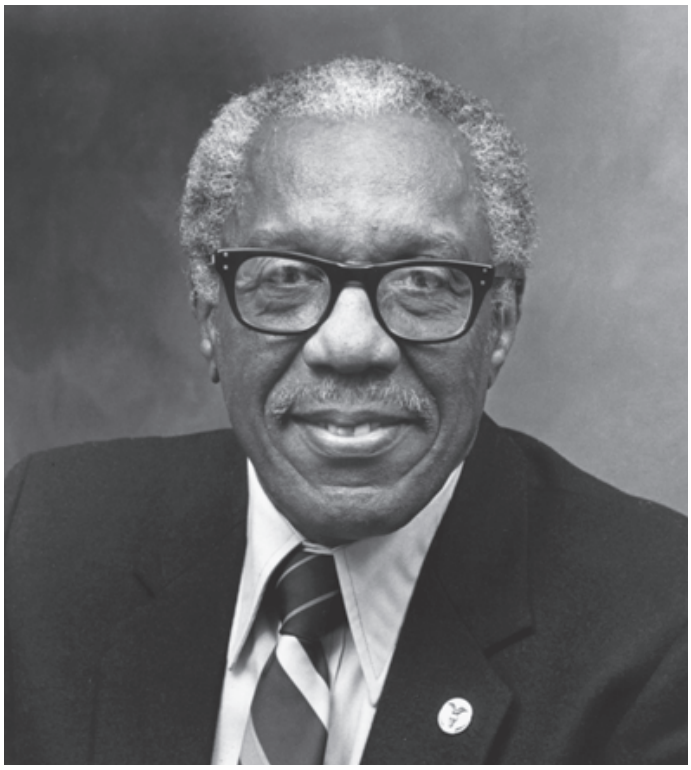
George W. Crockett Jr.

1909–1997

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1980–1991

Democrat from Michigan



Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

George W. Crockett Jr. won a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives in 1980 after a lengthy career as a lawyer and a judge. At age 71, he was the oldest African-American Member ever elected to Congress. The Michigan Representative came to the House with a reputation as a tireless civil rights advocate and a staunch defender of civil liberties. In the House, Crockett was known for challenging the Ronald Reagan administration's interventionist foreign policy and instead prioritized economic development programs, both domestically and abroad. "The people in my Detroit district do not believe that our national security is linked solely to our ability to deter military attack," he said. "Let us confront the world not with a greater nuclear destructive possibility, but with healthy bodies and better educated minds."[1]

Born in Jacksonville, Florida, on August 10, 1909, George William Crockett Jr. was the son of George Crockett Sr., a carpenter, and Minnie Jenkins Crockett. He attended public schools in his native city and graduated with a bachelor's degree from Morehouse College in Atlanta, Georgia, in 1931. Crockett went north to study law at the University of Michigan, in Ann Arbor, where he earned a law degree in 1934. That same year he married Dr. Ethelene Jones, the first Black woman to practice obstetrics and gynecology in Michigan and the first woman president of the American Lung Association. The couple had three children: Elizabeth Ann Hicks, George William Crockett III, and Ethelene Crockett Jones. After his wife died in 1978, Crockett married Harriette Clark Chambliss, a pediatrician with two sons, in 1980.[2]

Crockett worked in Jacksonville, Florida, and Fairmont, West Virginia, as a lawyer in private practice. In West Virginia, he organized a new branch of the NAACP and campaigned for Senator Matthew Mansfield Neely, an ally of the labor movement. His early experiences with politics took him to Washington, DC, in 1939 as the first African-American attorney with the U.S. Department of Labor. Though he progressed quickly through the ranks, he soon faced blatant employment discrimination when he was told that a Black attorney could not lead his legal division. Crockett left the Department, and, in 1943, President Franklin D. Roosevelt appointed him a hearing examiner with the Fair Employment Practices Committee. A year later, he moved to Detroit, Michigan, to direct a Fair Employment Practices office with the United Auto Workers. During this time, he remained active in the legal

defense of labor unions and civil rights organizers and represented clients before the House Un-American Activities Committee, which often targeted activists and their associates for investigation.[3]

In 1949, Crockett made national news for defending 11 Communist leaders accused of subversion against the U.S. government under the Smith Act, a law which made advocating for or teaching about the overthrow of the government by force or violence a criminal offense. Though he was warned that defending Communists in federal court could hurt his public image, Crockett took the case because "if communists' rights were abridged, Blacks' rights would soon be crushed." All 11 were convicted. Upon the conclusion of the nine-month proceedings, the judge also found Crockett and the other defense attorneys in contempt of court and sentenced them to jail for allegedly disrupting courtroom proceedings throughout the trial. The Supreme Court eventually upheld the penalty. Recalling his four-month prison term, Crockett said, "I think I have always been a champion of the underdog in our society and, if anything, that segregated prison life probably pushed me a little farther along the road." Crockett also argued before the Supreme Court on behalf of Eugene Dennis, the top defendant in the 1949 trial, for an earlier sentence for contempt of Congress and was one of the defense lawyers in the influential case *Dennis v. United States*, which upheld the convictions of the Communist leaders and the constitutionality of the controversial Smith Act.[4]

During his pre-congressional career, Crockett established a solid civil rights record. He helped found Michigan's first integrated law firm and organized the Mississippi Project to provide free legal services for civil rights workers imprisoned in Mississippi. When members of the Ku Klux Klan set fire to a Black church in Philadelphia, Mississippi, Crockett strategized with Michael Schwerner, a civil rights volunteer, on how to hold the arsonists accountable in court. Schwerner and fellow activists James Chaney and Andrew Goodman were murdered the next day, June 21, 1964, after investigating the church fire, though their bodies were not discovered for another six weeks. Crockett was among those who investigated their disappearance, which sparked national outrage and further galvanized the civil rights movement.[5]

Upon his return to Detroit, Crockett unsuccessfully ran for a city council seat in 1965, but the publicity helped him win election the following year as a judge of the recorder's court, which had jurisdiction over felony cases in Detroit. Crockett served on the court from 1966 to 1978 and was its presiding official for the latter four years. He often dispensed lenient sentences for defendants arrested in civil rights protests. Crockett, who thought that African-American judges should be the "conscience of the judiciary," garnered national attention in 1969 when he released more than 100 members of a Black separatist group after a violent encounter with the Detroit police. Crockett defended his actions by asking, "Can any of you imagine the Detroit police invading an all-white church and rounding up everyone in sight to be bused to a wholesale lockup in a police garage?" After retiring from the recorder's court, he served as a visiting judge on the Michigan court of appeals and as corporation counsel for the city of Detroit.[6]

As a celebrated leader in Detroit's Black community, Crockett entered the race for the House seat left vacant by the resignation of Charles C. Diggs Jr. in 1980. The overwhelmingly Democratic congressional district, entirely within the city limits of Detroit, encompassed the downtown commercial center. During his campaign, Crockett promised to fight unemployment, improve health care, and provide housing opportunities for the residents of Detroit. Known for his integrity and civil rights record, Crockett won endorsements from Detroit Mayor Coleman A. Young and former Representative Diggs, and secured the Democratic nomination with a 42 percent plurality in the crowded August primary. He easily defeated his Republican opponent, Theodore Wallace, with 92 percent of the vote in the 1980 special election for the remainder of the 96th Congress (1979–1981). He also defeated Republican M. Michael Hurd in the general election for the full term in the 97th Congress (1981–1983), again earning 92 percent of the vote. Crockett retained his House seat for another four terms, rarely facing any formidable challenge in the majority-Black district, except in his final primary run against future Representative Barbara-Rose Collins, when he collected 51 percent of the vote.[7]

Sworn in to office on November 12, 1980, Crockett was appointed to the Committee on Foreign Affairs during his partial first term and remained on the panel for the rest of his House career. In the 97th Congress, he briefly served on the Small Business Committee before switching to the Judiciary Committee—a spot he retained from 1982 through the 101st Congress (1989–1991). He also served on the Select Committee on Aging from the 97th Congress

until his retirement at the end of the 101st Congress. During the 100th and 101st Congresses (1987–1991), Crockett chaired the Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere Affairs, which oversaw U.S. policy in Latin America and the Caribbean.

In the House, Crockett focused on constituent services and used his committee seats to bring attention to important issues. The Michigan Representative explained, "We have enough legislation now to take care of just about every situation that arises, if we will just enforce it and apply it." He did, on occasion, make exceptions to this practice. In 1984, for instance, Crockett authored a resolution calling for the release of Nelson Mandela, the imprisoned South African leader; the Mandela Freedom Resolution went on to pass the House. Throughout his tenure in Congress, he remained a consistent critic of the apartheid regime and was arrested in 1984 for participating in a demonstration outside the South African Embassy. Although he was not a legislator focused on introducing bills, he did take an active role in drawing attention to aspects of U.S. foreign policy he found troubling.[8]

When conservative groups questioned Crockett's appointment to chair the Western Hemisphere Affairs Subcommittee, he replied that he had "never collaborated with the Communist Party as such," Crockett said. "Admittedly, some of the positions I've taken, dictated by the U.S. Constitution, have coincided with desires and positions of the Communist Party, like supporting freedom of speech." During his first year as chair, Crockett held a hearing to examine the State Department's lack of diversity, which he believed projected "a white male image to a world whose population is dominated by people of color." Based on his interest in foreign policy, Crockett served as a member of the U.S. delegation to the 42nd General Assembly of the United Nations in 1987 and 1988. He also traveled with a U.S. congressional delegation to the Inter-Parliamentary Conference in Havana, Cuba, in 1981, and to the Seventh United Nations Congress on Prevention of Crime meeting in Milan, Italy, in 1984.[9]

As subcommittee chair, the Detroit Representative criticized President Ronald Reagan's foreign policy in the Americas. While considering the 1988 foreign aid authorization bill, Crockett criticized the administration's funding request because it allocated more than half of the aid available for the Western Hemisphere to just four Central American countries. Noting that "there is a lot more to the Western Hemisphere than Central America," he signaled his intent to focus on delivering aid to the Caribbean. During his last term in office, he proposed several bills to provide grants for the economic development of Caribbean nations, particularly in the agriculture and tourism industries.[10]

Crockett strongly opposed the Reagan administration's support of the anti-Communist Contras in Nicaragua, believing that the use of military aid "does more to prolong military conflicts, to drain resources from needed economic development, and to create political instability than it does to further the needs of the people." When the President sent the U.S. military into Grenada, Crockett unsuccessfully sought passage of a committee amendment directing the President to withdraw the troops within 30 days, a power afforded to Congress under the War Powers Resolution. When the President sent military aid to the Salvadoran government following that country's descent into civil war, Crockett brought a lawsuit against the administration for violating the Foreign Assistance Act, which prohibits sending aid to governments engaged in human rights abuses.[11]

Only a few months after President George H.W. Bush proposed more stringent antidrug policies in September 1989, Crockett made headlines as the first Member of Congress to call for the decriminalization of drugs. The former judge, known for taking controversial positions, noted, "Our courts are burdened down with these drug cases and there is nothing we can do about it." Crockett likened the U.S. criminalization of drugs to the prohibition of alcohol in the 1920s and argued that as long as there was demand for drugs, simply prosecuting suppliers would be an ineffective tactic on its own. He pointed out that federal money slotted for drug enforcement could be invested in housing and vocational programs to help his constituents and other impoverished Americans, which he believed would reduce the "unrelenting hopelessness" that he said fueled drug use.[12]

From his seat on the Judiciary Committee, Crockett confronted the disproportionate levels of scrutiny faced by Black politicians and public officials. In 1983, he wrote a letter to Judiciary Chair Peter Wallace Rodino Jr. of New Jersey requesting an investigation into the conduct of federal prosecutors, whom he believed were abusing grand jury proceedings to publicly smear Black officials. In his letter he referenced the attempted prosecution of

Alcee L. Hastings, a Black federal judge in Florida, who was accused of soliciting bribes in a criminal case in exchange for giving the defendants a lighter sentence. In 1988, the Judiciary Committee approved articles of impeachment against Hastings. During the markup, Crockett was the only Member to vote no on several articles—which accused the judge of making false statements during his bribery trial and leaking the contents of an FBI wiretap in a separate case—because he believed the allegations lacked evidence. Crockett did, however, vote for one article on the charge of soliciting bribes. Before the vote, he indicated his concern over what he considered to be "open season on black public officials," but concluded that, in Hastings's case, "an honest effort was made to put racism aside."[13]

In March 1990, at the age of 80, Crockett announced his intention to retire from the House: "After 68 years of working, I'm hoping to enjoy a little time off." The Michigan Representative denied that his decision had been influenced by the prospect of another difficult primary race against Barbara-Rose Collins. "I've just gotten older and wiser," he said. In his retirement Crockett continued his record of activism, joining the Detroit branch of the NAACP in its fight in 1996 to prevent the closing of the Detroit recorder's court, the court where Crockett began his career as a judge. On September 7, 1997, Crockett died of complications from cancer and a stroke.[14]

Manuscript Collection

Howard University, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center (Washington, DC). *Papers*: 1980–1990, 190 linear feet. The papers of George W. Crockett Jr. consist of speeches, photographs, correspondence, and other material documenting his legislative activities, particularly his service on the House Select Committee on Aging, the Committee on Foreign Affairs, and the Judiciary Committee. An inventory is available at the repository.

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Mervyn M. Dymally

1926–2012

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1981–1993

Democrat from California



Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

During his six terms in the U.S. House of Representatives, Mervyn M. Dymally was a prominent advocate for human rights and economic development across the globe. With a seat on the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Representative Dymally traveled the world to help shape U.S. foreign policy, particularly toward nations in the Caribbean and Africa. He also served as a subcommittee chair on three different standing committees. Born in Trinidad, Dymally championed immigrant rights as well as proposals designed to direct federal funding for programs in his California district.

Mervyn Malcolm Dymally was born on May 12, 1926, in Cedros, Trinidad, in the British West Indies, to Hamid and Andreid (Richardson) Dymally. He attended Cedros Government School and graduated from St. Benedict and Naparima Secondary School in Trinidad in 1944. Dymally worked as a janitor and a labor organizer early in his career. He also worked as a reporter, covering labor issues for *The Vanguard*, a weekly newspaper published by the Oilfields Workers' Trade Union. Inspired by the story of Booker T. Washington, a Black educator and the founder of Alabama's Tuskegee University, Dymally moved to the U.S. when he was 19 to study journalism at Lincoln University in Jefferson City, Missouri. After a semester, he transferred to Chapman University in Southern California. He said of his early years in the United States, "I came to L.A. in 1949. Those periods were waiting for that golden apple tree that I'd read about. … I couldn't find that gold tree, and I was searching for that. But I always worked, always found some kind of job. It's a matter of survival." Dymally earned a bachelor's degree in education from California State University in Los Angeles in 1954. After college, he taught students with functional needs for six years in Los Angeles. He earned a master's degree in government from California State University in Sacramento in 1969 and a Ph.D. in human behavior from the United States International University in San Diego in 1978. He married Alice M. Gueno, an educator from New Orleans, and they raised two children: Mark and Lynn.[1]

While working as a teacher, Dymally volunteered as a campaign worker and later worked as a field representative for the American Federation of Teachers. He joined the California Young Democrats and became the organization's state treasurer. In 1960, he campaigned for the Democratic candidate, John F. Kennedy.[2]

In 1962, Dymally won election to the California state assembly from a district in southern Los Angeles County.

He succeeded assemblyman Augustus F. "Gus" Hawkins, who had won a U.S. House seat. Dymally became the first foreign-born Black candidate elected to the California legislature. Four years later, he became the first African-American candidate elected to the California senate, where he chaired the senate Democratic caucus. Dymally chaired three full committees—social welfare; military and veterans affairs; and elections and reapportionment—as well as the joint committee on legal equality for women, from which he authored the legislation that eventually resulted in the state's ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment. He also was chairman of the California state Black caucus. For Dymally, politics was "the cutting edge in the entire civil-rights movement," and he sought to break down barriers to public office and use legislative power to rectify injustice. In 1974, Dymally was elected lieutenant governor of California—becoming the first African-American official to win statewide office in California. His campaign focused on the state's energy and environmental concerns as well as on equal rights for women. "I'm not shying away from race questions, but neither am I running a campaign on black issues," he noted during the contest. He served as lieutenant governor until 1979, heading the state commission for economic development and the commission of the Californias—a joint committee to facilitate collaboration with Mexican officials. In 1978, he lost re-election to Republican Mike Curb.[3]

In 1980, Dymally entered the Democratic primary for a diverse U.S. congressional district that encompassed suburbs in southern Los Angeles County—Gardena, Compton, Torrance, and Hawthorne—which had a population that was more than 60 percent Black, Latino, and Asian American. While the west side of the district contained affluent businesses, the east side, home to mostly working-class Black residents, had an unemployment rate of 40 percent. Representative Charles Herbert Wilson had represented the Democratic-leaning district for nearly two decades, with no serious opposition until the late 1970s. But in 1980, Wilson entered the primary while under investigation by the House Ethics Committee for financial misconduct. Dymally faced Wilson and former U.S. Representative Mark Warren Hannaford of California in a three-way race. Dymally had a core group of support among African-American voters and the backing of then-California assemblyman Howard Lawrence Berman and U.S. Representative Henry Arnold Waxman—two of his allies from his days in the state legislature. As a candidate, Dymally organized meetings with Governor Edmund G. Brown Jr. and community leaders to gather information about the most pressing issues in the district. Their concerns mostly centered around access to federal funds for local projects, including community policing efforts in the district and the construction of the Century Freeway—a highway connecting the city of Norwalk with Los Angeles International Airport. To address the district's unemployment, Dymally believed enhancing the aerospace industry would create more jobs for the area. In the Democratic primary, Dymally received 51 percent of the vote while Hannaford and Wilson received 25 and 16 percent, respectively. In the general election, Dymally won handily over Republican candidate Don Grimshaw, capturing 64 percent of the vote.[4]

Though its borders changed during a later reapportionment, Dymally's district remained heavily Democratic (more than 70 percent by the end of the 1980s) during his 12 years in office. By 1992, it included large portions of Carson and the Los Angeles neighborhoods Watts and Wilmington, in addition to Compton and Lynwood. In his subsequent five re-elections Dymally prevailed easily with 70 percent or more of the vote.[5]

When Dymally took his seat in the House in January 1981, he won assignments on three committees: Foreign Affairs; the District of Columbia; and Science and Technology. In the 98th Congress (1983–1985), Dymally left his post on Science and Technology for a seat on the Post Office and Civil Service Committee. He served on that panel, Foreign Affairs, and the District of Columbia Committee until he retired in 1993. For a single term in the 99th Congress (1985–1987), Dymally also served on the Education and Labor Committee. In the 100th Congress (1987–1989), he chaired the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC).

Democratic leadership named Dymally chair of the District of Columbia's Subcommittee on Judiciary and Education during his first term. He served in this position for the remainder of his congressional career and sponsored several bills relating to the District's judicial system that became law. As a member of the committee, he supported statehood for the majority-Black city and increased funding for education programs. Dymally served briefly as the Post Office and Civil Service's Postal Personnel and Modernization Subcommittee chairman—an assignment he welcomed because many of his constituents were postal

workers. As chair of that committee's Census and Population Subcommittee, Dymally passed a bill into law that extended some federal workplace rights to postal workers.[6]

Having immigrated to the United States after growing up in Trinidad, Dymally hoped to use his own experiences to help shape U.S. foreign policy from his seat on the Foreign Affairs Committee. Early in his career, Dymally focused on political, economic, and immigrant concerns affecting countries in the Caribbean. He introduced legislation such as the Caribbean Infrastructure Assistance Act and the Caribbean-Central America Higher Education Act, but neither of the bills made it to the House Floor for debate. He also founded the CBC's Caribbean Task Force and criticized the Ronald Reagan administration's treatment and detainment of Haitian refugees.[7]

As chair of the Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on International Operations (101st Congress; 1989–1991) and the Subcommittee on Africa (102nd Congress; 1991–1993), Dymally became a leading spokesperson on human rights and economic development around the globe. He was a prominent critic of apartheid in South Africa and called for U.S. sanctions against its minority-White government. He introduced a resolution to condemn nations that disregarded a South African arms embargo and then strongly opposed the George H.W. Bush administration's efforts to end sanctions in 1991. "The basic life for blacks in South Africa has not changed," Dymally said, adding that sanctions should be lifted only when the country created a democratic government. He advocated for a U.S. aid package to advance the process. In 1985, Dymally joined British officials in calling for the United Nations to pressure South Africa to grant Namibia its independence and, two years later, supported UN supervision over Namibian democratic elections. In 1990, he and fellow California Representative Ronald V. Dellums proposed an amendment to the Intelligence Authorization Act to prohibit covert U.S. military action in Angola. Dymally was also critical of Israel for continuing its trade with South Africa and suppressing Palestinian protests in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. He was a steadfast supporter of the creation of a Palestinian state.[8]

Dymally also focused on international issues as chair of the CBC. In 1987, the Prime Minister of Japan made an offensive comment about the intelligence of African Americans and other people of color living in the United States. The CBC claimed this comment was part of a long-standing prejudice some Japanese corporations held that led to the lack of Black employees in Japanese firms as well as limited deals between Japanese companies and African-American business owners. In response, Dymally led a delegation to Japan to discuss the country's relationship with Black businesses in the United States. "We do not want this to be perceived as Blacks against the Japanese," Dymally stated. "This is a basic issue of international economic justice. We also are looking at addressing this question with South Africa, West Germany, the United Kingdom, and other foreign manufacturers who sell consumer goods without ever owning up to corporate responsibility."[9]

For his California district, Dymally backed federal defense spending on projects for the Los Angeles-based aerospace industry and worked with aerospace companies to create federal grants for California high school students pursuing careers in science and technology. He also opposed the Reagan administration's funding cuts to federal housing, employment, and education initiatives that benefited his constituents in South Los Angeles. Along with California Representatives Gus Hawkins and Julian C. Dixon, Dymally opposed the Reagan administration's proposed cuts to the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act, which funded subsidized jobs throughout the country. In 1981, the three Representatives hosted a forum in Los Angeles and asked their constituents to report job losses so the CBC could coordinate a response.[10]

To connect with his constituents, Dymally held seven public seminars across the district each year. At one of these events, a constituent discussed ongoing efforts to grant reparations to Japanese Americans interned by the U.S. government during World War II. In December 1982, Dymally introduced the Japanese-American and Aleut-American Relocation and Internment Individual Redress Act, becoming one of the first Representatives to propose legislation to pay monetary compensation directly to individual detainees. His bill came only two years after the creation of the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Interment of Civilians, which Congress established in 1980 to understand the history and consequences of internment. Dymally recalled that he knew the bill "wasn't going to pass, but it was going to educate the public." He also introduced legislation designed to establish a community fund to pay compensation to those who had been detained during the war. In September 1987, Dymally spoke on the House Floor backing the redress effort. He called the internment

of Japanese Americans a case of "blatant discrimination" and demanded compensation for those who were stripped of their property. In 1988, Congress passed the Civil Liberties Act, which authorized payment to surviving detainees.[11]

Dymally also worked to assist a small constituency of Filipino World War II veterans living in California. In 1942, Congress passed a law allowing non-citizens serving with U.S. forces to become naturalized, but the Philippines had been excluded because of Japanese occupation. Dymally introduced five bills between 1984 and 1989 to enable Filipino veterans to become eligible for citizenship. In a 1989 subcommittee hearing that considered one of his bills, Dymally told his colleagues that "we are legally and morally obligated to return the promise of the Congress of 1942. As a nation that promotes equality, fairness and justice globally, we must keep our promise to the Filipinos." In 1990, he worked with Senator Daniel Ken Inouye of Hawaii to successfully include the provision in the Immigration and Nationality Act, signed by President Bush.[12]

In February 1992, Dymally announced that he would retire from the House at the end of the 102nd Congress. "I did not get elected to stay in office forever," Dymally remarked. "I have no regrets. The people have supported me. They have permitted me to be independent and even wrong sometimes." Though he endorsed his daughter, Lynn, to succeed him, Compton Mayor Walter R. Tucker III won the Democratic primary and easily prevailed in the general election for Dymally's vacant seat.[13]

In his retirement, Dymally worked as a foreign affairs consultant for Caribbean, African, and Asian interests. In 2002, he was elected to the California state assembly to represent a district that encompassed South Los Angeles and the cities of Compton, Paramount, and Long Beach. In the state assembly, Dymally was elected chair of the Democratic study group, which developed progressive legislation. In 2008, he ran to serve a second time in the state senate but lost to assemblyman Rod Wright. He also taught as a professor at the Charles R. Drew University of Medicine and Science in Los Angeles and led the university's Urban Health Institute. Mervyn Dymally died on October 7, 2012, in Los Angeles.[14]

Manuscript Collection

California State University, Los Angeles, Special Collections (Los Angeles, CA). *Papers*: ca. 1962–1993, approximately 440 linear feet. The papers of Mervyn M. Dymally document his service in the California state assembly, California state senate, and his tenure as California lieutenant governor. The collection includes correspondence, press clippings, press releases, speeches, and photographs.

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Gus Savage

1925–2015

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1981–1993

Democrat from Illinois



Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

In 1980, Gus Savage, a veteran civil rights activist and pioneer African-American journalist, used his strong community ties to earn a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives from the South Side of Chicago. During his 12 years in Congress, Savage's personality and militant approach to highlighting racial inequalities in his district and around the nation made headlines and often provoked controversy. "I value my independence," Savage avowed. "And I view struggle as desirable. I don't crave acceptance. I march to my own tune. If the machine doesn't like it, that's tough. If my colleagues don't like it, that's also tough."[1]

Born in Detroit, Michigan, on October 30, 1925, Augustus Alexander "Gus" Savage moved to the South Side of Chicago with his family at age five. He attended public schools in Chicago, graduating from Wendell Phillips High School in 1943. Savage served in a segregated unit of the U.S. Army from 1943 to 1946; the racial discrimination he experienced in the military led to a lifelong fight against inequality. After he completed a tour of duty in World War II, Savage attended Roosevelt University in Chicago, where he earned a bachelor's degree in philosophy in 1951. Enrolled in Chicago-Kent College of Law during 1952 and 1953, he changed his career to journalism in 1954. At the height of the civil rights movement in 1965, Savage founded and published the Chicago-based *Citizen Newspapers*, the nation's largest Black-owned chain of independent weekly newspapers. Savage married Eunice King on August 4, 1946. The couple had two children: Thomas James and Emma Mae. Eunice King Savage was the general manager of *Citizen Newspapers* for 15 years. She died of lung cancer in 1981.[2]

Savage used his publications to combat discrimination in housing, employment, and labor unions. In the 1960s, he chaired Chicago's South End Voters Conference and led Protest at the Polls, an organization dedicated to electing Black officials independent from Chicago machine politics. Savage also served as the campaign manager for the Midwest League of Negro Voters. He organized and participated in a series of protests, including one against the National Tea Company—an advertiser in his newspapers—to draw attention to the company's poor record on minority hiring practices. He also had an important role reporting on the brutal lynching of Emmett Till, a 14-year-old African-American boy from Chicago who was murdered in Mississippi for allegedly whistling at a White woman. Savage edited and published *The American Negro: A Magazine*

of Protest, which was among the first publications to print the shocking photographs of Till's mutilated body. *Jet* and the *Chicago Defender* ran the images as well, laying bare for a national audience the devastating reality of racial violence against Black Americans.[3]

In 1948, Savage worked as a Progressive Party organizer for former Vice President Henry A. Wallace's presidential campaign against the incumbent, President Harry S. Truman. Savage also became involved in local politics as an outspoken critic of Chicago Mayor Richard J. Daley and his party machine. Beginning in the 1960s, Savage used his newspapers to criticize the White power structure that dominated the city for much of the twentieth century. It was not long before he ran for office himself. Savage made five unsuccessful bids for elective office at the local and the national levels before eventually earning a seat in Congress. Savage twice challenged the Daley machine for a seat in Congress but was soundly defeated in 1968 by five-term incumbent William Thomas Murphy and in 1970 by the machine-backed candidate, Morgan Francis Murphy.[4]

When Representative Morgan Murphy announced his retirement from the House in December 1979, Savage joined the race to succeed him. Created in 1971, the predominantly African-American, working-class congressional district formed a U shape that encompassed much of Chicago's far South Side, several suburban neighborhoods, and an industrial area surrounding Lake Calumet. In the four-candidate Democratic primary, Savage faced another Daley machine candidate, Reginald Brown, who was the principal of the Chicago Vocational School, alongside two other Democrats. Savage emphasized his reputation as an independent politician and an alternative to the Chicago machine. After winning the primary by earning 45 percent of the vote, Savage trounced his Republican opponent in the general election with 88 percent of the vote, becoming the district's first African-American Representative. Savage joined two other Black politicians from Chicago—Cardiss Collins and Harold Washington—in the 97th Congress (1981–1983). It was the first time three African-American lawmakers represented Chicago simultaneously and a clear indication of the growing political influence of the city's Black voters.[5]

During his six terms in office, Savage served on three committees: Post Office and Civil Service; Public Works and Transportation; and Small Business. He also chaired the Public Works and Transportation Subcommittee on Economic Development during the 101st and 102nd Congresses (1989–1993).

Savage once observed that he viewed his election to the House as "a vehicle to effect change." And on Capitol Hill, he focused on advancing the rights of African Americans and improving conditions in his Chicago district. In a major legislative triumph, Savage sponsored an amendment to the National Defense Authorization Act for the 1987 fiscal year that reserved upwards of $25 billion in federal military contracts for minority-owned and -controlled businesses and institutions, as well as historically Black colleges and universities. "I would only remind our colleagues that our great Nation, America, was founded on an impossible dream, and America was built by doing the improbable," Savage said during debate on his measure. "Do not limit your goal to the attainable; set your goal at what is right." In 1988, he sponsored legislation to build a new federal office building in his district and urged the use of minority contractors for the project. Savage also sponsored measures to provide homebuyers with mortgage assistance and prevent foreclosures.[6]

Savage used his position in the House to advocate against practices that disproportionately affected Black Americans. The Chicago Representative joined his Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) colleagues in criticizing President Ronald Reagan's economic agenda during the 1980s. "Reagan is a reverse Robin Hood, robbing the poor and giving to the rich," he said, referring to a 1981 administration proposal that included tax cuts for the wealthy and decreased federal spending for programs to assist Americans living in poverty. He also found fault with much of the President's foreign policy, including the U.S. invasion of Grenada. Savage favored cuts for military programs such as the Strategic Defense Initiative—a space-based missile defense system touted by the Reagan administration—and called for a reduction of the armed forces. "I don't want to take young men into the Army to train them to kill," he said. "I'd rather we send them to college to train them to heal."[7]

On foreign policy matters, Savage worked to direct America's attention to African affairs. He toured the continent on congressional visits to Zimbabwe, South Africa, Zaire, Somalia, Angola, and Kenya. Savage was critical of congressional support for Israel, and consistently made anti-Semitic remarks about the power of lobbyists to influence Congress on Middle Eastern issues and provide campaign contributions to his opponents. Savage was also

one of only three Members of the House who voted against a resolution requesting that the United States withhold funds from the United Nations if Israel was barred from participating in General Assembly proceedings.[8]

Over the course of his career in Congress, Savage faced several investigations into his conduct. In 1981, he was involved in a confrontation with the District of Columbia police superintendent regarding a traffic violation his son committed, and, in 1984, he was the subject of an investigation by the Federal Election Commission about incomplete campaign finance reports. He was also criticized for his poor voting record and regular absences. In 1989, the House Ethics Committee, chaired by CBC member Julian C. Dixon of California, investigated Savage after he was accused of sexual harassment by a Peace Corps volunteer during an official congressional visit to Zaire. The subsequent public report condemned Savage's behavior but did not recommend punishment. Questioned by reporters, Savage said the "white racist" press had attacked him unfairly, asserting, "Black leadership is under attack in this county, and I'm the No. 1 target." Savage granted few interviews as a Representative, insisting the media distorted his image and record.[9]

Savage faced competitive primary races throughout his career and never received more than 52 percent of the vote. In three successive primaries he was opposed by Mel Reynolds, a former Rhodes Scholar and professor. Following the 1990 Census, the Illinois state legislature redrew Savage's district for the 1992 election cycle, expanding its boundaries to encompass more suburban neighborhoods. The new district lines ultimately aided Reynolds by depriving Savage of parts of neighborhoods in Chicago where his most loyal voters lived. Reynolds also received the endorsement of the influential African-American newspaper, the *Chicago Defender*. In 1992, Savage lost to Reynolds by an unexpectedly wide margin of 63 to 37 percent. After leaving the House in January 1993, Savage continued to live in Washington, DC. He died in Chicago on October 31, 2015, the day after his ninetieth birthday.[10]

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Harold Washington

1922–1987

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1981–1983

Democrat from Illinois

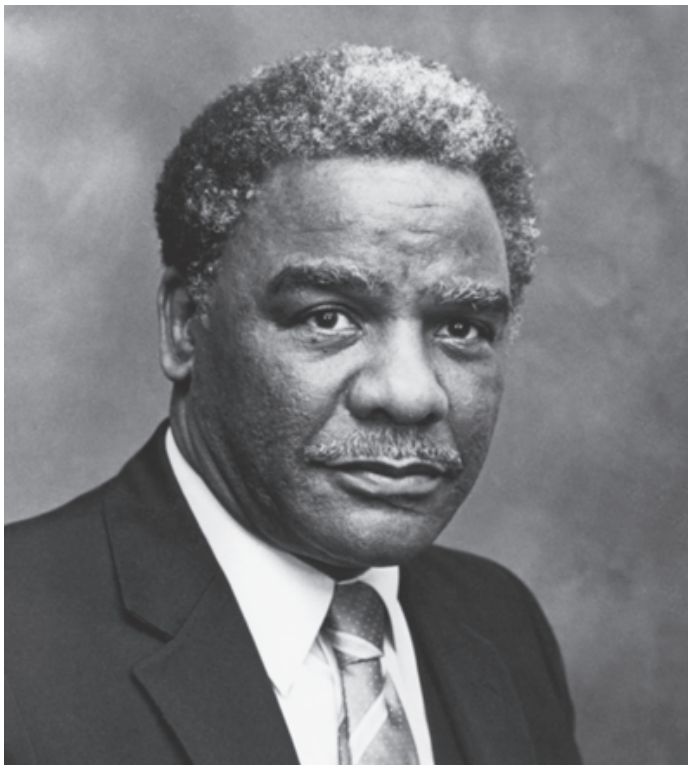

Image courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration

In the early 1980s, Representative Harold Washington of Illinois served slightly more than one term in the U.S. House of Representatives before winning election as the first African-American mayor of Chicago. On Capitol Hill, Washington represented a South Side district with a celebrated history of electing Black lawmakers to Congress. Washington confronted the powerful party machines that for years had dictated the rhythms of Chicago politics. In the House, Washington worked to protect and open access to federal aid programs, and used his seat on the powerful Judiciary Committee to advance the cause of civil rights. "The reason my face and my name are known all over is because of the history of the Chicago political machine and the movement that brought it down," Washington remarked. "I just happened to be there at the right time to capitalize on it."[1]

Harold Washington was born on April 15, 1922, in Chicago, Illinois, to Bertha, an amateur singer and domestic worker, and Roy Lee Washington, a minister and lawyer. After his parents divorced in 1928, Washington lived with his father, who married Arlene Jackson, a local schoolteacher, in 1935. Washington's father was active in Chicago politics, serving as a precinct captain in the city's predominantly Black South Side. Washington accompanied his father to rallies and meetings and learned the intricacies of the political machine that dominated Chicago politics by observing future Representatives Arthur W. Mitchell, William L. Dawson, and Ralph H. Metcalfe. Washington attended Forrestville School and DuSable High School in Chicago before dropping out to work in a meatpacking factory and compete as an amateur boxer and a hurdler. In 1941, Washington married Dorothy Finch. The couple divorced in 1951. Drafted into the military in 1942, Washington served with the U.S. Army Air Corps unit of engineers in the Pacific until 1946. After World War II, he attended Roosevelt University in Chicago and served as class president during his senior year. After earning a bachelor's degree in political science in 1949, he went on to receive a law degree from Northwestern University's School of Law in 1952, joining his father in private law practice in Chicago after he passed the bar in 1953.[2]

When his father died in 1953, Washington succeeded him as a precinct captain in the third ward regular Democratic organization. Washington joined the city corporation counsel's office as an assistant prosecutor from 1954 to 1958, and in 1960, he started a four-year stint as an arbitrator for

the Illinois industrial commission. Washington served in the Illinois state house of representatives from 1965 to 1976 and in the Illinois state senate from 1976 to 1980. Although he was closely aligned with the city's political machine and often followed its "idiot card"—the derogatory name for the voting instructions assembled for machine candidates—Washington defied organization leaders on occasion, such as his votes for the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), a fair housing code, and the establishment of a statewide holiday honoring civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. Despite facing some legal issues—Washington spent a month in jail on a 1971 conviction for failure to file income tax returns—he maintained support among his constituents.[3]

In 1977, following the sudden death of the powerful Chicago Mayor Richard J. Daley, Washington ran to fill the vacancy. Washington had grown frustrated with the local Democratic organization, which he believed stifled Black politicians like himself who refused to fall into line on every issue, and challenged the machine-backed candidate, Michael Bilandic, for the Democratic mayoral nomination. As he struggled to raise campaign funds, he focused much of his attention on Chicago's South Side. During the campaign, he likened the city's Black population to a "sleeping giant," predicting that if "the potential black vote ever woke up, we'd control the city." In a field of four contenders, Washington finished third with 11 percent of the vote. Afterward, he promised voters that his split with the machine was permanent. "I'm going to do that which maybe I should have done 10 or 12 years ago," Washington exclaimed. "I'm going to stay outside that damned Democratic Party and give it hell."[4]

Three years later, Washington challenged first-term Representative Bennett M. Stewart, the machine's incumbent, in the 1980 Democratic primary for Chicago's South Side seat in the House. Washington was well known in the majority-Black district, which included middle-class and poor neighborhoods running south along Lake Michigan as well as Chicago's downtown commercial Loop. His earlier mayoral run had won him support among independent voters, and he benefited from local discontent with the city's political machine which, two years earlier, had all but handpicked Stewart to replace Representative Ralph Metcalfe in the House after his sudden death in 1978. In the 1980 primary, Washington garnered nearly 50 percent of the vote to defeat Stewart, who placed third in a field of four candidates that included Ralph Metcalfe Jr., the son of the late Representative. In the November general election, Washington trounced his Republican opponent, George Williams, securing 95 percent of the vote to earn a seat in the 97th Congress (1981–1983).[5]

Sworn in on January 3, 1981, Washington received assignments on three committees: Education and Labor; Judiciary; and Government Operations. Washington was the sixth consecutive African-American Representative from Chicago's South Side, a line of succession which began with Oscar De Priest's election to the House in 1928. Unlike his predecessors, however, Washington lacked the backing of the Chicago political establishment, and he continued his anti-machine posture on Capitol Hill.

Washington refused for weeks to resign from his seat in the statehouse to deny Mayor Jane Byrne, who had inherited Chicago's machine after Daley's death, the ability to replace him in Springfield with a party regular from her personal staff. Though Washington did not accept his salary during the standoff, state Democrats threatened lawsuits, and House Minority Leader Robert Henry Michel of Illinois discussed a formal motion declaring Washington's seat vacant before the Congressman ultimately relented.[6]

Elected to office at the same time as President Ronald Reagan, Washington spent much of his time on Capitol Hill criticizing the President's proposals to cut taxes and slash spending on federal aid programs. He criticized the President's agenda for favoring wealthy Americans while simultaneously trying "to balance the budget on the backs of the poor," including his constituents in Chicago. Washington said cuts to federal assistance programs, such as college financial aid, were "unfairly targeted" at districts like his, and said limiting access to college education would have a detrimental effect on the economy. Washington also disagreed with much of the President's foreign policy, especially the increased production of nuclear weapons, the emphasis on defense spending, and U.S. military intervention in Central America.[7]

Washington's most enduring influence as a Representative was his commitment to civil rights. From his seat on the Judiciary Committee in 1982, Washington helped negotiate an extension of sections of the Voting Rights Act that prevented localities with a history of voting rights abuses from using "bail-out" provisions to avoid federal supervision. Washington's efforts during seven weeks of lengthy hearings before the Subcommittee on Civil and Constitutional Rights drew praise from civil

rights leaders. The Congressional Black Caucus, which Washington labeled "the one forum by which black leaders can speak to the nation," chose the Illinois Representative to help manage the bill during debate on the House Floor. In this role, Washington led the opposition to several amendments that sought to weaken the bill by allowing local officials, rather than federal courts, to review requests to skirt federal oversight.[8]

During his House career, Washington denounced proposals to weaken the enforcement of affirmative action and endorsed the ERA. After the ERA failed to secure ratification by the 1982 deadline, he expressed regret and blamed the Reagan administration for its failure. "To me, the ERA is a nondebatable issue," Washington noted. "Black people have suffered from discrimination, degradation, and inequality in all areas of life. So, on this issue of peoples' rights, it is easy to identify with the inequities women are facing."[9]

Concerned that Mayor Byrne and other Chicago machine leaders would launch a challenge to his re-election, Washington spent considerable time campaigning back home during his first term. Despite his apprehension, he ran unopposed in the Democratic primary and easily won a second term in the House, garnering 97 percent of the vote in the general election.[10]

Shortly after his victory in November 1982, Washington announced his candidacy for mayor of Chicago. Approached by several African-American groups interested in fielding a strong Black candidate to oppose Byrne, Washington agreed to run only after a campaign to register more than 100,000 African-American voters in Chicago. Throughout the Democratic primary, Washington used a grassroots approach, emphasizing his anti-machine record, especially when courting Black voters. "It's our turn," Washington said repeatedly. "We're not going to apologize for it and we're not going to waste a lot of time explaining it. It's our turn—that's all." Drastically outspent by his opponents in a closely watched race, Washington nonetheless won the February Democratic nomination; the primary boasted the largest voter turnout in 25 years. In the April general election, Washington narrowly defeated former Illinois state legislator Republican Bernard Epton to become Chicago's first African-American mayor. On April 30, 1983, a little more than two weeks after the election, he resigned his House seat.[11]

As mayor, Washington struggled to reform the Chicago political scene, but he did weaken the power of the machine. Seven months after winning election to a second mayoral term, Washington died of a heart attack on November 25, 1987. "Losing our mayor is like losing a black folk hero," noted a Chicago constituent. Even the *Chicago Tribune*, which had at times criticized Washington, observed that few people "have made quite so powerful an impact" on the city. During a salute to his former colleague on the House Floor, Mervyn M. Dymally of California recognized Washington's political legacy: "He was purposeful and constantly focused, for his battle did not begin and end with the roll call, but extended into a crusade to heal the cancerous lesions of race hatred and generations of divisive political warfare."[12]

Manuscript Collection

Chicago Public Library, Harold Washington Library Center, Special Collections (Chicago, IL). *Papers*: 1970–1983, 57 linear feet. The collection of Harold Washington's congressional records documents his promotion and sponsorship of legislation, committee work, and involvement with the Congressional Black Caucus. The papers contain correspondence with constituents, including casework, fundraising, and the organization of task forces to deal with such issues as housing and health. A finding aid is available in the repository and online.

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Katie Hall

1938–2012

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1982–1985

Democrat from Indiana



Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

In the 1950s, Katie Hall was inspired to seek out a "world larger than Mississippi" after hearing speeches by visiting African-American Members of Congress in her hometown of Mound Bayou. Hall moved to Gary, Indiana, in 1960 and was active in local and state politics before winning a 1982 special election to the U.S. House of Representatives. She was the first Black Member of Congress from Indiana, and in a little more than two years on Capitol Hill she successfully led the House effort to create a federal holiday honoring Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.[1]

Katie Hall was born Katie Beatrice Green on April 3, 1938, to Jeff and Bessie Mae Hooper Green, in Mound Bayou, Mississippi. One of 12 children, Hall attended the public schools in Mound Bayou and graduated with a bachelor's degree from Mississippi Vocational College—now known as Mississippi Valley State University—a historically Black university, in 1960. In 1957, she married John H. Hall and they had two children: Jacqueline and Junifer.[2]

When a local physician and civic leader invited Representative William L. Dawson of Illinois and other African-American Members of Congress to speak in Mound Bayou in the 1950s, Hall embraced the power of politics to effect change. "They started me to thinking what life should be like," she recalled. The day after she graduated from college in 1960, Hall and her young family moved north to Gary, Indiana, an industrial city on the south shore of Lake Michigan, in pursuit of work and political freedom. Hall and her husband swiftly launched themselves into local politics and registered to vote. The Halls met attorney Richard G. Hatcher at a NAACP meeting in 1962. The next year, Katie Hall worked on Hatcher's campaign for the Gary city council, and in 1967, Hall was part of the team that helped elect Hatcher one of the first Black mayors of a major American city. During this period, she taught high school social studies in Gary and pursued a master's degree from Indiana University in Bloomington, graduating in 1968.[3]

Hall's work on the campaign trail led her to consider a career in politics. She ran unsuccessful campaigns for the Gary city council in 1970 and the Indiana state house of representatives in 1972 but won a seat in the state house in 1974. Two years later, Hall was elected to the state senate, where she served from 1976 until 1982. She also led the Lake County Democratic committee from 1978 to 1980 and chaired the 1980 Indiana Democratic convention. Hall dedicated her efforts in the state legislature to supporting development in and around Gary, securing

funds for conventions, sports centers, and the Gary/Chicago International Airport. She also helped establish the position of deputy mayor for Gary in 1975.[4]

In September 1982, Indiana Democratic Representative Adam Benjamin Jr. died of a heart attack. A week later Hall attended a public forum to discuss a possible successor and was surprised to hear her name mentioned. "I had always thought about running for Congress," she admitted, but refrained because "I saw Adam as a very highly respected Congressman who did the job very well. I saw him as a person who was undefeatable." Patricia Benjamin, the late Representative's wife, also expressed interest in succeeding her husband.[5]

Under Indiana law, the chair of the district's Democratic committee selected the nominee to fill the vacancy for the remainder of the 97th Congress (1981–1983). The party chair at the time was Gary Mayor Richard Hatcher, who Hall considered a political mentor. Hatcher recalled Hall's support for his own political career in the 1960s and selected her as the Democratic candidate for the district representing the northwest corner of the state, anchored by Gary, the steel-producing hub of the region. At the same time, the district committee nominated Hall—with Hatcher casting the deciding vote—for a full term in the 98th Congress (1983–1985) representing a new seat that had been drawn following the 1980 Census. The district's boundaries remained relatively unchanged after the reapportionment, and White northern Indiana Democrats protested Hall's nomination to the safe Democratic seat because she was Black. Although downtown Gary was primarily African American, the population of the entire district was 70 percent White. A legal battle ensued when Patricia Benjamin's supporters claimed that Hatcher, as chairman of the old district, did not have the right to select a candidate for the new district. The courts refused to overturn Hatcher's decision. Hall's nomination for both the vacancy and the full term was tantamount to election in the working-class, Democratic district. She defeated her Republican opponent, Thomas Krieger, with 63 percent of the vote to win election to the remainder of the 97th Congress. She simultaneously won election with 56 percent of the vote for the 98th Congress. Hall was the first Black woman from Indiana to serve in the U.S. Congress.[6]

When she arrived in Washington to be sworn in on November 2, 1982, Representative Hall received seats on the Committee on Post Office and Civil Service and the Committee on Public Works and Transportation. Hall voted with the Democratic majority against much of the Ronald Reagan administration's legislative agenda, focusing on education, labor, and women's issues. Hall said many of her constituents believed the President had failed on women's issues "and I have to agree," she insisted, pointing to the lack of enforcement of equal opportunity laws in education and employment. She voted against the Social Security Amendments of 1983 which raised the retirement age and delayed cost-of-living adjustments. "I thought it would put an undue hardship on many of my constituents," she argued.[7]

Hall's northwest Indiana congressional district led the nation in steel production at the time. As a member of the House Steel Caucus, Hall cosponsored the Fair Trade in Steel Act, designed to revitalize American steel production in cities like Gary by limiting steel imports. Hall urged the Reagan administration to implement protectionist measures. As part of the executive committee of the Steel Caucus, Hall met with President Reagan in 1983 to discuss the administration's new task force established to revitalize the industry without instituting tariffs. Hall also worked to improve conditions overseas and during a congressional fact-finding tour of six North African countries, Hall joined her colleagues in the fight to alleviate hunger in Ethiopia.[8]

Hall made her most lasting legislative contribution as chair of the Post Office and Civil Service Subcommittee on Census and Population, which held jurisdiction over federal holidays. In July 1983, Hall introduced a bill to make the birthday of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. a public holiday. Since King's assassination in 1968, similar measures had been introduced annually, but all had failed. Although Detroit Representative John Conyers Jr. had regularly sponsored the measure, the Congressional Black Caucus selected Hall as the floor manager for the measure. Representative William H. Gray III of Pennsylvania observed, "Sometimes when you get to the goal line it's good to go to someone fresh and new to take it over. She brought a freshness of approach, a spirit of reconciliation to what had sometimes been a bitter battle." Hall held hearings on the measure, welcoming testimony from Senator Edward Moore "Ted" Kennedy of Massachusetts, Stevie Wonder, and King's widow Coretta Scott King.[9]

Many opponents argued the bill would be too expensive, citing the estimated cost of the holiday to the federal government, while others disparaged King's character as unworthy of celebration. Hall negotiated with opponents

by moving the holiday from a fixed date—King's January 15 birthday—to the third Monday in January to prevent government offices from having to open twice in one week and thereby save money. She introduced a new bill on July 29, 1983, which was referred to the Committee on Post Office and Civil Service and swiftly sent to the House Floor under suspension of the rules. Hall opened debate in the chamber by reminding her colleagues, "The legislation before us will act as a national commitment to Dr. King's vision and determination for an ideal America, which he spoke of the night before his death, where equality will always prevail."[10]

On the House Floor, most opponents continued to object to the bill's cost, but some such as Representative Lawrence Patton McDonald of Georgia, alleged King was a Communist sympathizer and cited King's sealed FBI surveillance records to impugn his character. Others wanted to remove King's name from the title of the bill and complained that they were shut out of the amendment process. After one day of contentious debate on August 2, 1983—more than 15 years after King's assassination—the bill passed the House by a vote of 338 to 90.[11]

In the Senate, the measure faced an uphill climb as North Carolina Senator Jesse Helms threatened to filibuster. He criticized what he said was the burdensome cost of a new holiday for the federal government and also stated without evidence that King was connected to the Communist Party and should not be honored for his "calculated use of nonviolence as a provocative act." Leadership in both parties criticized Helms and quickly offered Helms a vote on tobacco legislation crucial to North Carolina to end the standoff. On November 2, 1983, President Ronald Reagan abandoned his opposition to the measure and signed it into law. Hall also sponsored a bill creating a federal commission to encourage commemorative events on the first observance of Martin Luther King Jr. Day, which was scheduled for January 20, 1986. It was signed into law in 1984.[12]

In 1984, Hall encountered formidable competition in her bid for renomination and re-election to the 99th Congress (1985–1987). Despite support from prominent Democrats, including Speaker Thomas P. "Tip" O'Neill Jr. of Massachusetts, Hall faced two strong challengers in her district primary: former Adam Benjamin aide Peter Visclosky and county prosecutor Jack Crawford. Hall maintained that her opposition was based partially on her race and gender. During one debate, Hall declared, "If I wasn't black and female, there wouldn't be a contest." Rev. Jesse Jackson, whose name appeared on the primary ballot for the Democratic presidential nominee, also rallied to her aid. In the May primary, Hall lost the Democratic nomination to Visclosky by a margin of 2,367 votes. Low turnout among Gary residents significantly reduced Hall's vote tally when compared with her victorious 1982 campaign, despite Jackson's presence on the ballot. Hall argued that racism had led to her defeat, pointing to Visclosky's accusations that she ignored non-Black constituents, particularly in the suburbs, in favor of serving the interests of Mayor Hatcher in Gary. Hall also questioned the returns in areas where her campaign predicted a stronger showing than reflected in the final count. She filed suit to force a recount of the primary results. In one suburban county, a recount confirmed her losing margin without changing a single vote.[13]

After Congress, Hall continued to be active in Indiana Democratic politics. In 1986 and in 1990, she tried unsuccessfully to recapture the Democratic nomination in her old House district. Hall returned to Gary and began teaching again while also serving as the vice chair of the city's housing board. Hall became the Gary city clerk in 1988. She resigned in January 2003 after pleading guilty to charges of federal mail fraud. On February 20, 2012, Katie Hall died at the age of 73, in Gary, Indiana.[14]

Manuscript Collection

Indiana Historical Society, Smith Memorial Library (Indianapolis, IN). *Papers*: ca. 1957–2017, one manuscript box, three DVDs (2014–2015), two folders of black and white photographs, one folder of color photographs, one OVC color photo, one oversize manuscript folder, and four artifacts (campaign buttons). The Katie Hall collection includes photographs (ca. 1956–2016), essays (2015–2016), Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Commission papers (1984–1986), newspaper clippings, articles, correspondence, resolutions, proclamations, appointments, programs, invitations, and reports.

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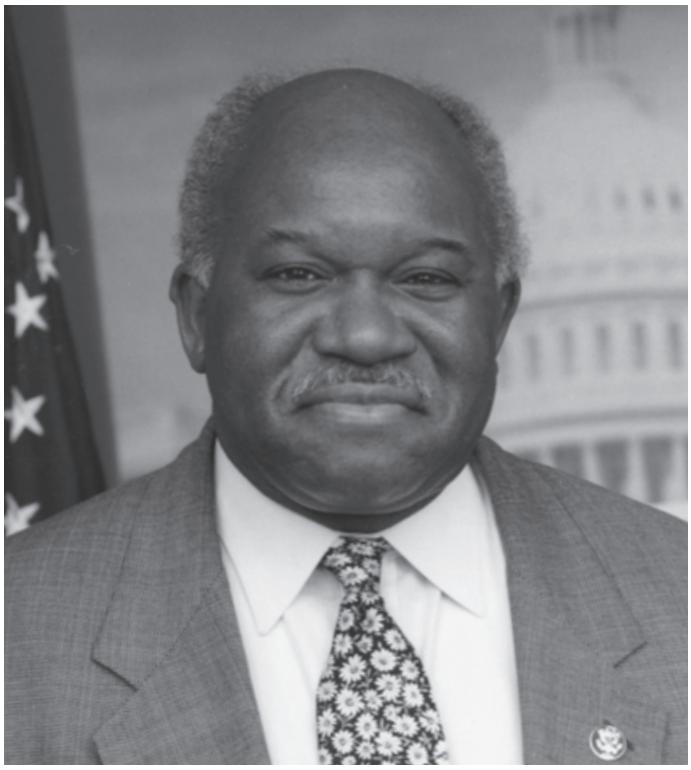
Major R. Owens

1936–2013

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1983–2007

Democrat from New York



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Major R. Owens, a librarian, civil rights activist, and community reformer, served in the New York state senate before winning the seat held by legendary Brooklyn Representative Shirley Chisholm—the first African-American woman elected to Congress—when she retired from the U.S. House of Representatives. Beginning in 1983, Owens became a significant advocate for education during his 12 terms in Congress. "Education is the kingpin issue," he explained. "Proper nurturing of and attention to the educational process will achieve a positive domino reaction which will benefit employment and economic development. … The greater the education, the lesser the victimization by drugs, alcoholism, and swindles. … We have to believe that all power and progress really begins with education."[1]

Major Robert Odell Owens was born in Collierville, Tennessee, on June 28, 1936, to Ezekiel and Edna Owens. Owens's father, a day laborer in a furniture factory who espoused President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal philosophy, shaped Owens's political views at an early age. "I can't remember a time when I wasn't aware of the fact that a much bigger world than my own personal universe was out there," Owens once remarked. "We were very poor and always had to struggle to make ends meet. Still, I was also aware that we were not alone—that millions of people, in this country and abroad, faced similar kinds of problems. I also realized that what happened in the larger world affected my family and its personal welfare." He also recalled that his mother, "the scholar of the family," influenced how he approached his education. His parents' optimism about their children's future left Owens with the attitude that "there was no reason why I couldn't go out and scale life's summits." Early on, he aspired to be a novelist. He attended public schools in Memphis, Tennessee, graduating from Hamilton High School. Owens then went to Atlanta, Georgia, and attended historically Black colleges for both his undergrad and graduate studies. In 1956, Owens earned a bachelor's degree with high honors from Morehouse College. A year later, he completed a master's degree in library science at Atlanta University. In 1956, he married Ethel Werfel. They raised three children—Christopher, Geoffrey, and Millard—before divorcing in 1985. Major Owens later married Marie Cuprill, the staff director of a House Education and Labor subcommittee, and became a stepparent to her two children: Carlos and Cecilia.[2]

In 1958, Owens took a job as a librarian at New York's Brooklyn Public Library, where he worked until 1966. He

became active in the Democratic Party during that time and was involved in community organizations and the civil rights movement. In 1961, Owens joined the Brooklyn chapter of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), later chairing the organization. While in CORE, Owens helped lead a series of rent strikes and organized a voter registration program. In 1965, he ran for a seat on the city council but lost. He was also vice president of the metropolitan New York council of housing, a nonprofit tenants' assistance group. Additionally, Owens taught as an adjunct professor of library science and was director of the Community Media Program at Columbia University.[3]

From 1966 to 1968, he served as the executive director of Brooklyn's Brownsville community council, an antipoverty organization. One observer described him as "the most canny and capable of the community corporation directors," and the Brooklyn borough president later named September 10, 1971, as "Major R. Owens Day." Based on Owens's work on antipoverty programs in the Brownsville neighborhood, New York Mayor John Vliet Lindsay appointed him the commissioner of the community development agency, giving him responsibility for the city's antipoverty programs. Owens left the post in late 1973 near the end of Lindsay's term as mayor, accusing antipoverty and school programs in Brownsville of corruption and further asserting that Samuel Wright, the newly elected African-American New York city councilman, had awarded school board contracts as "political payoffs." Owens first ran for elective office in 1974, winning a seat in the New York state senate, where he chaired the senate Democratic operations committee. He also tended to back local and statewide candidates from outside the Brooklyn Democratic machine. He embraced this outsider status in his own U.S. congressional race in the early 1980s.[4]

After Representative Shirley Chisholm announced her retirement in 1982, Owens became a candidate for her Brooklyn-based seat, which encompassed the neighborhoods of Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brownsville, and Crown Heights. The district was roughly 80 percent Black and overwhelmingly Democratic, with a high poverty rate. In the Democratic primary, Owens faced African-American New York state senator Vander L. Beatty. Considered the leading reformer among local politicians, Owens had grassroots support and the endorsement of the *New York Times*, *New York Amsterdam News*, and the *Village Voice*. The wealthy Beatty was backed by many top Democratic leaders, including Representative Chisholm, the Brooklyn political machine led by borough president Howard Golden, and a patronage network Beatty had cultivated from his time in Albany. Owens exploited Beatty's connection to corrupt local officials, stressing his own honesty and independence from the local political machine. Owens prevailed in the primary by 2,400 votes and survived a court challenge from Beatty and his backers, who questioned the results. Six months later, Beatty was indicted on charges of election fraud. In the general election, Owens cruised to victory, defeating Republican David Katan with 91 percent of the vote.[5]

Over the course of his career, Owens monitored potential primary challengers, especially because he came from outside the political establishment, but he usually lacked significant opposition. Although he did face a serious primary challenge in 2000, Owens never stumbled in any of his general election campaigns. He won each of his 11 re-elections with at least 89 percent of the vote.[6]

When Representative Owens took his seat in the House for the 98th Congress (1983–1985), he received assignments on the Education and Labor Committee and the Government Operations Committee. He remained on both panels throughout his House career. In 1987, Owens became chair of the Education and Labor Subcommittee on Select Education and Civil Rights—a position he held until Republicans won control of the chamber in 1994 and abolished the subcommittee. By the 109th Congress (2005–2007), Owens was the third-ranking Democrat on the Education and the Workforce Committee and the Government Reform Committee. In addition, he served as the ranking minority member on the Education and the Workforce Subcommittee on Workforce Protections. Owens also was a member of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) and the Progressive Caucus.

Early in his House career, Owens surveyed the effects of America's depressed economy in the early 1980s and explained that he planned to "push the prerogatives of a congressman to the limit" to publicize the needs of his constituents. "My principal focus is on jobs and employment. From my perspective the Democratic-controlled House has been extremely negligent in this area. It has shown little, if any, urgency about the plight of the unemployed." One of Owens' legislative solutions, H.J. Res. 202, proposed a constitutional amendment that would guarantee an employment opportunity for Americans. Owens realized such an ambitious bill was not likely to pass. "I don't expect it to pass this year or next," Owens said, "but I do expect it to have an impact."[7]

As a lawmaker, Owens focused on a cause near to his heart: advocating more federal money for education and libraries, which dovetailed with the needs of his urban district. From his post as chair of the Subcommittee on Select Education and Civil Rights, Owens focused on funding for library services, institutions of higher learning, and programs to lower the high school dropout rate among Black students. From his seat on the Subcommittee on Postsecondary Education of the Committee on Education and Labor, he was a strong supporter of amendments to a 1985 bill reauthorizing the Higher Education Act that provided more than $100 million to historically Black colleges. He called the measure "the payment of a long overdue debt" in response to critics who charged it was "unwarranted special treatment." Owens also served as chairman of the CBC's Higher Education Braintrust.[8]

When the Cold War ended in the early 1990s, Owens advocated shifting money from America's military buildup to domestic programs to help poor and working-class communities in cities across the country. "We need our fair share of this peace dividend, in particular to rehabilitate crumbling and dilapidated inner-city schools, and to guarantee a first-rate education for urban youths," he said. Owens sponsored several bills aimed at aiding under-resourced school systems, including the National Institute for the Education of At-Risk Students Act and the Safe Schools Act of 1994. Owens criticized budgets under Republican Presidents Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush, asserting that they neglected the pressing needs of Black communities. On the House Floor in 1990, he belted out lines from a song he wrote: "At the big white DC mansion/There's a meeting of the mob/And the question on the table/Is which beggars they will rob."[9]

As chair of the Subcommittee on Select Education of the Committee on Education and Labor, Owens introduced the Education of the Handicapped Act Amendments of 1990, a landmark law Owens said set forth "clear, strong, consistent, enforceable standards addressing discrimination against individuals with disabilities." Among the provisions were the first guidelines prohibiting discrimination against persons with disabilities in businesses and public spaces and the establishment of standards for accessibility to public buildings. The measure also contained provisions to promote development programs for preschool children and to introduce new technologies to assist students with disabilities, which Owens had championed earlier. "A civilized and moral government which is also seeking to enhance its own self-interest must strive to maximize the opportunities for the educational development, equal access and productive employment of all its citizens," Owens noted. "Greater than all the physical barriers are the barriers of entrenched attitudes and the silent insistence that people with disabilities should be grateful for minimal governmental protection and assistance." After introducing the bill in February 1989, Owens successfully guided it through his Subcommittee on Select Education, and onto final passage by the House. As floor manager, Owens led the debate on the conference report and ushered the bill toward final passage in October 1990. President Bush signed the bill into law on October 30, 1990.[10]

As chair of the Subcommittee on Select Education, Owens also was the lead sponsor of the Domestic Volunteer Service Act Amendments of 1989. The bill reformed the long-established Volunteers in Service to America program, which assigned volunteers to community-based aid agencies to combat urban and rural poverty. Additionally, he was a key backer of the Child Abuse Prevention Challenge Grants Reauthorization Act of 1989, which renewed a measure first passed in 1974. The bill provided federal funding to states to assess, investigate, and prosecute cases of child abuse, and directed research on effective child abuse prevention and treatment programs run by states.[11]

Over time, the makeup of Owens's Brooklyn-based district changed. Following reapportionment after the 1990 Census, African Americans made up 55 percent of the district, Whites were 19 percent, and Hispanics were 12 percent. That round of reapportionment expanded the western borders of the district to take in the wealthy Park Slope neighborhood and middle-class Kensington. During the 1980s and 1990s, large numbers of Haitians began moving into the district, making it the second-largest Haitian community in the country, second to Miami. Roughly two-thirds of the district's Black population hailed from nations in the Caribbean Basin. Immigrant groups complained that Owens was "totally out of touch with the Haitian community." While he supported the return to power of ousted Haitian president Jean-Bertrand Aristide, opponents blamed him for being less active regarding issues such as housing and political asylum. In 2000, Owens received a stiff primary challenge from New York City Councilwoman Una Clarke, a Jamaican-born politician with roots among the growing number of Caribbean

immigrants in Owens's district. A one-time political ally of Owens, Clarke capitalized on simmering immigrant discontent, charging he had not done enough to bring federal economic aid to the district and that he was unresponsive to immigration issues. Owens relied on support from First Lady and New York Senate candidate Hillary Rodham Clinton and other prominent Democrats. Owens eventually turned back Clarke's primary challenge.[12]

Reapportionment following the 2000 Census did not significantly reconfigure the district. Owens cruised to re-election in 2002, but when he announced in early 2003 that he would seek re-election in 2004 and then retire in 2007, two New York City council members jumped into the primary. Yvette D. Clarke, daughter of Owens's 2000 primary opponent, drew 29 percent of the vote, while Tracy Boyland won 22 percent of the vote. Representative Owens won the primary with 45 percent of the vote and captured the general election to his final term with 94 percent of the vote. Among those who announced their candidacy for his open seat in 2006 was Owens's son Chris. Yvette D. Clarke eventually won the Democratic primary and the general election to succeed Representative Owens.[13]

In retirement, Owens suggested he would pursue his interest in literature. "It's something that I have always wanted to do," Owens said. "I even began writing a novel when I was younger. And that's one of the things I want very much to get back to." In late 2006, Owens was named a distinguished visiting scholar at the John W. Kluge Center at the Library of Congress, where, in 2011, he completed a book on the CBC and its impact on national politics. Owens died of heart failure on October 21, 2013, in New York City.[14]

Manuscript Collection

University at Albany, State University of New York, M.E. Grenander Department of Special Collections & Archives (Albany, NY). *Papers*: 1988–2006, 129 cubic feet. The collection includes Major R. Owen's office files and personal papers from his 24 years in Congress. It includes subject files related to his committee work on education, civil rights, and workforce issues as well as matters related to New York City and New York State, foreign affairs, and his membership in the Congressional Black Caucus. There are materials related to Owens's bills, budgets, government reports, remarks, photographs, correspondence, press releases, news clippings, speeches, appointment calendars, and voting records. A small number of audiocassettes and videotapes are also included.

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Edolphus Towns

1934–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1983–2013

Democrat from New York



Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

From the North Carolina tobacco fields of his youth, Edolphus Towns went on to master the turbulent politics of urban Brooklyn and rose to chair the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform during a 30-year career in the U.S. House of Representatives. From his first year in Congress in 1983, Towns focused on how the federal government could aid all Americans. He supported improvements in America's health care systems, higher education reforms, and the protection of consumers. "Our resources are abundant, our productive capacity enormous. Surely we can find a way in all this to take care of each other," Towns said.[1]

Edolphus Towns Jr. was born on July 21, 1934, in Chadbourn, North Carolina, to Versie and Edolphus Towns. His parents were tobacco sharecroppers. Towns attended the local public schools before graduating in 1956 from North Carolina A&T State University in Greensboro. He served in the U.S. Army for two years before moving to New York City where he taught at Medgar Evers College, Fordham University, and in the city's public schools. From 1965 to 1975, Towns served as director of the Metropolitan Hospital and then as assistant administrator at Beth Israel Hospital. Towns earned a master's degree in social work in 1973 from Adelphi University in Garden City, New York. He married Gwendolyn Forbes, a public school teacher, in 1960, and they raised two children: Darryl and Deidra.[2]

Active in the Brooklyn Democratic organization, Towns won election as Democratic Party state committeeman for New York's fortieth assembly district in Brooklyn in 1972. In 1976, he was appointed the first African-American deputy borough president for Brooklyn, a position that Towns used to connect with the various social and political organizations in the borough. In 1982, when Democratic Representative Frederick William Richmond resigned after being indicted on felony charges, Towns moved quickly to run to fill the vacancy. Redistricting that year had created a new Democratic district composed primarily of African-American and Hispanic voters in northern Brooklyn and Bedford-Stuyvesant. Towns garnered the support of Brooklyn Democratic leader Meade H. Esposito and Democratic reformer Al Vann. "I expect to be the consensus candidate," Towns predicted. Two other candidates split the Hispanic vote, and Towns won the primary by a plurality. He easily won the general election. Subsequent redistricting made Towns's district more Democratic. Bedford-Stuyvesant remained the heart of the district while Brooklyn Heights

was added. Towns's constituency was described as one of the state's most diverse and solidly Democratic, comprising Black, Hispanic, Caribbean, and Jewish voters. Towns's winning margins in the general elections hovered at 85 percent or more in his 14 re-elections.[3]

Towns did, however, often face challengers in the Democratic primaries. As the 1998 race neared, for instance, Brooklyn Democratic chair Clarence Norman actively tried to recruit a challenger to Towns while former Democratic mayor David Dinkins endorsed Barry Ford in the primary. For his part, Towns pointed out that he had "never seen [Ford] at a town hall meeting, a community board meeting or a tenants association meeting." He quipped, "This is one Ford this Congressional District won't buy." Towns ultimately won the primary with 52 percent of the vote.[4]

When he began his congressional career in the 98th Congress (1983–1985), Towns served on three committees: Government Operations (later renamed Oversight and Government Reform); Public Works and Transportation; and the Select Committee on Narcotics Abuse and Control. He remained on Government Operations for his entire House career. Towns swapped membership on Public Works and Transportation for Energy and Commerce in the 101st Congress (1989–1991). The House abolished the Select Committee on Narcotics in 1993. In the 103rd Congress (1993–1995), Towns chaired the Government Operations Subcommittee on Human Resources and Intergovernmental Relations. In the 110th Congress (2007–2009), he was the chair of the Oversight and Government Reform Subcommittee on Government Management, Organization, and Procurement. During the 111th Congress (2009–2011), Towns became chair of the full Committee on Oversight and Government Reform. Wielding the full committee gavel required Towns to relinquish his seat on Energy and Commerce. When Republicans retook control of the House after the 2010 midterm elections, Towns lost his chairmanship. Democratic leadership then gave the ranking Democratic position on the committee to Elijah E. Cummings of Maryland to help rebuff investigations into Barack Obama's presidential administration by the new Republican majority. In the 112th Congress (2011–2013), his last term in office, Towns served on the Oversight and Government Reform Committee and the Energy and Commerce Committee.[5]

During his career, Towns cultivated a restrained style. "I should jump out and push and get in front of the camera," he once acknowledged, "but that's just not my nature." But his low-key style did help him win some legislative victories early in his career. He cosponsored legislation with Representative Charles Thomas McMillen of Maryland and Senator William Warren "Bill" Bradley of New Jersey to require colleges to report the graduation rates of their student athletes. "If we can report the on-time arrivals of airlines," Towns argued, "surely we can let student-athletes know whether they are likely to receive a useful college degree if they sign a letter of intent at a university." The legislation became the Student Right to Know Act, enacted during the 101st Congress. To further protect the rights of college student-athletes, Towns introduced legislation in the 102nd Congress (1991–1993) that would have required the National Collegiate Athletic Association to implement a formalized process before taking punitive actions against an athlete or coach.[6]

Because Towns had also worked as a hospital administrator, health care reform ranked high among his legislative priorities. In Congress, he hoped to improve access to health services in underserved communities, including Medicare drug coverage and alcohol treatment programs for pregnant women. He also lobbied to increase reimbursements for nurse midwives and physician assistants. During the 103rd Congress, Towns, as chair of the Government Operations Committee's Subcommittee on Human Resources and Intergovernmental Relations, held hearings to review the Food and Drug Administration's pharmaceutical regulations. He also advocated for preventive medicine as an alternative to health care reform. Towns encouraged healthier diets, sought money for funding poison-prevention programs, and worked to convince city planners to build new waste incinerators away from minority communities. Towns also advocated for the availability of breast cancer screenings and better training for nursing home staff. He criticized the National Cancer Institute after its recommendation that women under the age of 50 could go without annual mammograms. "Both early detection and screening in younger women can be beneficial in combating this disease," he said. "If you can recommend an appropriate daily allowance for vegetables in the American diet, you should be able to recommend lifesaving screenings for American women." In 1993, when President William J. Clinton's health care reform package came out in favor of a "managed competition" approach over the "single payer" system, Towns criticized the President's

proposal. He claimed that the administration's approach would leave minority medical providers and minority medical schools behind. "Single payer is the way to go. It would solve a lot of problems, and it would be fair to everyone," Towns explained. "This [Clinton's] plan is better than nothing, but it's far from adequate."[7]

Towns chaired the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) during the 102nd Congress, and led the caucus's opposition to George H.W. Bush's nomination of Clarence Thomas to the Supreme Court. Towns also helped coordinate the CBC's effort to pass the Civil Rights Act of 1991, legislation that strengthened equal employment law that President Bush had vetoed the year before. Towns sponsored a CBC-supported substitute amendment to a compromised version of the Civil Rights Act of 1991. While the substitute failed, Towns still supported the passage of the act. In response to a 1992 amendment to end congressional funding of legislative service organizations, like the CBC, Towns defended the caucus which, he explained "was founded 20 years ago to represent the needs and dreams of millions who not only reside in our districts but in every corner of this nation.[8]

In 2009, Towns became the chair of the Oversight and Government Reform amidst the economic recession that began in 2007. Under Towns, the committee focused on overseeing government programs used to support banks and other financial institutions to prevent a larger financial crisis. Towns held hearings on the decision of some companies who received federal bailout money to still give their executive's large compensation. "These huge pay packages are offensive during these difficult times and Americans are angry about it." He also led hearings investigating the relationship between federal regulators and the financial institutions receiving support. After the passage of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, Towns led hearings on the oversight of the federal government's disbursement of the stimulus funds and its contract procurement practices. In keeping with his concern over federal spending practices, Towns sponsored legislation in 2012 to better track and regulate improper payments by federal agencies. President Obama signed the bill into law in January 2013. As chair, Towns also led committee investigations into high profile consumer safety issues. In 2010, he held hearings on a car manufacturer's faulty gas pedals that resulted in dozens of car-accident related deaths. He also investigated the manufacturing and recall practices of a company that produced children's pain medicine.[9]

In 2012, Towns faced two challengers for re-election: New York state assembly member Hakeem S. Jeffries and city council member and former Black Panther Charles Barron. Instead of going through a tough campaign, the 78-year-old Towns announced he would not run for a sixteenth term. He retired at the end of the 112th Congress. After Congress, Towns has worked as a political consultant and lobbyist and joined the board of several organizations. "Ed Towns' life journey—from son of a tobacco sharecropper to Chair of a House Committee—is testament to the opportunities that the United States can offer those who are dedicated to helping improve the lives of others," Towns's Oversight and Reform Committee colleague Carolyn Bosher Maloney of New York explained following his retirement announcement.[10]

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Alan Wheat

1951–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1983–1995

Democrat from Missouri



Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

As a freshman Member of Congress, Representative Alan Wheat of Missouri received a rare appointment to the prestigious House Committee on Rules that shaped his congressional career. He used his seat on the influential panel to push through legislation important to his district and the Democratic Party. During his six terms in the U.S. House of Representatives, Wheat secured funding crucial to his constituents, advocated for civil rights legislation, and skillfully represented the diverse interests in his Kansas City district.[1]

Alan Dupree Wheat was born in San Antonio, Texas, on October 16, 1951, to James Wheat, an officer and civil engineer in the U.S. Air Force, and Emogene "Jean" Wheat, a teacher. Wheat grew up on military bases and attended schools in Wichita, Kansas, and Seville, Spain, before graduating from Airline High School in Bosier City, Louisiana, in 1968. After earning a bachelor's degree in economics from Grinnell College in Iowa, Wheat worked as an economist for several years in Kansas City, first at the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development in 1972 and for the regional planning organization for the Kansas City metropolitan area from 1973 to 1975. Wheat then served as an aide to Jackson County, Missouri, executive Mike White before winning election to the Missouri general assembly in 1976 at age 25. During three terms in the Missouri state legislature, Wheat chaired the urban affairs committee. He married Yolanda Townsend, a lawyer, and the couple had two children: Christopher and Nicholas. Wheat also had a daughter, Alynda, from a previous relationship.[2]

When Missouri Representative Richard Walker Bolling announced his retirement in August 1981 after more than three decades in office, Wheat joined seven other candidates in the Democratic primary to represent the majority-White, predominantly Democratic district encompassing much of Kansas City. The district, which was 23 percent Black, had been recently redrawn, and stretched from Kansas City's downtown business district to several surrounding suburbs, including Independence, Missouri, hometown of President Harry S. Truman. Wheat earned the backing of Freedom, Inc., an African-American political organization in Kansas City, and welcomed Missouri Representative and Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) founder William Lacy "Bill" Clay Sr. to campaign on his behalf. Wheat was the only Black candidate in the crowded field. Although he lacked campaign resources in the primary, Wheat mobilized

volunteers and embraced grassroots organizing. He earned the Democratic nomination with 31 percent of the vote thanks in large part to solid Black voter support.[3]

As the Democratic nominee, Wheat redoubled his efforts at outreach, particularly to White voters, by visiting local Democratic clubs and community events throughout the district. Bolling backed Wheat's candidacy by raising money and appearing in televised campaign ads on his behalf. Wheat worked to appeal to middle- and working-class voters with his criticism of President Ronald Reagan's economic policies and his promises to continue Bolling's legislative agenda. Wheat went on to win the November 1982 general election against Republican Missouri state representative John Sharp with 58 percent of the vote. Wheat became the first African-American Member to represent Kansas City and the second Black Representative in Congress from Missouri.[4]

Elected to the 98th Congress (1983–1985) at age 31, Wheat received a spot on the powerful House Rules Committee thanks to a recommendation from Bolling who had chaired the committee for four years before his retirement. Since the Rules Committee controls the flow of legislation on the House Floor, Wheat took advantage of the process to add late amendments to bills and limit their consideration in debate, effectively getting the final word on legislation before House passage. "Rules gave me the opportunity to immediately start making an impact on the House of Representatives," Wheat recalled in 1994. "Perhaps not so much as a sponsor of legislation but being able to have an impact on legislation as it came through the committee." He was well-positioned to secure federal funding for a series of projects affecting his district, ranging from flood control initiatives to highway and transit spending and the building of a new Kansas City courthouse. He played a significant role in the passage of legislation to prohibit American airplanes from being serviced and maintained overseas, which saved the jobs of hundreds of Kansas City-based airline employees. He also supported a bill to expand the Harry S. Truman National Historic Site. In 1989, Wheat also used his seat on the Rules Committee to help institute a ban on smoking on most domestic flights by attaching the bill to a routine procedural measure to avoid undue attention from tobacco lobbyists and other opponents. He regularly sponsored resolutions from the Rules Committee governing floor debate and amendments for bills he found important, such as the 1987 Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act, which launched more than a dozen grant and federal aid programs for unhoused Americans.[5]

From the 99th to the 103rd Congresses (1985–1995), Wheat served on the District of Columbia Committee, chairing the Government Operations and Metropolitan Affairs Subcommittee during his final four terms in office. Wheat was also a member of the House Select Committee on Children, Youth, and Families and the Select Committee on Hunger.

From his position on the Rules Committee, Wheat sponsored the debate and rules resolutions for the civil rights bill of 1990, a comprehensive measure to expand legal protections against employment discrimination that he called "the single most important civil rights legislation since the 1964 Civil Rights Act." Wheat's rule governing consideration of the bill ensured that it arrived on the House Floor largely intact. He applauded the wide-ranging protections afforded by the bill and criticized those who "would have us believe that certain kinds of discrimination are more onerous than other kinds of discrimination. … I have a hard time understanding how any kind of discrimination that might be based upon gender, age, physical disability, would somehow be better or worse than discrimination based on race." The George H.W. Bush administration strongly opposed the bill, and inaccurately claimed that the measure would lead to racial quotas in hiring practices. President Bush vetoed the bill after it passed both chambers of Congress. Though Wheat preferred a more expansive version of the civil rights legislation when the bill was revived in the 102nd Congress (1991–1993) and criticized Congress's practice of exempting itself from the law's provisions, he supported the final framework and crafted the rule for its consideration in the House.[6]

In the 102nd Congress Wheat joined fellow Missouri Representative Bill Clay in cosponsoring legislation to provide financial assistance to historically Black colleges and universities. The bill was designed to fund infrastructure projects on campuses and create new programs of study. The measure became part of the Higher Education Amendments of 1992.[7]

As vice chair of the CBC during the 100th and 101st Congresses (1987–1991), Wheat instituted a policy that allowed White Members of Congress to join the organization as associate members. Forty-one White Members joined in 1988, but the CBC ended the practice

shortly after Wheat left office. Additionally, Wheat served as president of the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation, an independent, nonprofit organization geared toward public policy analysis.[8]

Wheat's interest in foreign policy was wide-ranging. He denounced South Africa's apartheid regime and used his place on the Rules Committee to play a significant role in clearing procedural hurdles and managing debate on the floor as the House considered the Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act of 1986. The Missouri Representative was a member of a congressional delegation that visited South Africa in 1990, meeting with both anti-apartheid leaders like Dr. Frank Chikane and representatives of the apartheid government such as South African President Frederik de Klerk. After touring the country, Wheat remarked, "It is true that a start has been made, but it is only a start down the long road that must be trod toward freedom in South Africa." He urged his colleagues to strengthen economic sanctions against South Africa until the country instituted full democratic reforms. Wheat also opposed the U.S. invasion of Grenada in 1983 and President Reagan's decision to furnish military aid to the Contras in Nicaragua. In 1991, Wheat joined the Democratic majority in condemning the resolution authorizing the use of force in the Gulf War.[9]

Wheat also supported federal legislative action to aid cities. In 1984 he introduced a bill to create urban enterprise zones, where tax incentives and infrastructure investments were strategically deployed to promote economic development. He consistently supported bills designed to invest in enterprise zones and later proposed tax credits for health and child care for enterprise zone residents. Wheat also voted against the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1993, citing his constituents' concerns. "A vote against NAFTA is a vote for the opportunity to craft a new agreement that will take on the tough issues of wage discrepancies, Mexican labor standards, and job training," he said. "It is a vote for the chance to negotiate a better pact that will include workable plans to fund initiatives to adequately retrain U.S. workers, clean up the environment, and replace lost tariff revenue." In 1994, Wheat responded to constituent concerns about neighborhood violence by enthusiastically backing the omnibus crime bill that year, breaking with many of his colleagues in the CBC to support one of President William J. Clinton's priorities.[10]

Wheat's attention to the needs of his district paid off at the polls, where he enjoyed comfortable margins of victory. During his re-elections, he reminded voters of his valuable position on the Rules Committee, which allowed him to secure funding for projects for the district. Wheat also employed clever campaign advertisements with wheat stalks—an obvious reference to his name and a symbol of midwestern agriculture. In 1992, his name appeared on a list of dozens of Members who overdrew their accounts at the informal House "bank" managed by the Sergeant at Arms. Nevertheless, Wheat was elected to a sixth term in the House with 59 percent of the vote during an election cycle in which the bank controversy effectively ended the careers of other Members. His share of the vote that year was the lowest since his first run for Congress in 1982.[11]

When Missouri's Republican Senator John Claggett Danforth announced his decision to retire at the conclusion of the 103rd Congress (1993–1995), Wheat entered the race to fill the vacant Senate seat. "I want my career to be meaningful," he stated. "I don't want to look back after 30 or 40 years' service and have nothing to say except that I grew in seniority and inherited a committee chairmanship." Wheat earned the Democratic nomination with 41 percent of the vote, defeating Jackson County executive Marsha Murphy to become the first African-American candidate in Missouri to be nominated for statewide office. In the general election he faced an uphill battle against former Missouri Governor John David Ashcroft. The competitive primary had depleted Wheat's campaign funds, and a rising anti-incumbent sentiment in 1994 put him on the defensive. Wheat's campaign focused on his formidable experience as a legislator on Capitol Hill and his consistent record of support for the Democratic Party's agenda. He visited rural counties, seeking to build support beyond Kansas City, and promised to work to revitalize the economy across the state. Ashcroft accused Wheat of backing excessive government spending and criticized his support for abortion rights and gun control. Ashcroft also made crime a central issue of the campaign, describing Wheat's voting record as "soft-on-crime" and denouncing his opposition to the death penalty. In an election year in which the GOP gained control of the House and the Senate for the first time in decades, Wheat lost to Ashcroft with 36 percent of the vote.[12]

After his congressional service, Wheat served as vice president of a pharmaceutical company and as vice president

of public policy and government relations of the global relief organization Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere (CARE). In 1996, Wheat accepted a position as deputy campaign manager for President Clinton's re-election campaign. Two years later in 1998, he founded a political consulting firm in Virginia. In 2013, Wheat joined a national law firm as head of public policy practice. In March 2021, he was also appointed to the board of directors of a for-profit higher education corporation.[13]

Manuscript Collection

University of Missouri, Kansas City, The State Historical Society of Missouri Research Center (Kansas City, MO). *Papers*: ca. 1982–1994, 257 cubic feet. Alan Wheat's papers consist of congressional files, including press releases, newsletters, correspondence, voting records, office files, calendars, and speeches. The collection also contains photographs and videotapes. A finding aid is available in the repository and online.

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Charles A. Hayes

1918–1997

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1983–1993

Democrat from Illinois



Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

Elected in his first bid for public office, Charles A. Hayes served five terms in the U.S. House of Representatives after succeeding Representative Harold Washington, who resigned in 1983 to become mayor of Chicago. A longtime labor activist and union official, Hayes sought to enact policies to empower workers and strengthen civil rights protections. He also called for a bold economic agenda to alleviate poverty and create jobs, particularly for his constituents on Chicago's South Side. "Full employment," Hayes noted, "is America's first requirement for attaining genuine freedom and opportunity for all."[1]

Charles Arthur Hayes was born in Cairo, Illinois, on February 17, 1918, to Charles, a farm laborer, and Nevada Hazel Hayes, a homemaker. Hayes graduated from Cairo's Sumner High School in 1935 before taking a job as a machine operator at a woodworking company in his hometown. His long career of union activism began in 1939 when he organized a strike at his workplace and established Local 1424 of the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America, serving as chapter president in the early 1940s. "I found out pretty early in my life that you couldn't deal with an employer on a one-on-one basis. You had to do it collectively," Hayes reflected. In 1942, he moved to Chicago and found work in a meatpacking plant, where his colleagues elected him chair of the grievance committee of the United Packinghouse Workers of America (UPWA). Hayes became a staff member for the union in 1949, and eventually served as director of the UPWA's District 1. From 1979 until his retirement in 1983, Hayes served as the international vice president of the United Food and Commercial Workers Union. During his labor union career, he promoted increased benefits and improved conditions for workers, fought to eliminate segregation and discriminatory hiring and promotion practices, and provided African-American and women workers with opportunities to serve as leaders in the labor movement. Hayes was twice widowed and once divorced. He had two daughters: Barbara and Charlene.[2]

Alongside his work as a union leader, Hayes also engaged in civil rights activism. Early in his UPWA career, Hayes participated in a successful sit-in at a Chicago department store restaurant close to the stockyards protesting the restaurant's refusal to serve Black workers. He organized moral and financial support for the Montgomery, Alabama, bus boycott in 1955. He also worked closely with Martin Luther King Jr.'s Southern Christian Leadership Conference through

the 1960s and was a founding member of Jesse Jackson's Operation PUSH (People United to Save Humanity) in 1971.[3]

In 1959, the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) subpoenaed Hayes to testify about his alleged ties to the Communist Party as a trade union leader. From the late 1940s through the 1960s, HUAC subpoenaed witnesses from across the country and from all manner of professions, amid its efforts to uncover the reach of Communist influence in American society. During the hearing, Hayes denounced Communism but declined to answer questions about any personal connections with the party.[4]

Hayes's job as a union representative often took him to Capitol Hill. And as a veteran lobbyist for the meatpacking union, he gained valuable experience about Congress's inner workings. Back home in Chicago, Hayes worked against the powerful local political machine and supported the anti-establishment candidate, Harold Washington, in his bids for mayor of Chicago—both his unsuccessful run in 1977 and his victorious campaign in 1983. Like Washington, Hayes believed the city government could be doing more for the city's many impoverished Black residents, especially those living on the South Side. The friendship of the two Chicago leaders figured prominently in Hayes's path to Congress.[5]

Washington had served just one term in the House when he was elected Chicago's first African-American mayor. And when he resigned from Congress on April 30, 1983, Hayes joined 13 other candidates in the special Democratic primary to fill his seat. Well-known in the South Side district because of his union activism, Hayes nonetheless faced an array of challengers with more name recognition, including Ralph Metcalfe Jr., the son of a former Representative; civil rights leader Al Raby; and Lu Palmer, a newspaper columnist and community activist. During the campaign, the 65-year-old Hayes promised to advocate for federal assistance for public housing and employment programs. With the enthusiastic backing of organized labor as well as Mayor Washington, Hayes won the crowded and competitive primary on July 26, 1983, with 45 percent of the vote. Although Washington's active campaigning on Hayes's behalf contributed to his win, Hayes assured his supporters that he would maintain his independence in Congress. "I'm not going to be a mouthpiece for him," Hayes said. One month later, Hayes easily defeated his Republican opponent, community newspaper columnist Diane Preacely, in the special election with 94 percent of the vote.[6]

Hayes took his seat in Congress on September 12, 1983. During his tenure in the House, he served on three committees: Education and Labor; Small Business; and Post Office and Civil Service. Hayes also joined the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC), and viewed its collective power to influence legislation as an important asset in advancing the rights of African Americans—one that surpassed the abilities of any individual Member. Hayes once remarked, "To say that a person can just go (to Congress) and change it all—it doesn't work that way."[7]

As a member of the Education and Labor Committee, Hayes worked to combat the high dropout rate among students in Chicago, which far exceeded the national average. In 1985, he introduced the Dropout Prevention and Reentry Act to allocate $50 million in federal funding to state and local government officials to help students stay in school. "The greatest security our Nation can have is to have our children properly educated," Hayes said in 1986. The bill passed the House but faltered in the Senate. Hayes then worked with committee chair Augustus F. "Gus" Hawkins of California to include his dropout prevention measure into a major 1988 education reform law. In 1990, his bill to extend funding for the dropout program for an additional two years was signed into law as well. Echoing many of his African-American colleagues in the House, Hayes questioned the Ronald Reagan administration's education policies. He criticized President Reagan's proposed budget cuts in the mid-1980s, calling them "a callous disregard for the dreams and aspirations of millions of poor and disadvantaged children and young adults."[8]

During his congressional career, Hayes worked on his campaign promise to tackle unemployment. He sponsored bills to provide disadvantaged youth with job training, as well as legislation creating public works programs to rebuild infrastructure in cities like Chicago. After the economic recession of the early 1980s caused manufacturing plants in his district to close, Hayes urged lawmakers to support legislation to assist workers who had lost their jobs. He also worked to strengthen the 1978 Humphrey–Hawkins Full Employment and Balanced Growth Act, which promoted employment opportunities in accordance with a growth in productivity. Hayes sponsored the Income and Jobs Action Act of 1985 to reinforce the principles outlined in the 1978 measure and to "focus attention and find solutions to the problem of unemployment and stop acting as though the problem does not exist." Drawing on his experience as a

labor leader, Hayes consistently supported legislation to protect American workers through higher wages, restrictions on imports, and more comprehensive benefits for children and health care.[9]

During his last two terms, Hayes chaired the Post Office and Civil Service Committee's Subcommittee on Postal Personnel and Modernization. As subcommittee chair, Hayes held hearings to draw testimony from U.S. Postal Service (USPS) administrators and postal union leaders over labor issues. While questioning Chicago's postmaster, Hayes expressed concern over possible job losses stemming from the increasing use of automation by the USPS. He also held a hearing on legislation to provide free mail service to troops serving in the Persian Gulf region, which became law in 1990. Back at home, Hayes organized a task force in his congressional district that successfully lobbied USPS officials in Chicago to increase the number of business contracts they signed with women- and minority-owned businesses.[10]

A consistent opponent of South Africa's White-minority government, Hayes introduced legislation to impose economic and diplomatic sanctions against South Africa as a means of ending apartheid. In November 1984, he was one of several House Members arrested for protesting at the South African Embassy in Washington, DC. In 1986, he visited the country as part of a congressional delegation led by William H. Gray III of Pennsylvania. Hayes strongly supported the Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act of 1986, which imposed sanctions on the South African government until it dismantled its system of apartheid. "If blame is to be laid for the continuing deaths of antiapartheid protesters in South Africa," he wrote, "those who have not strongly denounced the continued abuse of power by the South African Government are as much to blame as that Government itself."[11]

Hayes faced little opposition during his re-elections, and typically won with more than 90 percent of the vote. In the 1992 Democratic primary, however, several factors contributed to an unusually difficult campaign for the five-term incumbent. Partially because his district's population had declined during the 1980s, Illinois state officials redrew the district's boundaries following the 1990 Census. Although the district still included the predominantly African-American South Side, it also picked up several White neighborhoods and suburban areas of southwest Chicago. Hayes faced a formidable challenger in the primary—Bobby L. Rush, a Chicago alderman and a former member of the Black Panther Party. During the campaign, Rush accused Hayes of making promises to his constituents but failing to secure substantial legislative victories. Just days before the March 17 Democratic primary, Hayes was linked to a scandal in the House after a study by the Government Accounting Office indicated that many Members consistently overdrew their accounts in the House "bank," an informal service provided by the House Sergeant at Arms. The ensuing investigation by the House Ethics Committee revealed that Hayes wrote 716 checks exceeding his account balance over a 39-month period. "I believe the whole thing is a personal matter," Hayes commented after his overdrafts became public. "It did not cost the taxpayers a dime and is a side issue when our nation is in a serious crisis." Rush won 42 percent of the vote, besting Hayes by 3 percent. In 1993, the Justice Department cleared Hayes of any criminal wrongdoing for overdrawing his account while he was a Member of the House.[12]

Hayes remained active in labor and community affairs after his congressional career. He died of cancer in Chicago on April 8, 1997. "Charlie Hayes was a giant in the history of the struggle for civil rights and political rights for Americans of African descent," reflected Senator Carol Moseley Braun of Illinois. "He was a trailblazer in the trade-union movement and to the end maintained his passionate commitment to working men and women." In 1999, the Charles A. Hayes Family Investment Center, a nonprofit technology center for disadvantaged Chicago residents, opened in a historic building previously used by the UPWA.[13]

Manuscript Collection

Chicago Public Library, Archival Collections (Chicago, IL). *Papers*: 1944–1997, 10 linear feet. The Charles A. Hayes Papers have been arranged into three series: precongressional records, congressional records, and photographs. The first series documents aspects of Hayes's life prior to his congressional campaign and House service beginning in 1983. The second series documents Hayes's first congressional campaign, his service from 1983 to 1993, and his life after Congress, from 1993 to his death in 1997. The third series contains more than 100 photographs that document his personal life, labor organizing, and congressional career. A finding aid is available in the repository and online.

Notes

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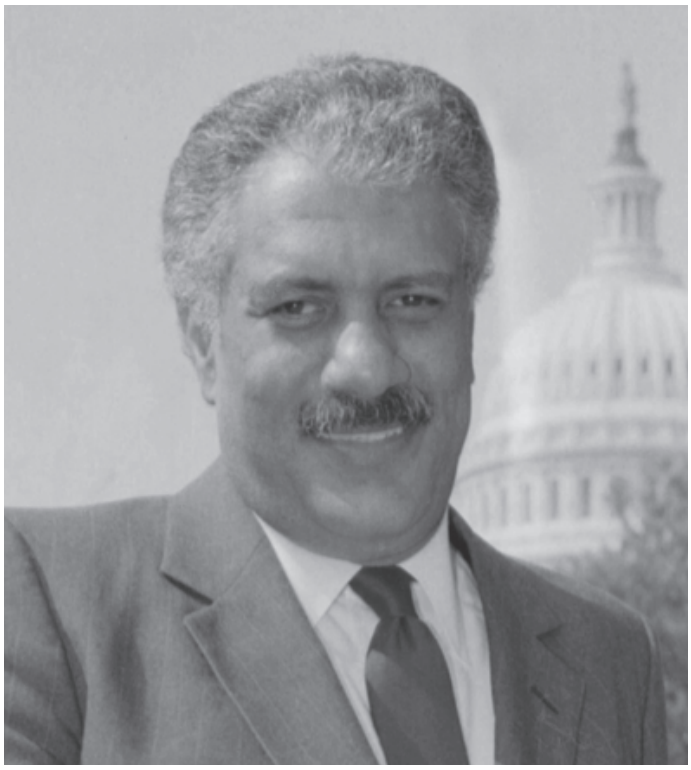
Alton R. Waldon Jr.

1936–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1986–1987

Democrat from New York



Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

Following more than two decades of public service at the state and municipal levels in New York, Alton R. Waldon Jr. won a special election to the 99th Congress (1985–1987) in June 1986. Two months later, he failed to win the Democratic nomination for that year's general election to the 100th Congress (1987–1989). Though he served in the House for less than six months, Waldon made history as the first Black Representative elected from New York City's borough of Queens. He devoted his short term to protesting apartheid in South Africa. "I could have made a lot of money if I had gone and practiced law in the private sector," Waldon noted upon wining his election to the House. "But I always preferred public service; it's my calling."[1]

Alton Ronald Waldon Jr. was born on December 21, 1936, in Lakeland, Florida. His parents, Rupert Waldon and Alton R. Waldon Sr., moved the family to New York City when their son was six years old, and he grew up in the Bedford-Stuyvesant section of Brooklyn. Alton Waldon Sr. worked as a longshoreman. Waldon graduated from Boys High School in 1954, joined the U.S. Army in 1956, and served until he was discharged in 1959. He married Barbara DeCosta, a graphic designer, in 1961. They had three children: Alton III, Dana, and Ian. Waldon spent his first few years out of the military pursuing a professional singing career before he joined the New York City housing authority's police force in 1962. The housing authority police, which provided security for residents of the city's public housing, was at the time separate from the New York City police department. Waldon advanced from the rank of patrolman to captain and became the commander of the department's training center. Waldon received a bachelor's in criminal justice from John Jay College in New York City in 1968 and earned a law degree from New York Law School in 1973. In 1970, during his legal studies, Waldon won the prestigious Thurgood Marshall Fellowship, awarded every three years to promising minority law students by the New York state trial lawyers association. In 1975, Waldon was appointed deputy commissioner of the New York state division of human rights. In 1981 and 1982, he served as assistant counsel for a New York state office serving people with developmental and intellectual disabilities. In 1982, Waldon won election to represent his Queens neighborhood in the New York state assembly, where he served until 1986.[2]

In April 1986, Representative Joseph Patrick Addabbo died after a long battle with cancer. During his 25-year career, Addabbo had risen to chair the Appropriations

Subcommittee on the Department of Defense. Since the early 1960s, the population of his southeastern Queens district had grown by about 25 percent. Its demographics had also changed. When he started in the House, the district had been majority White; by 1986, it had a slight Black majority. In May that year, Queens Democrats nominated Waldon to run for Addabbo's seat in the June 10 special election. Three Democrats joined the canvass under third party banners: Floyd H. Flake, a popular pastor of the Allen African Methodist Episcopal Church in Jamaica; New York City health department official Kevin McCabe; and state senator Andrew Jenkins. A lone Republican, Richard Dietl, also joined the race.[3]

Although he did not have the backing of the Democratic Party, Flake was considered Waldon's strongest opponent. Flake's position in the religious community gained him the support of many Black ministers in the district. Churches were instrumental in influencing voters, and routinely provided transportation to the polls. Flake gained the endorsement of the *New York Times* just five days before the election, though the newspaper also portrayed Waldon favorably. When the polls closed on Election Day, Flake led by 197 votes out of more than 40,000 cast, with absentee ballots yet to be counted. But Flake's name did not appear on the absentee ballots because a filing technicality had temporarily eliminated him from the race; by the time his candidacy was reinstated right before the election, it was too late to change the absentee ballots. The final count put Waldon ahead of Flake by a mere 278 votes. Flake attempted to discard the absentee ballots in court, but a three-judge federal appeals panel ruled in Waldon's favor on July 25. Waldon was in Washington, DC, visiting Representative Charles B. Rangel of New York when he received the news of his election. He was sworn in four days later, on July 29, 1986, as the first Black Representative from Queens. "How sweet it is," he declared. "I am the son of a man who could not read and write, and only in America could this happen, to have someone to come from abject poverty … and to sit in this august body."[4]

During his brief term, Waldon received assignments to the Committee on Education and Labor and the Committee on Small Business, but he focused primarily on U.S. relations with South Africa. Waldon entered Congress at the height of the battle for strict sanctions against South Africa's White-minority government to condemn its apartheid system. Waldon supported the Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act of 1986, which initially called for a near-total trade ban with the country. "South Africa is not a legitimate state," he said. "The only way to balance the inequities in South Africa is to establish a new black-majority government." Though he was disappointed when the Senate amended the act to weaken the sanctions, Waldon and other Black Members led the fight to override President Ronald Reagan's veto of the compromise bill. "America is the cradle of freedom," Waldon wrote. "But unless we move with determination and dispatch the babe of hope will be stillborn in Pretoria." He also opposed aid to Angolan rebels, who received support from South Africa's White-minority government and called on President Reagan to participate in a summit with the leaders of the nations bordering South Africa.[5]

Domestically, Waldon sought investments in educational programs and supported legislation meant to combat drug trafficking and the use of crack cocaine. He voted for the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986, which bolstered the enforcement of drug laws and expanded the use of mandatory minimum sentencing. "For those of us who are black this self-inflicted pain is the worst oppression we have known since slavery," he declared on the House Floor. "Let us … pledge to crack down on crack." He also called for a national task force to focus on illiteracy, which he described as a "corrosive force that is silently eroding the social infrastructure of our Nation."[6]

Just two months after he took his seat, Waldon found himself battling Flake for re-election. Waldon had the benefit of incumbency and support from New York Governor Mario Cuomo, but Flake returned with a strong base and the backing of New York City Mayor Edward Irving Koch. Waldon lost the nomination to Flake by about 3,000 votes.[7]

After leaving Congress in January 1987, Waldon sat on the New York state investigation commission until 1990. The following year, he won a seat in the New York state senate, where he served for a decade. He also worked as an agent for several professional football and basketball players. When Representative Flake resigned from Congress in 1997, Waldon unsuccessfully sought the Democratic nomination for his old seat. Despite his close ties to Democratic officials in Queens, the party chose assemblyman Gregory W. Meeks. Waldon ran in the special election as a third-party candidate but only garnered 21 percent of the vote. In 2000, Waldon accepted a judicial appointment to the New York court of claims. He retired from the court in 2006.[8]

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Mike Espy

1953–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1987–1993

Democrat from Mississippi



Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

In 1986, Mike Espy of Mississippi won a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives, becoming the first Black Mississippian to serve in Congress in more than 100 years. During his career, Espy gained unprecedented levels of biracial support among voters but he often had to navigate strict racial divisions that were deeply woven into the state's society. "Service, service, service," Espy said when asked to describe his legislative focus in the House. From his seats on the Agriculture and Budget Committees, he worked on economic development issues and procuring aid for farmers in his impoverished rural district. After three terms in the House, Espy was appointed Secretary of Agriculture in the Cabinet of President William J. Clinton.[1]

Alphonso Michael "Mike" Espy was born in Yazoo City, Mississippi, on November 30, 1953. He and his twin, Althea Michelle, were the youngest of Henry and Willie Jean Espy's seven children. Both of Espy's parents graduated from the Tuskegee Institute (now Tuskegee University) in Alabama, and his father served as a county agent for the U.S. Department of Agriculture in the 1930s and 1940s before joining the funeral home business founded by his father-in-law, T.J. Huddleston Sr. Huddleston, Mike Espy's maternal grandfather and one of the wealthiest Black men in the South, founded a chain of funeral homes and in 1928 built the first Black hospital in Mississippi.[2]

Mike Espy attended a local parochial school through his first two years of high school. After the school closed in 1969, he transferred to Yazoo City High School. Espy was one of the only Black students at the school, and he carried a stick to fend off racist attacks from his classmates. "Relative to the civil rights experiences of snarling dogs and whips and things it was pretty tame," Espy recalled of his schooldays. "But I'd always have a fight. The teacher would leave the room, and then you're one among 35 in a classroom and they'd make racial jeers." A year later, in 1970, Yazoo City High School was fully integrated, and Espy was elected president of the Black student body during his senior year—the White students had their own president. Espy graduated with a bachelor's degree in political science from Howard University in Washington, DC, in 1975. He earned a law degree from Santa Clara University Law School in Santa Clara, California, in 1978, and returned to Mississippi to practice law. He married Sheila Bell and the couple had two children: Jamilla and Michael, before divorcing.[3]

Espy began his political career working in several state government positions. He served as the first Black assistant

secretary of state, managing the central Mississippi legal services division from 1978 to 1980. For the next four years, Espy served as assistant secretary of state for the public lands division, in charge of enforcing a state law that set aside one of every 36 square miles for educational purposes. From 1984 to 1985, Espy was assistant state attorney general for the consumer protection division. Espy also took on a prominent role in national politics when he served on the rules committee for the 1984 Democratic National Convention.[4]

Following the 1980 Census—nearly 100 years after the last Black Representative to serve Mississippi, John R. Lynch, departed the House in 1883—statewide redistricting created a new congressional district that stretched along the Mississippi River and encompassed the cities of Vicksburg and Greenville. The redrawn seat was majority-Black, but it had a voting-age population that remained majority White. In 1982, Robert Clark, a Black state legislator, had come close to defeating White Republican William Webster Franklin—who appealed to White voters using a controversial campaign slogan "He's one of us"—in the new district. In 1984, federal courts redrew the district's boundaries to include more Black voters. The new district was 58 percent Black, with a voting age population that was around 53 percent Black. The district also was the most impoverished in the country; 42 percent of its residents lived below the national poverty line and five counties had an unemployment rate of at least 20 percent. When Robert Clark ran for the seat and lost a second time to Franklin, Espy studied the results and concluded that, with improved voter turnout, he could win the seat himself. "The time was right, it was hot. I saw it in the numbers," he recalled.[5]

In 1986, Espy won the Democratic nomination with 50 percent of the vote against two White challengers: Paul B. Johnson, a grandson of a former Mississippi governor, and Hiram Eastland, a cousin of the late segregationist U.S. Senator James Eastland. In the general election, Espy faced the incumbent Republican, Franklin. Race remained a stark dividing line in Mississippi, and Espy worked to turn out Black voters, going door to door asking supporters to volunteer transportation and other services on Election Day. "I need you; I can't do it by myself," he remembered saying. "Please sir, please ma'am, turn out, serve as a poll watcher or a driver or a food-fixer. The answer is in your hands." Espy also stepped across the deep racial divide to court White voters in the district. Doing so, however, required a tenuous balancing act, he said. "You must excite your black voters and not incite your white voters." Espy promised to combat the agricultural depression that plagued White farmers in western Mississippi, touting a promise from the soon-to-be House Speaker Jim Wright of Texas that he would be appointed to the powerful House Agriculture Committee. On Election Day, Espy won with 52 percent of the vote, including 12 percent of the White turnout. In winning his first elective office, Espy also became the only Black Representative in the 100th Congress (1987–1989) to represent a rural district. Espy's historic election caused the *Washington Post* to envision a new future for the state of Mississippi. Espy's victory "did more than shatter the age-old color barrier," the *Post* reported. "It is further evidence that Mississippi is ready for a change."[6]

Having defeated a Republican incumbent, Democratic House leaders rewarded Espy with favorable committee assignments for a first-term Representative, enabling him to look after the interests of his rural district. He received his promised seat on the Agriculture Committee as well as an assignment on the prestigious Budget Committee. He also served on the Select Committee on Hunger. Espy was re-elected three times. In 1988, Espy won the general election with 65 percent of the vote and more than tripled his share of the White vote compared to two years earlier. Espy noted that his successful first term in Congress, and his focus on constituent services, caused White voters to "overcome the apprehension" of voting for a Black candidate. In Espy's next two elections, in 1990 and 1992, he defeated Republican Dorothy Bedford with 84 and 76 percent of the vote, respectively.[7]

In his first term, Espy sponsored the Lower Mississippi Delta Development Act, enlisting the aid of fellow Mississippi Democrat and powerful Appropriations Committee Chair Jamie Lloyd Whitten, who helped secure $2 million to fund the project. The bill, provisions of which were incorporated into the 1989 agriculture appropriation bill, established a nine-member panel to study the region's widespread poverty and created a plan for economic development along the banks of the Mississippi River. The governors of participating states (Mississippi, Louisiana, Arkansas, Tennessee, Kentucky, Missouri, and Illinois) selected the commission's members. "We must strive to bring this … region, which has been described as soil rich but dirt poor, into full partnership with the rest of the country," Espy said in a House Floor speech. In addition, Espy touted the Mississippi Delta's

fastest-growing enterprise: catfish farming. He sought federal grants for the thousand-acre pools where catfish were bred and sponsored a resolution declaring April 4, 1987, as National Catfish Day. He even persuaded the U.S. Army to serve catfish in its mess halls at least once a week.[8]

As the only Black House Member from a rural area and whose district had formerly been represented by a Republican, Espy embraced the political center to a greater degree than did many of his African-American colleagues in Congress, occasionally putting him at odds with the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC). He received significant pushback from the CBC over his membership in the National Rifle Association and his support for welfare reform. "I stopped going to CBC meetings," he recalled. "I supported their initiatives, but I just didn't feel comfortable." On most issues, however, Espy sided with his party. He generally disagreed with President Ronald Reagan's focus on building America's Cold War military capacity, and voted against authorizing President George H.W. Bush's use of military force in Iraq in 1991. Espy also supported abortion rights.[9]

Espy was a strong advocate for welfare reform and pushed for the adoption of programs to assist low-income Americans in achieving economic self-reliance. As chair of the Budget Committee's Task Force on Community Development and Natural Resources, and as chair of the Select Committee on Hunger's Domestic Task Force, he presided over several hearings on "asset-oriented policy" that focused on boosting the ability of welfare recipients to save money. Espy supported the use of Individual Development Accounts (IDAs) which had certain tax advantages and accrued interest with matching government contributions. The hope was that IDAs would help Americans achieve life goals such as homeownership or starting a business. "It's not what you make, it's what you keep," Espy noted. The task forces also heard testimony from advocates of "microenterprises," through which welfare recipients received loans from local banks to start their own small businesses. Working with Hunger Committee Chair Tony Patrick Hall of Ohio, Espy cosponsored legislation that sought to develop federal IDA and microenterprise programs.[10]

Espy's involvement in the Lower Mississippi Delta Development Commission provided him the opportunity to form a close working relationship with then-Arkansas Governor Clinton, who chaired the commission. Both politicians also belonged to the Democratic Leadership Council, a coalition that promoted the same welfare-reform efforts that Espy pushed in the House. Espy was one of the first Democratic lawmakers to endorse Clinton's 1992 candidacy for President. That year, Espy won re-election to a fourth term in Congress, but had to relinquish his seat on the Budget Committee after reaching a three-term limit. After getting passed over for a seat on the prestigious Appropriations Committee, Espy wrote out the top 10 reasons he should head the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) on the back of an envelope and handed it to a Clinton aide while attending a post-election banquet. Clinton offered him the post, and Espy resigned from Congress on January 22, 1993, to serve in Clinton's Cabinet.[11]

Up to that point, most Agriculture Secretaries had come from the Midwest, and Espy was the first African American and the first Mississippian to lead the USDA. As the fourth-largest federal department, the USDA oversaw services ranging from the administration of food assistance programs to farm subsidies. Espy directed several noteworthy achievements at the USDA, including improved meat inspection processes after an outbreak of illness caused by the bacterium E. coli in fast-food hamburgers. He also trimmed the agency's bureaucracy and provided relief for farming areas following devastating Mississippi River floods in 1993. Espy resigned as Agriculture Secretary on December 31, 1994, following allegations of ethics violations. He was indicted on felony bribery and fraud charges amid accusations that various food companies had paid his way to sporting events and awarded his girlfriend a scholarship. Espy was acquitted in 1998.[12]

Espy returned to Jackson, Mississippi, to practice law, while also serving an unpaid post as an adviser to Department of Energy during the last years of the Clinton administration. In 2018, when Republican Mississippi Senator William Thad Cochran announced his retirement, Espy declared his candidacy for the November special election to fill the seat. In a four-way contest, Espy's main opponent was former state agriculture commissioner Cindy Hyde-Smith, a Republican, who had been appointed to the Senate seat in April. Running in a predominantly Republican state, Espy emphasized bipartisanship and promised to support Mississippi interests over party ideals. Neither candidate received a majority of the vote on Election Day, triggering a runoff. On November 27, 2018, Hyde-Smith defeated Espy with 54 percent of the vote.

Espy challenged Hyde-Smith again in 2020 for the full six-year Senate term. He secured the Democratic nomination but lost the general election with 44 percent of the vote on November 3, 2020.[13]

Manuscript Collection

Mississippi State University Libraries, Congressional and Political Research Center (Starkville, MS). *Papers*: ca. 1986–1996, 72 cubic feet. The Mike Espy Collection contains files, audio-visual material, publications, and memorabilia documenting his congressional career plus personal files and other items from his work as U.S. Secretary of Agriculture. The collection is currently in process and closed. An oral history project is being planned with Espy to accompany the collection.

Notes

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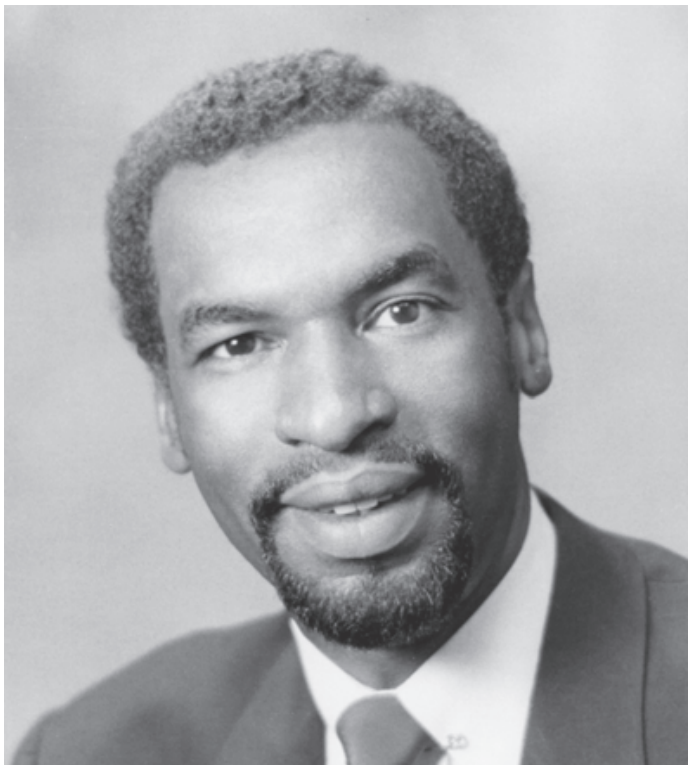
Floyd H. Flake

1945–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1987–1997

Democrat from New York



Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

Although Floyd H. Flake arrived in Congress in January 1987 without having held public office, he was bolstered by his experience managing one of the largest churches in New York City: the Allen African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church. As a provider of a broad range of social services, the church was the economic focal point of the Jamaica, Queens, neighborhood. A Democrat, Flake often worked across the aisle with Republicans in the U.S. House of Representatives to develop and fund urban renewal and education projects using private enterprise. But Flake's calling ultimately remained his church, and halfway through his sixth term in Congress he left to return to New York. "I realize I could never be a Beltway politician," Flake noted. "[Back home] there are real people with real everyday problems that need to be addressed."[1]

Floyd Harold Flake was born in Los Angeles, California, on January 30, 1945, one of 13 children of Robert Flake Sr., a janitor, and Rosie Lee Johnson-Flake, a homemaker. The Flakes moved to Houston, Texas, where Floyd Flake attended public schools and joined the AME church at the age of 10. Flake was the first in his family to attend college. He graduated in 1967 from Ohio's historically Black Wilberforce University with a bachelor's degree in psychology. He subsequently did graduate work at Payne Theological Seminary at Wilberforce before earning his master's degree in divinity at the United Theological Seminary in Dayton, Ohio, in 1995. Flake later studied business administration at Northeastern University in Boston. Between his studies, he was employed as a social worker in Dayton, a salesman for a large tobacco company, and a marketing analyst for an international technology and document management company. Flake eventually drew on his background in religious studies and education, working as the director of the Martin Luther King Jr. Afro-American Center and the chaplain at Boston University. Flake married Margaret Elaine McCollins, also an ordained minister, and they raised four children: Aliya, Nailah, Robert Rasheed, and Harold Hasan.[2]

In 1976, Flake and his wife Elaine took over the Allen AME Church in Jamaica, a primarily Black neighborhood and one of the poorest sections of the mostly middle-class Queens borough in New York. Named for Richard Allen, the founder of the first AME church, Flake's parish was the oldest AME church in Queens, dating back to the 1860s. Under Flake's leadership, Allen AME membership grew from less than 1,500 to nearly 10,000 members in two decades. Allen

AME provided community outreach services such as a health clinic, a primary school, and affordable housing. Other local Black pastors spoke highly of Flake's ministry. "He is a master builder," noted a local Pentecostal reverend. A regional Baptist leader called him "a role model for the clergy."[3]

Flake did not consider running for public office until Joseph Patrick Addabbo, a longtime Representative from southeastern Queens, died in April 1986, opening a House seat. The district's demographics had changed dramatically during Addabbo's 25-year career—from a large, middle-class Irish and Italian majority to one that was 65 percent Black. Democratic leaders in the borough sought a Black candidate to succeed Addabbo for the remainder of the 99th Congress (1985–1987). Excluding Flake's impoverished neighborhood in Jamaica, the district constituted one of the largest Black middle-class communities in the nation. Flake lost the Democratic nomination for the seat to Alton R. Waldon Jr., a state assemblyman and a former police officer. But in the crowded special election, Flake ran on the Unity Party platform. Several other Democrats also joined the race on third-party tickets, providing Waldon with competition in the overwhelmingly Democratic district. Flake was Waldon's chief opponent; he enjoyed the endorsement of the *New York Times* as well as the powerful support of local clergy. Flake won the initial canvass in June by a mere 197 votes, but Waldon took the lead by 276 votes after the absentee ballots were counted. Flake's name was not on the absentee ballots, due to a filing error that occurred shortly before the election. Although he attempted to nullify the absentee ballots in federal court, he was unsuccessful. "It was mindboggling," Flake noted of his loss to Waldon. "One day you go to bed having won an election. A week later you discover you've lost because of absentee ballots."[4]

Flake returned three months later to face Waldon for the Democratic nomination for the full term in the 100th Congress (1987–1989). In addition to his Jamaica base, Flake also enjoyed an endorsement from New York City Mayor Edward Irving Koch, who delivered to him some of the predominantly Jewish and Italian neighborhoods that remained in the district. Flake defeated Waldon in the primary by 3,000 votes. Flake's nomination propelled him to an easy victory in the general election in the heavily Democratic district, where he won with 68 percent of the vote.[5]

Flake won re-election five times, typically garnering between 60 and 70 percent of the vote in general elections. In 1992, a well-publicized legal controversy catapulted Flake into a primary battle. Two years earlier, Floyd and Elaine Flake had been charged with income tax evasion and embezzlement of federal funds appropriated to build the church's senior citizen housing complex in 1981. The Flakes maintained their innocence, and their supporters claimed the charges were politically and racially motivated. Following a well-publicized, three-week trial in March 1991, a judge dismissed the charges against the Flakes, declaring the prosecution's evidence insufficient. Following the controversy, Simeon Golar, an African-American judge, challenged him for the Democratic nomination. Golar claimed that Flake focused more on his church and its surrounding neighborhood than on his congressional duties and neighborhoods outside Jamaica. The Democratic establishment in Queens chose to support Golar in the primary. Flake retaliated by providing a slate of candidates for local elections who were loyal to him and running against the party's handpicked candidates. Election officials threw several of Flake's candidates off the ballot for failure to observe filing rules. Flake ultimately won the nomination.[6]

In the 100th Congress, Flake's background in business and urban redevelopment won him appointments to the Banking, Finance, and Urban Affairs Committee and the Small Business Committee. Following the loss of several incumbents on the Banking Committee in the 1992 elections, Flake rose to chair the panel's Subcommittee on General Oversight, Investigations, and Resolutions of Failed Financial Institutions. During the 100th Congress, Flake also served on the Select Committee on Children, Youth, and Families. From the 100th to the 102nd Congress (1987–1993), Flake served on the Select Committee on Hunger. In the 103rd Congress (1993–1995), Flake joined the Government Operations Committee, which he left at the end of the term. Following the 1992 election, Flake attempted to gain a seat on the Appropriations Committee but was passed over for two New York Members with less seniority. Congressional observers attributed this decision by Democratic leaders as a penalty for Flake's reputation as an independent lawmaker and his support of local politicians not endorsed by the party.[7]

Flake used his committee assignments to help steer federal money toward development projects in his district. In 1995, a New York publication cited him as one of the most effective downstate New York Representatives regarding the procurement of federal funds. Flake's willingness to

work with Republicans and their traditional corporate constituents often helped him to meet his goals. In 1993, taking advantage of his promotion to the chair of the Banking Committee's subcommittee on General Oversight, Investigations, and the Resolution of Failed Financial Institutions, Flake introduced a comprehensive community development plan that outwardly opposed a plan advanced by Democratic President William J. Clinton. Along with the ranking member on the Banking Committee, Representative James Albert Smith Leach of Iowa, Flake crafted legislation that redirected one-third of the funding for the Clinton proposal from local community development banks to large lending institutions. Flake said this move provided incentives for big banks to lend to poor communities—first, by underwriting local lenders in order to help small businesses get off the ground and, second, by encouraging larger lenders to take on the businesses as they matured. Parts of Flake's legislation were later incorporated into the Community Development Banking and Financial Institutions Act, which was signed into law in 1994.[8]

After Republicans took over the House majority in the November 1994 elections, Flake strove to work across the aisle. He was particularly supportive of Republican efforts to introduce school vouchers—tax credits given to parents so their children could attend private schools. New House Speaker Newt Gingrich of Georgia took note of Flake's work at Allen AME, especially the Allen AME Christian School that Flake founded. And in 1997, Gingrich brought Flake in to cosponsor the American Community Renewal Act, a reform bill introduced by J.C. Watts Jr. of Oklahoma, which offered tax breaks and school vouchers to poor urban neighborhoods. Although the bill did not make it out of committee, Flake's support of school vouchers drew criticism from within his party. Citing his own church-run school, Flake argued that private schools used fewer tax dollars per student annually and graduated more students than did public schools. He also believed that vouchers would motivate public schools to better manage their finances and curricula. Most Democrats viewed the program as an across-the-board abandonment of the public school system. Both the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) and a powerful lobby composed of many New York City teachers and administrators opposed the legislation. House Minority Leader Richard Andrew Gephardt of Missouri noted, "I've been to Floyd Flake's school, and I've seen how truly remarkable it is. But if we're going to rip the rug from underneath public schools, we've made a grave error." Flake's support was not without reservation; he informed Gingrich that the Republican's larger legislative agenda ignored urban America.[9]

Flake occasionally collaborated with Republicans, but he voted with Democrats more often than not. Though wary of dependence on government assistance, Flake railed against program cuts the House approved in a 1996 welfare reform bill, which he noted would cost New Yorkers $750 million in lost federal benefits. Flake noted the role of the federal safety net in helping poor people make ends meet in cities with wealth inequality. "Any attempts to reform welfare must be carried out with equal amounts of compassion for recipients and zeal for reform," he said.[10]

Flake also was an active member of the CBC and supported its broad mission. "With those 39 votes, we were able to do a very effective job of lobbying the President and Congress because those votes made a big difference," Flake noted after an increase in the caucus membership following the 1992 elections. But he cautioned against the CBC's continued support of educational policies, economic development, and anti-poverty programs that relied too much on the federal government. After Republicans took control of both chambers of Congress and, as a result, President Clinton "had to center himself by dealing with both sides," Flake argued that the CBC should "become more bipartisan or work with the President understanding that he, as the leader of the nation, cannot afford to make policies that were effective for us in the 1970s."[11]

Allen AME remained a significant part of Flake's life, and in July 1997 he announced that he was resigning from Congress to concentrate on his pastoral duties. "My calling in life is as a minister," Flake told reporters, "so I had to come to a real reconciliation … and it is impossible to continue the sojourn where I am traveling back and forth to DC." Flake retired from Congress on November 15, 1997. Candidates who hoped to succeed Flake immediately sought his endorsement, recognizing the local political power of Allen AME's congregation. Flake backed the eventual winner, former state assemblyman Gregory W. Meeks.[12]

Flake continued to be politically active following his departure from Congress, writing opinion pieces for the *New York Post* and working for various conservative think tanks to promote school vouchers. "The best thing that's happened to me is getting out of Congress," Flake declared in a 1997 interview, "because I'm going to be a real hell-

raiser from now on!" In addition to fulfilling his duties as head pastor at Allen AME, Flake also served as president of Wilberforce University from 2002 to 2008.[13]

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11 Ed Laiscell, "Congressman Floyd Flake Prepares to Leave Congress," 17 September 1997, *Washington Informer*: 18.

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John Lewis

1940–2020

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1987–2020

Democrat from Georgia

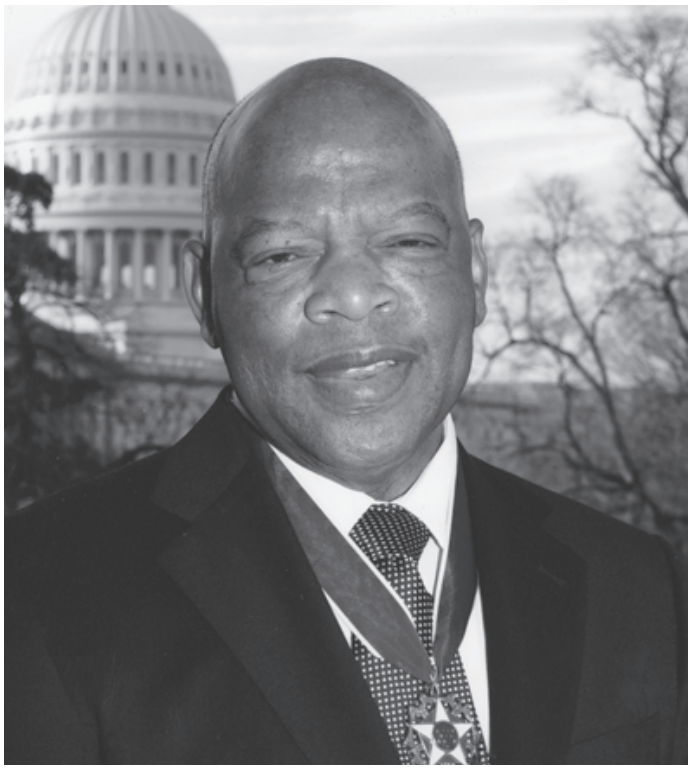

Image courtesy of the U.S. House of Representatives Photography Office

The son of Alabama sharecroppers, Representative John Lewis of Georgia dedicated his life to advancing the cause of freedom and equality in America. As a leader in the civil rights movement of the 1960s, Lewis challenged Jim Crow segregation and oppression across the South through nonviolent protest. His bold, peaceful stands against discrimination were often met with violence, and Lewis regularly put his own physical safety on the line. In 1965, Alabama state troopers in the town of Selma attacked Lewis and other demonstrators with clubs and tear gas during a march for voting rights. Images of the assault were broadcast around the country and directly contributed to the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Two decades later, in 1986, Lewis was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives from an Atlanta district, part of a new generation of Black lawmakers from the South made possible by Lewis's tireless work to expand access to the ballot. During his more than three decades in Congress, Lewis was a formidable legislator who exerted moral and political leadership within the Democratic Party and never forgot his roots as an activist.

John Lewis was born on February 21, 1940, in Troy, Alabama, one of 10 children of Eddie and Willie Mae Lewis. To escape the exploitative system of sharecropping prevalent across the South, his parents saved enough money to purchase a 110-acre farm to grow cotton, corn, and peanuts. To help make ends meet, Lewis's father also drove a school bus, and his mother was a domestic worker. John Lewis attended segregated public schools in Alabama, and as a boy he felt called to ministry, aspiring to emulate the career of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. after hearing him speak on the radio. In 1957, Lewis moved to Nashville, Tennessee, to attend the American Baptist Theological Seminary, graduating with a bachelor's degree in 1961. Lewis then enrolled at Fisk University, also in Nashville, and in 1967 earned a degree in religion and philosophy. In 1968, Lewis married Lillian Miles and they had one son: John-Miles Lewis.[1]

Before his twenty-first birthday, Lewis had taken on a central role in the American civil rights movement. He embraced King's philosophy of nonviolent resistance and as a college student participated in sit-in protests to desegregate lunch counters in Nashville in the spring of 1960. Lewis was a founder and chairman of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), a national civil rights organization with chapters at colleges throughout

the South. In 1961, he endured brutal physical beatings and a lengthy arrest as one of 13 participants in the first Freedom Rides, organized by the Congress of Racial Equality to desegregate interstate commercial busing in the South. Lewis's fearless commitment to peaceful protest resulted in more than 40 arrests between 1960 and 1966.[2]

In 1963, Lewis helped plan the iconic March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. In the buildup to the event, Lewis, King, labor leader A. Philip Randolph, activist Bayard Rustin, and other march organizers were accused by powerful segregationists like Senator Strom Thurmond of South Carolina of having ties to the Communist Party. On August 28, Lewis delivered a keynote address at the Lincoln Memorial in which he called on an army of movement activists to "march through the South" in a sustained campaign of nonviolent resistance to produce effective federal civil rights legislation and destroy Jim Crow.[3]

In 1964, as part of SNCC's Freedom Summer campaign in Mississippi, Lewis braved constant threats and violence to lead a voter registration drive and peaceful protests against segregation. He worked with SNCC staff to train an interracial group of activists to set up schools and register people to vote. After months of organizing, Lewis was part of a group of civil rights activists invited by the Guinean government to travel to the West African nation and share their experiences with young people in September 1964. Lewis extended his trip to several African nations, including Liberia, Ghana, Zambia, and Ethiopia. During a brief stop in Nairobi, Kenya, he had a chance meeting with Malcolm X, who was also traveling at the time, during which they discussed the global Black freedom struggle and their goals for the movement in the United States.[4]

When Lewis returned to America, he embarked on a new voter registration drive in Selma. SNCC worked with King and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference to coordinate picket lines and protests in early 1965. On Sunday, March 7, Lewis and hundreds of others began a march to the state capital in Montgomery to raise awareness of voter suppression. As the group crossed the Edmund Pettus Bridge over the Alabama River, baton-wielding state troopers descended on the peaceful marchers, beating and tear-gassing them. Photos of local law enforcement attacking Lewis with a club circulated throughout the nation. Lewis, who suffered a fractured skull on what became known as "Bloody Sunday," called for the federal government to protect protestors. "I don't see how President [Lyndon B.] Johnson can send troops to Vietnam … I don't see how he can send troops to Africa and can't send troops to Selma," he said before receiving treatment for his injury.[5]

The appalling brutality against peaceful demonstrators in Selma served as the catalyst for congressional action on voting rights. While some Members, including James Douglas Martin of Alabama, accused Lewis of instigating the violence, momentum for a new voting rights legislation gathered speed. Only six months later, in early August, Lewis attended a ceremony at the White House to watch as President Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act of 1965. The new law banned discrimination at the polls and sanctioned federal oversight of the nation's elections. It also included a "preclearance" requirement in which counties with a history of discrimination required Department of Justice approval before making any changes to their voting laws.[6]

Lewis left SNCC in 1966 and finished a degree at Fisk before taking a job in New York City as associate director of the Field Foundation, which worked to combat poverty and inequality. In 1967, he moved to Atlanta, where he took a job as director of the Community Organization Project for the Southern Regional Council, an interracial advocacy group. Shortly into his tenure there, he took a brief leave to work on the presidential campaign of Senator Robert Francis Kennedy of New York. Lewis was with Kennedy in Los Angeles when the Senator was assassinated in June 1968.[7]

In 1970, Lewis became executive director of the Voter Education Project, a nonpartisan organization working to register voters across the South. On March 3, 1975, he testified in front of a House Judiciary Committee subcommittee on the need to reauthorize the Voting Rights Act. Lewis recommended that Congress renew and strengthen the act. "Those who hold illegitimate power will not give it up voluntarily," Lewis warned. He called on Congress to pass a "permanent, national act" to "guarantee minority voting rights protection" across the nation.[8]

Lewis first ran for Congress in a 1977 special election to replace Georgia Representative Andrew Young, who had resigned to serve as U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations. In the crowded Democratic primary for the seat representing Atlanta's Fifth District, Lewis ran on a platform calling for strong federal antipoverty programs. On Election Day, Lewis won 29 percent of the vote—second in a field of 12, behind Atlanta city council president Wyche Fowler Jr. Because Fowler failed to secure a majority, he faced Lewis in a runoff. On the day of the

election, Walter E. Fauntroy, the District of Columbia's Delegate in Congress, visited Atlanta and told crowds that the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) needed Lewis on Capitol Hill. Fowler ultimately prevailed with 62 percent of the vote.[9]

One month later, President James Earl "Jimmy" Carter appointed Lewis associate director of the federal volunteer agency, ACTION, where he worked to build connections with local volunteer groups and diversify the agency's workforce. He resigned in January 1980, citing his desire to return to Atlanta and pursue a career in politics. He later tied his decision to leave Washington to a contentious hearing in front of the House Appropriations Committee, in which several Members tried to limit funding for ACTION programs. Lewis became determined to seek elected office "where I would have more control over the things I thought ought to be done, where I wouldn't have to go up to Capitol Hill and answer to some committee chair who was simply using this agency or that to score political points. I wanted to get on the other side of that table." In October 1980, he was named director of community affairs at the National Consumer Cooperative Bank, a financial institution chartered by Congress to provide funding for consumer cooperatives.[10]

In 1981, Lewis defeated a 24-year veteran of city politics to claim a seat on the Atlanta city council. In his first elected office, Lewis grappled with local issues including public funding for infrastructure, zoning laws, and homelessness. He touted his independence and urged the council to adopt ethics reforms, including financial disclosure requirements. He was also one of the leading opponents of a four-lane highway designed to serve the Jimmy Carter Presidential Library and Museum. Lewis criticized the plan for harming local neighborhoods, cutting through a city park, and increasing traffic and pollution. Ultimately, the council approved the road, but it was reduced to two lanes. In 2018, it was renamed the John Lewis Freedom Parkway.[11]

In 1986, Representative Fowler announced his intention to run for the U.S. Senate. With Georgia's Fifth District seat open for the first time in nearly a decade, Lewis resigned from the city council to join seven other candidates in the Democratic primary. The Fifth District had been redrawn following reapportionment in 1982. The new seat covered most of Atlanta and rural areas in southwest Fulton County, and the district's Black population increased from about half to nearly two-thirds of all registered voters. Lewis initially finished second to his former SNCC colleague and then-Georgia state senator Julian Bond, with 35 percent of the vote. But Bond's share of the vote fell just short of 50 percent, triggering a runoff for September 2. Lewis assumed the role of outsider, campaigning door to door across the district. He criticized Bond for absenteeism in the state senate and for not effectively serving his constituents during his 20-year career in state politics. Lewis promised to advocate for all people and business in his district. "I'm not on the black slate," he declared, "I'm on the people's slate."[12]

As the primary runoff neared, Lewis worked to chip away at Bond's lead. In a televised debate, Lewis suggested both candidates submit to a drug test for public review—echoing a similar request by President Ronald Reagan of his administration's staff weeks earlier. Bond declined and accused Lewis of "demagoguery," but the ploy became a focal point during the campaign's final days. Lewis ultimately prevailed in a narrow victory, earning 52 percent of the vote. Polling suggested he won a larger share of Black voters than in the initial primary while also attracting nearly 80 percent of White voters. In the general election, Lewis easily defeated Republican candidate Portia A. Scott with 75 percent of the vote. In his subsequent 16 re-elections, Lewis won by similar margins, running unopposed in all but three cycles since 2002.[13]

When Lewis entered the House in January 1987, he was assigned to two committees: Public Works and Transportation; and Interior and Insular Affairs. In the 101st Congress (1989–1991), he received an additional post on the House Select Committee on Aging. Lewis also served on the Budget Committee for the 108th Congress (2003–2005) and the Joint Committee on Taxation during the 116th Congress (2019–2021). In addition to his committee responsibilities, Lewis was part of the Democratic whip operation for 30 years. He was named a chief deputy whip in 1989 before being appointed senior chief deputy whip in the 108th Congress. As a chief deputy whip, Lewis held a seat on the influential Democratic Steering and Policy Committee, which helps set the party's agenda and oversees committee assignments. He was also a member of the CBC. Lewis relinquished his other committee assignments after winning a coveted seat on the powerful Ways and Means Committee in the 103rd Congress (1993–1995). He remained on the tax-writing panel for the rest of his career.[14]

From the start, Lewis had a far-ranging legislative agenda. He backed or introduced a wide array of proposals

early in his House tenure, including legislation advancing civil rights as well as environmental justice, education, and health care. He often described his work on Capitol Hill as being in pursuit of King's ideal notion of the "beloved community"—one committed to equality and founded on peace and justice for all.[15]

Lewis's celebrated record of activism gave him a prominent place on Capitol Hill. Reporters sought his perspective on every important bill, controversy, or Democratic maneuver in Congress. His public comments carried significant weight within the Democratic Caucus and often garnered praise from Republicans. For many on Capitol Hill, Lewis was the "conscience of Congress."[16]

Lewis also attended to the needs of his district. He took the lead in securing federal funds for urban development and highlighted troubling inequities in a city experiencing dynamic change. When a major department store vacated its downtown Atlanta building in 1991, Lewis joined his Georgia colleagues in calling for the federal government to transform the space into offices for the thousands of federal workers in the city. Lewis used his seat on the Public Works Committee to secure funding for what became the Atlanta Federal Center. He argued that consolidating the federal workforce in the city center would encourage people to take mass transit and lower pollution. Lewis was known as a thoughtful lawmaker who often carefully evaluated the local effect of urban development, calling for federal funds for infrastructure improvements to help the city prepare to host the summer Olympics Games. He was also a prominent opponent of highway projects that he said would disrupt residential neighborhoods and compromise air quality in the city.[17]

In addition to his work on local issues, Lewis used his seat in the House as a platform to bring his commitment to human rights to U.S. foreign policy. In 1988, he was arrested during an anti-apartheid protest at the South African embassy in Washington. Lewis's renowned commitment to the philosophy of nonviolence complicated his position on U.S. military actions abroad. In 1991, he was a vocal opponent of American intervention in the Gulf War, calling war "obsolete as a tool and as a means to conduct foreign policy." In the aftermath of September 11, 2001, however, Lewis declared his intention to "send the strongest possible message that we can't let terrorism stand" and joined the overwhelming majority of House Members who voted to authorize the use of military force overseas. One year later, he cited the destructive nature of war to adamantly oppose the Bush administration's planned invasion of Iraq.[18]

At certain points in his career, Lewis broke with his party to oppose major international trade initiatives. Lewis joined Majority Whip David Edward Bonior of Michigan in opposing the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), proposed by Democratic President William J. Clinton in 1993. Lewis warned the agreement threatened jobs in the United States over the long-term. Despite his opposition, NAFTA went into effect in 1994. He also criticized the move to normalize trade relations with China in 2000, criticizing the human rights record of the Chinese government.[19]

When the Republican Party won control of the House in the 104th Congress (1995–1997), Lewis helped lead the Democratic opposition to the agenda of Speaker Newt Gingrich of Georgia. Lewis worked to stop Republicans from cutting welfare programs and other government spending. In 1995, he joined protestors to disrupt a speech given by Gingrich to a private organization in support of reductions to Medicare. He was one of the most prominent voices criticizing Gingrich for profiting from a lucrative book deal and tried to force the House Ethics Committee to release a preliminary report on Gingrich's alleged wrongdoing. In 1997, House Republicans revoked Lewis's speaking privileges for a day when, during a speech on the House Floor, he accused Gingrich of lying to the Ethics Committee.[20]

Lewis briefly considered mounting a challenge to Georgia Republican Senator Paul Coverdell in 1997. "I do not want to give the Republican incumbent a free ride," Lewis said. He ultimately decided to hold on to his House seat, and during the remainder of the 105th Congress (1997–1999), Lewis was a prominent voice against the impeachment of President Clinton.[21]

Throughout his time on Capitol Hill, Lewis searched for ways to use the power of the federal government to ensure equal protection of the law. In 2004, he introduced the FAIRNESS Act to clarify the processes the government used to determine if discrimination occurred in the workplace. When the Voting Rights Act was set to expire in 2007, Lewis was at the forefront of the Democratic effort to reauthorize the legislation and opposed amendments that he said made it harder to register to vote. Lewis was clear that the gains in voting rights of the previous four decades were not irreversible. "We cannot separate the debate today

from our history and the past we have traveled." The law, he said, was as necessary in 2006 as it was in 1965.[22]

In 2013, when the Supreme Court struck down as unconstitutional the formula used by the Justice Department to determine which jurisdictions were subject to the preclearance provision, Lewis denounced the decision. The Court, he said, "had stuck a dagger in the heart of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. They're saying, in effect, that history cannot repeat itself. But I say, come and walk in my shoes."[23]

As Lewis worked to protect the gains of the civil rights movement, he also worked to preserve and celebrate its history. In his first term, he passed a bill naming a federal building in Atlanta after Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.; throughout his career, he proposed several bills to bestow similar honors on judges, lawyers, and activists who helped shape the civil rights movement. He also led an annual "pilgrimage" to Selma to retrace his steps across the Edmund Pettus Bridge in 1965. Lewis urged congressional colleagues from both sides of the aisle to join him in Alabama, and over the years scores of them participated in the pilgrimage. His graphic novel on his experience in the civil rights movement was the first of the genre to win a National Book Award for young people's literature in 2016.[24]

In each term from 1988 to 2003, Lewis proposed legislation to establish a national museum of African American history. He worked tirelessly to gather support for the measure, and his bill creating the National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, DC, was finally signed into law by President George W. Bush in 2003. The museum opened on the National Mall in 2016.[25]

Lewis also took bold stands on controversial or contested issues such as gay rights. He opposed both the Defense Department's 1993 "don't ask, don't tell" policy that banned openly gay service members in the U.S. military, and the 1996 Defense of Marriage Act. In support of his convictions, he often participated in protests and risked arrest. In 2016, Lewis led a 25-hour sit-in on the House Floor to protest the lack of gun control legislation following a mass shooting at a nightclub in Orlando, Florida.[26]

Lewis remained an activist during his career on Capitol Hill. He called on popular movements to do what he had done in the 1960s: pressure Congress to act. "Without social movement, without people speaking out, making their voices heard, without moving their feet, sometimes Congress is reluctant to move or to act," Lewis said. "Now one thing about elected officials, and I think the Voting Rights Act proved that, they can count, they're good on counting. They can change their minds, their attitudes. They can get religion pretty quick."[27]

When the Democratic Party won the House majority for the 110th Congress, Lewis seized the opportunity to pass legislation. After a long period in the minority, Lewis became chair of the Ways and Means Subcommittee on Oversight in the 110th and 111th Congresses (2007–2011). He held hearings to expose fraud in the Medicare program, investigated government tax credits for development projects in New Orleans, Louisiana, following the devastation wrought by Hurricane Katrina, and searched for ways to improve the tax code to strengthen nonprofit advocacy organizations. In the wake of the mortgage crisis and banking failures, Lewis led subcommittee hearings to investigate the use of federal money in the Troubled Asset Relief Program and sought ways to improve the services provided by the IRS to taxpayers. In the 110th Congress, Lewis sponsored the Emmett Till Unsolved Civil Rights Crime Act, which provided $20 million over 10 years to revisit investigations into crimes against civil rights workers that occurred before January 1, 1970. The bill became law in 2008.[28]

After losing the House majority in 2010 and spending eight years in the minority, House Democrats reclaimed power following the 2018 midterm elections. In the 116th Congress, Lewis again took the gavel of the Ways and Means Subcommittee on Oversight. Lewis worked with several Republican colleagues to build support for his Taxpayer First Act which reformed the internal workings of the IRS and improved taxpayer services. The bill became law in 2019. In December 2019, he supported the impeachment of President Donald J. Trump.[29]

In 2019, Lewis passed William Lacy "Bill" Clay Sr. of Missouri to become the third-longest-serving Black Member of Congress. He remained committed to speaking truth to power and calling on the nation to live up to its inspired ideals. In the summer of 2020, Lewis voiced support for the protests occurring around the world against police brutality and racism following the murder of George Floyd, a Black man, while in police custody in Minnesota; Lewis visited Black Lives Matter Plaza in Washington, DC, in early June.[30]

On July 17, 2020, John Lewis died in Atlanta of pancreatic cancer. A procession was organized to walk his remains across the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma one final time before his casket laid in honor in two state capitals: Montgomery, Alabama, and Atlanta, Georgia. Ten days

later, Lewis became the first Black lawmaker to lie in state in the U.S. Capitol Rotunda.[31]

In 1995, almost a decade into his House career, Lewis offered a personal reflection on the convictions that guided his actions and defined his life. "What am I? I am a man who deeply believes in compassion and hope," Lewis wrote. "A man who believes we can move beyond the anger, hatred and attacks that have assaulted our nation's psyche. A man who, day after day, struggles to build the bridges that will allow us all to come together in Dr. King's beloved community."[32]

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32 Lewis, "Why I Said What I Did."

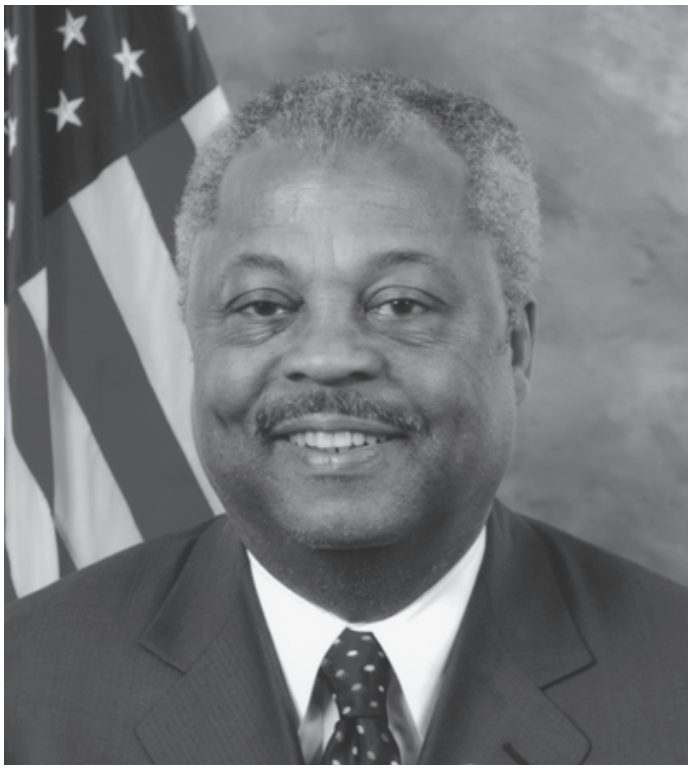
Donald M. Payne

1934–2012

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1989–2012

Democrat from New Jersey



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With his election to the U.S. House of Representatives in November 1988, Donald M. Payne became the first African-American lawmaker to represent New Jersey in the U.S. Congress. An experienced community activist and elected official, Payne delivered essential resources to his constituents in Newark while advocating for expanded educational opportunities and fostering relations between the United States and countries in Africa. "I want to be a congressman to serve as a model for the young people I talk to on the Newark street corners," Payne said. "I want them to see there are no barriers to achievement. I want to give them a reason to try."[1]

Donald Milford Payne was born on July 16, 1934, in Newark, New Jersey, the son of William Evander Payne, a dock worker, and Norma Garrett Payne. Payne, along with his brother William and sister Kathryn, grew up in Doodletown, an Italian-American section of Newark. "Everyone, whites and blacks, worked for low wages, although we didn't think of it as living in poverty, and there was a real sense of neighborhood, of depending on one another," Payne later said about his early life. As a teenager, Payne joined a group called "The Leaguers," which sought to support Black youth in Newark by providing social, educational, and work activities. The founders, Reynold and Mary Burch, were prominent African-American community leaders in Newark and helped Payne secure a four-year scholarship at Seton Hall University. Payne graduated in 1957 with a bachelor's degree in social studies and later pursued graduate studies at Springfield College in Massachusetts. On June 15, 1958, he married Hazel Johnson. The couple raised three children—Donald Jr., Wanda, and Nicole—before Hazel died in 1963. Payne never remarried. He taught English and social studies and coached football in the Newark public schools before working for a major insurance company. He later served as vice president of a computer forms manufacturing company founded by his brother.[2]

Payne became involved in politics at age 19 as manager of his brother's successful campaign to serve as Newark's first African-American district leader. He pursued community work through the local YMCA. From 1970 to 1973, Payne served as president of the YMCA of the United States—the first African American to hold that position. In 1972, he was elected to the Essex County board of freeholders. Payne served as a freeholder for six years, and eventually chaired the board. In 1982, Payne won election to the Newark municipal council, where he served until his election to Congress.[3]

Payne twice challenged Representative Peter Wallace Rodino Jr. in the Democratic primary for a U.S. House seat encompassing Newark and portions of Essex County. The district had become overwhelmingly Black (nearly 60 percent by the 1990 Census) and Payne argued that it should be represented by an African-American lawmaker. But in both 1980 and 1986 Payne lost his bids to unseat the influential, longtime chair of the House Judiciary Committee. In 1988, however, when Rodino announced his retirement after 40 years in Congress, Payne became a leading contender for the nomination to fill the open seat. In the June 1988 Democratic primary, he defeated Ralph T. Grant, a Newark city councilman, by a two-to-one ratio. In a district that voted overwhelmingly Democratic, Payne defeated Republican Michael Webb, a local teacher, with 77 percent of the vote in the general election. He won by similar margins in his subsequent 11 re-elections.[4]

After Payne was sworn into the House on January 3, 1989, he received assignments on three committees: Government Operations; Education and Labor; and Foreign Affairs. He served on the Government Operations Committee for two non-consecutive terms before leaving the committee at the start of the 104th Congress (1995–1997). Payne remained on the two other panels for the remainder of his House career. During the 103rd and 104th Congresses (1993–1997), Payne and other Members successfully lobbied to save the Foreign Affairs Committee's Subcommittee on Africa from elimination. Payne also chaired the Government Operations' Subcommittee on Human Resources and Intergovernmental Affairs during the 102nd Congress. In the 110th Congress (2007–2009), Payne assumed the gavel of the Foreign Affairs Committee's Subcommittee on Africa and Global Health. Payne served as an assistant whip throughout his congressional career.[5]

Payne's domestic agenda focused on bringing financial resources to his district and promoting educational opportunities. Early in his career, Payne introduced several resolutions promoting National Literacy Day that became law. Payne sponsored bills that expanded educational opportunities such as the College Opportunity Act of 1991, and the Urban Schools America Act of 1993. An advocate for urban redevelopment, Payne successfully steered $6 million toward the building and improvement of parks in his district with the help of the New Jersey delegation during the 105th Congress (1997–1999).[6]

As chair of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) during the 104th Congress, Payne helped the CBC navigate new House rules and was known for his thoughtful, determined, and low-key leadership style. "I think there is a lot of dignity in being able to achieve things without having to create rapture," he once noted. In 1995, the new Republican majority eliminated financing for legislative service organizations in the House as a method to curb spending, causing the CBC and other caucuses to lose much of their logistical support. The CBC came to rely more heavily on the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation and caucus members contributed staff and resources from their offices to keep the organization running. Despite the financial hardship caused by the new rules, Payne was confident that the CBC—which at the time had a membership that was all Democratic except for Republican Gary A. Franks of Connecticut—would "be a strong factor in influencing the position of our party and of the House." Payne led the CBC's opposition to much of the Republican majority's legislation. Payne oversaw the caucus's program to block bills that could negatively affect African Americans, forming a task force to review upcoming legislation and regularly discussing strategy with President William J. Clinton.[7]

Like his CBC predecessors Charles C. Diggs Jr. of Michigan and Mickey Leland of Texas, Payne also advocated for greater U.S. engagement in Africa. As a senior member of the Foreign Affairs Committee, Representative Payne worked to foster relations with sub-Saharan Africa and brought attention to international human rights issues. During the 106th Congress (1999–2001), for example, Payne sponsored H. Res. 62, a resolution passed by the House condemning violence in Sierra Leone. A frequent visitor to the African continent during his congressional career, Payne was dubbed the "unofficial ambassador of Congress to the nations of Africa." During the 103rd Congress (1993–1995), Payne publicly questioned the Clinton administration's decision to forcibly return Haitian refugees who risked their lives to sail to the United States. He also criticized the administration's failure to craft a comprehensive approach to Africa and its tepid response to the civil war in Rwanda. Payne's concern for human rights abroad was reflected in his sponsorship of bills such as the Nigeria Democracy Act and the Northern Ireland Peace and Reconciliation Act. In 2007, Payne introduced legislation to guide U.S. foreign policy with Ethiopia in order to

"foster stability, democracy and economic development." The bill passed the House but not the Senate.[8]

For two decades, Payne worked to bring attention to human rights violations and the devastations of war occurring in Sudan. In October 1990, as a member of the Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Africa, Payne led a hearing on famine in the country and the Sudanese government's role in the crisis. Throughout his career, Payne frequently introduced legislation to bring attention to the crises in Sudan. In 1996, for example, he sponsored legislation to stop the United States from "providing economic, military, or arms transfers to Sudan" until the government ended slavery in the country. In June 2001, Payne, along with columnist and minister Barbara Reynolds, was arrested outside the Sudanese Embassy during a protest against slavery in the east African country. Three years later, in June 2004, the House passed Payne's concurrent resolution declaring genocide in the Darfur region of Sudan. A similar concurrent resolution, sponsored by Senator Sam Dale Brownback of Kansas, passed the Senate in July 2004. In July 2011, Payne was part of the United States delegation which attended the ceremony celebrating the independence of South Sudan. "I witnessed the joy of the people of South Sudan and how jubilant they felt … that the day finally came that they received their independence."[9]

Payne also worked with President George W. Bush to bring attention to the HIV/AIDS epidemic in sub-Saharan Africa. He acknowledged that while he opposed Bush on many policies, he said the President had gone "beyond what any other president had done" to work on the issue. Payne praised the administration's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, which provided $15 billion to combat the spread of HIV/AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa. In September 2003, President Bush appointed Payne to serve as a congressional delegate to the United Nations.[10]

Later in his career, Payne supported measures that memorialized and commemorated African-American history. In 2007, for example, Payne sponsored the Commission on the Abolition of the Transatlantic Slave Trade Act, which President Bush signed into law in February 2008. The legislation put in motion plans to celebrate the 200th anniversary of the decision to ban the transatlantic slave trade in United States. "Our nation's willingness to confront its past and calmly assess the impact of enslaved people on the United States strengthens our ability to serve as an advocate on the international stage," Payne said on the House Floor. In 2008, Payne also introduced a concurrent resolution that passed both chambers commemorating the life of Thurgood Marshall, the famed civil rights attorney and the first Black Supreme Court Justice, on the 100th anniversary of his birth.[11]

In February 2012, Payne announced that he had been diagnosed with colon cancer and would seek treatment while tending to his congressional duties. He died of complications from his illness in Livingston, New Jersey, on March 6, 2012. In November 2012, Payne's son, Donald M. Payne Jr., was elected in a special election to succeed his father, making the Paynes the third African-American father-and-son pair ever to serve in Congress.[12]

Manuscript Collection

Seton Hall University, The Monsignor William Noé Field Archives and Special Collections Center (South Orange, NJ). *Papers*: 1988–2012, 53.35 linear feet. The collection contains Donald M. Payne's professional papers from his time as U.S. Representative and focuses on his legislative work on behalf of his district and state. A finding aid is available in the repository and online.

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Craig A. Washington

1941–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1989–1995

Democrat from Texas



Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

Elected in a special election to fill the U.S. House of Representatives seat of the late Mickey Leland of Texas, Craig A. Washington used his time in Congress to support civil rights and the rights of criminal defendants. In the House, Washington took pride in his independent approach to lawmaking. "I did this my way," he said, conceding his loss in the 1994 Democratic primary to future Representative Sheila Jackson Lee. "There are a lot of easier ways to be a congressman or run for Congress. I wanted people to hear the truth."[1]

Craig Anthony Washington was born to Roy and Azalea Washington on October 12, 1941, in Longview, Texas. He attended two historically Black universities, earning a bachelor's degree in 1966 from Prairie View A&M University and a law degree from Texas Southern University in Houston in 1969. Washington was on the Texas Southern University Law School faculty from 1969 to 1970 before opening his own criminal defense practice in Houston. In 1973, Washington was elected to the Texas state house alongside future U.S. Representative Mickey Leland. In 1983, Washington moved to the state senate, where he proved to be a commanding orator and legislative strategist. Washington soon became one of the most prominent lawmakers working on behalf of civil rights in Texas. He sought ways to increase the participation of minorities and women in state government, supported Texas divestment from South Africa, and coordinated his state's fight against the AIDS epidemic. Washington married twice and raised five children.[2]

On August 7, 1989, Representative Mickey Leland died in a plane crash in Ethiopia while traveling to a United Nations refugee camp. Leland's downtown Houston district had been represented by African-American lawmakers in the House since its creation in 1972, when Leland's predecessor, Representative Barbara Jordan, was elected to the first of three terms in Congress. A longtime Leland ally, Washington entered the primary election to succeed him after Leland's widow, Alison, declined to run. Under the campaign slogan, "Pass the Torch," Washington ran with the support of the Leland family and won the nonpartisan primary. In a December 9 special election, Washington defeated Houston city councilman Anthony Hall with 56 percent of the vote.[3]

Washington took his oath of office on January 23, 1990, the opening day of the second session of the 101st Congress (1989–1991). "I could never replace Mickey

Leland. I'm merely his successor," he said. Washington's legal background won him appointments to the Judiciary Committee and the Committee on Education and Labor. Washington also filled Leland's seat on the Select Committee on Hunger, which the late Representative had created. After easily winning re-election twice in his heavily Democratic district—running unopposed in 1990 and capturing 65 percent of the vote in 1992—Washington traded his seat on the Education and Labor Committee for a sought-after place on the Energy and Commerce Committee in the 103rd Congress (1993–1995).[4]

Washington's experience as a lawyer and a civil rights activist influenced his efforts to shape new civil rights legislation during the George H.W. Bush administration. A 1990 civil rights bill sought to strengthen protections against employment discrimination based on race, sex, or ethnicity. President Bush threatened to veto the bill, claiming that it would mandate businesses to impose hiring quotas. As part of the conference committee of Representatives and Senators attempting to modify its provisions to secure passage, Washington voted against a compromise measure granting employers more leeway to avoid accusations of discrimination, declaring that the changes would produce a "hollow shell of a civil rights bill." After President Bush vetoed the resulting conference bill, Democrats pursued and passed a similar civil rights bill in 1991 at the start of the 102nd Congress (1991–1993). Washington ultimately backed the new proposal and condemned Republicans for using the "red herring" of quotas to stoke opposition to the legislation.[5]

As a member of the Judiciary Subcommittee on Crime and Criminal Justice, the former criminal defense lawyer opposed the William J. Clinton administration's Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act. Washington argued the crime bill was too punitive. In response to the legislation, Washington introduced the Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Reform Act, which was cosponsored by 21 of his colleagues in the Congressional Black Caucus. Washington's bill focused on preventive measures to reduce crime, like alternative sentencing programs, late-night recreational activities that sought to keep teenagers busy, and community policing initiatives. Washington also sponsored the Family Unity Demonstration Project that would have funded trial programs creating "community correctional facilities" that allowed incarcerated parents to live with their children.[6]

At times, Washington voted against large federal science initiatives that likely would have helped his district because he believed the federal funding could be better used to improve education, health care, and social services. He was one of two members of the Texas delegation in the House to vote against continued funding for the Department of Energy's superconducting super collider in 1993. The project, which would enable scientists to study small particles of matter, was planned for East Texas and would have brought the state millions of federal dollars. Washington was also the only Texan to vote against building a space station whose construction and maintenance would have employed constituents of his Houston district, which was home to NASA's Lyndon B. Johnson Space Center. Washington was one of seven members of the Texas delegation in the House to vote against the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), despite its support by Houston-area businesses, arguing that the measure would outsource 3,000 jobs from his district to Mexico.[7]

In 1991, Washington voted against sending U.S. troops into Kuwait to drive out Iraqi forces under President Saddam Hussein. Instead, he proposed a resolution calling for a declaration of war rather than an authorization of military force. "Either you are for war or you are against war," Washington declared on the House Floor. "Let it be said by history that the Congress of the United States saw its duty and we did it." When U.S. troops returned home from Kuwait, Washington voted against authorizing a celebration of their victory and insisted economic issues like urban poverty took precedence.[8]

In 1992, Washington ran to serve as chair of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC), which worked on issues and developed policy important to Black communities across the country. The 103rd Congress (1993–1995) was pivotal for the CBC, whose membership increased from 26 to 40 following the 1992 elections. Washington proposed assigning a caucus member to every House subcommittee and cited his independent voting record as proof of his commitment to bold leadership. However, he lost the race to Maryland Democrat Kweisi Mfume.[9]

In January 1991, Washington filed for bankruptcy, admitting he owed $250,000 in federal taxes and $65,000 in local taxes. Washington faced further difficulty when *Congressional Quarterly* reported that he was absent from nearly 25 percent of the votes during the 102nd Congress, giving him the worst attendance record in the

Texas delegation and the second-worst record of any Representative. Washington expressed exasperation with often lengthy voting processes, saying he skipped votes that had no bearing on his Houston districts so he could meet with constituents and focus on projects closer to home. In response, Washington began logging his missed votes and recording his alternative activities.[10]

In 1994, Washington faced a challenge in the Democratic primary from Houston city councilwoman Sheila Jackson Lee who promised to provide voters "representation you can be proud of." Although six of Washington's congressional colleagues flew to Houston to show their support for his re-election, Houston-area business owners rallied around Jackson Lee, upset that Washington had voted against NASA projects and against NAFTA. Washington lost the nomination to Jackson Lee, who handily defeated the incumbent with 63 percent of the vote, and went on to win the general election.[11]

Following his departure from Congress, Washington resumed practicing law and bought a farm outside Houston. He expressed no interest in returning to politics.[12]

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Power and Diversity

1990–2022

In November 1992, 17 new Black lawmakers won election to Congress for the first time. A handful of other African-American legislators had either retired or lost their seats during the 1992 election, but as the 103rd Congress (1993-1995) opened, 40 Black Members took the oath of office—the highest number in history and up from 27 in the previous term. It was a transformative moment in the history of African-American political representation. During the Congressional Black Caucus's (CBC) swearing-in ceremony two months later in January, Kweisi Mfume of Maryland, the incoming chair of the caucus, declared that the new Members and the rising influence their arrival foretold was nothing less than the realization of a prediction made more than 90 years earlier. In 1901, Representative George Henry White of North Carolina, the last Black Member to serve for nearly 30 years as Jim Crow segregation descended on the South, told the House that while the end of his tenure represented "perhaps the negroes' temporary farewell to the American Congress… Phoenix-like he will rise up someday and come again." Mfume told the crowd at the ceremony that White "was prophetic and uttered better than he perhaps knew." "We are in fact the phoenix that he spoke of," Mfume continued, "rising from those ashes and soaring free and unfettered in the clear blue skies of the 103rd Congress."[1]

One month before his passing in 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic, Representative John Lewis of Georgia visits the Black Lives Matter Plaza in Washington, DC.

Photograph by Gary D. Williams Jr.



As the first Black Representative to serve North Carolina in nearly a century, Eva M. Clayton advanced the interests of her rural district and raised awareness of the inequalities that affected African Americans nationwide.

Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

Of the 17 new Black members, 13 had been elected from recently created majority-Black districts. Eight of the thirteen—James E. Clyburn of South Carolina; Robert C. "Bobby" Scott of Virginia; Eva M. Clayton and Melvin L. Watt of North Carolina; Corrine Brown, Carrie P. Meek, and Alcee L. Hastings of Florida; and Earl F. Hilliard of Alabama —were elected from states that had not sent a Black Member to Congress since the end of the nineteenth century, when Jim Crow ended Black representation in electoral politics in the South.[2]

The November 1992 elections dramatically altered the composition of Black representation in Congress and boosted the political influence of the CBC. With but a few exceptions, the overwhelming number of Black Members elected before 1992 had come from urban districts in the North and West. But the 1992 class featured not only a majority of Members from the South, it included Members like Eva Clayton of North Carolina and Sanford D. Bishop Jr. of Georgia, who represented rural, farming constituencies. This era also saw a growth in the number of Black Members elected from districts that were primarily suburban, a trend that highlighted the decision by an increasing number of Black Americans to move to suburban neighborhoods. Albert Russell Wynn, for example, was elected in 1992 from a majority-Black Maryland district created out of suburban communities bordering eastern Washington, DC.

Six Black women won election to Congress for the first time in November 1992, more than doubling the number of Black women lawmakers. In a watershed moment, Carol Moseley Braun from Illinois became the first Black woman ever elected to the Senate, increasing the total number of Black women in Congress to 10. Before 1990, only five Black women had ever served on Capitol Hill.

The period covered in this section also saw the return of Black Republicans to the House and Senate. Before 1990, only three Black Republicans had been elected to Congress in the twentieth century: Representative Oscar De Priest of Illinois served from 1929 to 1935; Senator Edward W. Brooke of Massachusetts served from 1967 to 1979; and Delegate Melvin H. Evans of the U.S. Virgin Islands served from 1979 to 1981. In 1991, Gary A. Franks of Connecticut became the first Black Republican Representative in 55 years. Since Franks's election, another seven Black Republicans have been elected to the House and one, Tim Scott of South Carolina, was elected to both the House and later the Senate, the first and only Black lawmaker to serve in both chambers.

Two prominent themes have emerged over the 32-year period of Black representation in Congress between 1990 and 2022: the increase in real, meaningful congressional power and influence for Black Members, individually, and for the CBC, collectively; and the rise in geographic, ideological, and political diversity among Black lawmakers on Capitol Hill.

For Mfume, the arrival of new and more Black legislators in 1992 meant the CBC had "been given a great opportunity to effectuate meaningful change in the House." But for many Black Members, especially those elected in 1992 and afterwards, the substance of "meaningful change" and the process by which Black Members would effect this change were different from those of many, though not all, of their predecessors. With much smaller numbers in the previous generation, Black Members often pushed for legislation that brought attention to persistent problems of inequality facing Black Americans. In their role as what the CBC called "the conscience of Congress," these Members often took an oppositional stance to Democratic leadership. By 1993, the 38 Black Democrats in the House not only pushed for policies they believed could help Black

Americans, but they often did so as an influential bloc within the House Democratic Caucus. The members of the CBC aimed to help shape and pass House Democrats' top priorities as insiders rather than as outsiders. Albert Wynn voiced this changing perspective when he said: "I didn't come here to be anybody's conscience. I came here to negotiate."[3]

As with previous generations, African-American Members at times questioned the larger agenda of the Democratic Party and disagreed on exactly which policies best served Black Americans. By the early 1990s, the Democratic Party was transitioning away from supporting some New Deal and Great Society policies that called for government intervention and the expansion of federally funded social safety net programs. Elected in 1992, President William J. Clinton was at the vanguard of a new movement in the Democratic Party that prioritized deregulation of financial markets, the expansion of free trade, tough-on-crime policies, and a reduction in federally funded social services. Black Members were, at times, divided on whether to support these new policies—and whether to support the Democratic President in favor of them—given that they broke with decades of policy preferences shared by generations of Black lawmakers.

Although Black Members remained confident that they could influence the Democratic Party, the CBC encountered increasingly challenging terrain in a changing Congress. The growth in the number of Black Americans in Congress came about in a new era of partisan parity in Congress. In November 1994, the Republican Party won the majority in the House of Representatives for the first time in 40 years. In the following 28 years, Republicans held the majority for 20 years, while Democrats twice recaptured control. Given that most Black Members were Democrats, serving in the House minority checked their influence and legislative power.

As more Black Members won election to Congress, often from safe districts, they composed an ever-greater proportion of the membership of the Democratic Caucus. This afforded Black Members the chance to rise in party leadership in committees and within the caucus. The progress Black lawmakers made in attaining Democratic leadership positions, combined with the increasing influence of Black Democratic voters, especially in the South, helped pave the way for the election of a CBC member, Illinois Senator Barack Obama, as the first African-American President of the United States.

PRECONGRESSIONAL EXPERIENCES

More than 25 years after the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, Black leaders who got their start as activists during the 1960s were still being elected to Congress. Indeed, several of the Members sent to Washington in the 1990s had direct experiences participating in the civil rights and Black Power movements of the 1960s and early 1970s. James Clyburn participated in sit-in demonstrations and spent time in jail for protesting in the early 1960s. As a law student, future Washington, DC, Delegate Eleanor Holmes Norton worked with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) in Mississippi. Bobby L. Rush of Illinois became involved in protests with SNCC in Chicago in the 1960s before going on to help form the Illinois chapter of the Black Panther Party. Following the murder of Fred Hampton by Chicago police, Rush became the head of the Illinois chapter.[4]

The successes in representation brought about by Black activists during the civil rights movement extended beyond Congress to include the state legislatures. For instance, from 1970 to 1992, the number of African Americans serving in



In July 1996, members of the Congressional Black Caucus in the 104th Congress (1995–1997) pose on the House steps.

Image courtesy of the U.S. House of Representatives Photography Office

state legislatures rose from 168 to 463—an increase of 176 percent. The growth occurred fastest in the South—the area of the country with the largest number of Black residents and where voting rights legislation and court decisions provided greater access to the ballot. Across the South, Black lawmakers held 32 state legislative seats in 1970. By 1992, they held 226—a gain of 606 percent. Forty-seven of the 110 Black Members of Congress who have been elected since 1990 served as state legislators before serving on Capitol Hill.[5]

Many Members profiled in this era were political trailblazers. In 1972, for instance, Eddie Bernice Johnson became one of the first two Black women to win election to the Texas state house of representatives. In 1978, Diane E. Watson, who was only the second Black woman to win a seat on the Los Angeles board of education, became the first Black woman elected to the California state senate. In 1982, Carrie Meek became the first Black woman elected to the Florida state senate. And in 1992, Gwen Moore was the first Black woman elected to the Wisconsin state senate. Several held leadership positions in state legislatures. Maxine Waters was the first woman to be majority whip in the California state assembly; Bonnie Watson Coleman was the majority leader of the New Jersey state assembly; Steven A. Horsford was majority leader in the Nevada state senate; and Karen Bass was speaker of the California house of representatives.



With a background in health care and health policy, Eddie Bernice Johnson of Texas served in the Texas state legislature before embarking on a more than two-decade career in the House of Representatives.

Image courtesy of the Member

Serving in a state legislature was just one avenue to higher office. Experience in local and municipal office also typified this post-1991 cohort of Black Members of Congress. Twenty-four served on city councils; eight were elected county council members or commissioners; eight served as mayors; seven served as local, municipal, or federal judges; and others held other elected positions, such as school board member, recorder of deeds, and justice of the peace. Alcee Hastings, who unsuccessfully ran to be the first Black U.S. Senator from Florida in 1970, became the first Black federal judge appointed in Florida in 1979. And in 1991, Emanuel Cleaver II became the first Black mayor of Kansas City, Missouri. A few Members previously held high level executive positions in state governments. For example, Anthony G. Brown was lieutenant governor of Maryland, Kamala D. Harris was the California attorney general, and Lisa Blunt Rochester was the secretary of labor in Delaware.

Several other individuals held prominent federal positions before winning their first congressional election, including Eleanor Holmes Norton, who was chair of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission in the 1970s, and Diane Watson, who was U.S. Ambassador to the Federated States of Micronesia from 1999 through 2000.

Black women helped bring about many of the legal and cultural changes associated with the women's rights movement in America. They also joined women from other communities in running for and winning office in unprecedented numbers. Over time, African-American women have accounted for an increasing percentage of Black legislators in state capitals and in Washington, DC. In 1970, there were only 15 Black women state legislators—accounting for less than 10 percent of all African-American state lawmakers. By 1992, the number of Black women state legislators had increased to 131, or roughly 28 percent of all Black lawmakers at the state level. By early 2021, that number increased to 355, about 49 percent of all Black lawmakers in state legislatures. In 1971, only one Black woman—Shirley Chisholm of New York—served on Capitol Hill, among a total of 14 African Americans in Congress. In the 104th Congress (1995–1997), the number

of African-American women in the House surpassed 10. By the middle of the 117th Congress (2021–2023), there were 28 African-American women serving in Congress, making up roughly 46 percent of all Black Members—the highest total in American history. Maxine Waters and Eleanor Holmes Norton, who were first elected in 1990, are the longest-serving Black women in congressional history, each having served for more than 31 years.[6]

As their numbers have grown, Black women have assumed greater prominence in the CBC. As of 2022, Black women compose almost half of the CBC membership, and since the 2000s, many have chaired the caucus. From 1979 to 1997 only two women chaired the CBC—Cardiss Collins of Illinois during the 96th Congress (1979–1981) and Maxine Waters during the 105th Congress (1997–1999). During the twenty-first century, however, Eddie Bernice Johnson (107th Congress, 2001–2003), Carolyn C. Kilpatrick of Michigan (110th Congress, 2007–2009), Barbara Lee of California (111th Congress, 2009–2011), Marcia L. Fudge of Ohio (113th Congress, 2013–2015), Karen Bass (116th Congress, 2019–2021), and Joyce Beatty of Ohio (117th Congress, 2021–2023) have all chaired the CBC.[7]

REDISTRICTING

Much of what Congress did to address voting rights during this era came in response to decisions rendered by the courts. In *Mobile v. Bolden* (1980), for instance, the Supreme Court ruled that the decision by the city of Mobile, Alabama, to employ an at-large city commission did not violate Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act or African Americans' Fourteenth Amendment rights because, though the outcomes indicated that the system favored White candidates, discriminatory intent could not be proven. Following the Court's ruling, Black Members of Congress set out to amend Section 2 and supported the inclusion of language in the 1982 Voting Rights Act that allowed plaintiffs to prove a discriminatory effect rather than intentional discrimination in voting cases. Four years later, the Supreme Court in *Thornburg v. Gingles* (1986) devised a new standard that plaintiffs could use to claim discrimination in districting. During the redistricting process every 10 years, state legislators and the U.S. Department of Justice were required to consider if a politically cohesive racial or ethnic minority group lived in a geographically compact area and whether White voters of the same area tended to vote as a bloc to "usually defeat the minority's preferred candidate." The Court's interpretation of the 1982 Voting Rights Act's amendments to Section 2 thus created the legal basis for the creation of majority-Black congressional districts throughout the South.[8]

The 1982 amendment to Section 2 and the *Thornburg* decision marked a significant shift in how officials drew congressional districts. Previously, legislation such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 had focused on providing minority voters equal access and opportunity. But starting in 1982, the emphasis had shifted to prohibiting electoral arrangements that had the intent or the effect of diluting minority votes. The new legal environment, combined with the growing number of African-American state legislators involved in election oversight and the redistricting process—by one account, 17 percent of all Black state legislators in 1992 served on such committees, significantly boosted Black electoral prospects in the early 1990s.[9]

In the South, the creation of majority-Black districts—which also tended to be overwhelmingly Democratic—mostly ensured the election of Black lawmakers from states where decades of discrimination had prevented their election at every level of government. The South had always been reliably Democratic, but beginning in the 1960s the region's White voters began a decades-long transformation of switching allegiance to the Republican Party. By the midterm elections in 1994, during William J. Clinton's presidency, the gradual changes to the South's politics revealed a new electoral landscape that would come to define the region in which state legislatures created majority-Black seats to elect Democrats, making the other districts safer for White Republicans.[10]

Race-based redistricting in the early 1990s dramatically increased the number of Black Americans in the House and presented new political opportunities for the CBC. "I think the Congressional Black Caucus has moved to a whole other level," Ronald V. Dellums of California observed in the wake of the victories in November 1992. "We can win. We've gone beyond just being 'the conscience of the House.' " But it also produced a tide of lawsuits by voters whose former districts were transformed by the process. In 1993, the Court rendered a judgment in *Shaw v. Reno* that reinstated a suit by five White North Carolinians who charged that one of the state's new congressional districts—a majority-Black district represented by Representative Melvin Watt that connected a series of communities situated along the I-85 highway corridor—violated their Fourteenth Amendment rights to equal protection under the law



The Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) meets with President William J. Clinton at the White House in July 1993. Though the CBC agreed with Clinton on many issues, the group sometimes criticized the Democratic President for his appointments and for his willingness to compromise on efforts to reduce the federal budget deficit by curtailing entitlement programs.

Image courtesy of the William J. Clinton Library/National Archives and Records Administration

by diluting their votes. In a 5 to 4 decision, the Court questioned the constitutionality of drawing congressional districts with "bizarre" shapes. While the decision did not overturn a district court ruling that rejected the suit, it returned the matter to the lower courts with a new standard for scrutiny to prove that the district was warranted.[11]

Shaw v. Reno spawned redistricting challenges in several states, with the potential to affect the boundaries of roughly a dozen U.S. congressional districts represented by African-American lawmakers. On June 29, 1995, the Supreme Court struck down Georgia's congressional district map in *Miller v. Johnson*, a case brought by plaintiffs in a district represented by Representative Cynthia A. McKinney that stretched from Atlanta to the Georgia coast—some 260 miles away. The judgment called into question the creation of any district in which race was the "predominant factor." Writing for the majority, Justice Anthony M. Kennedy explained, "just as the state may not, absent extraordinary justification, segregate citizens on the basis of race in its public parks, buses, golf courses, beaches, and schools," the government also "may not separate its citizens into different voting districts on the basis of race." The decision reconfigured McKinney's district, as well as that of another Black Member from Georgia, making both majority-White districts with large African-American voting populations. Over the course of the next several years, lawsuits successfully challenged the boundaries of African-American-held seats in Florida, Texas, Virginia, and South Carolina.[12]

The challenge to majority-minority districting was perhaps most acute for Cleo Fields of Louisiana, who spent much of his time in Congress defending his seat in the courts. In 1996, a federal district court that relied on the *Shaw v. Reno* and *Miller v. Johnson* decisions found Fields's congressional district to be the product of an unconstitutional racial gerrymander. The state legislature subsequently redrew the district without a Black majority, and placed Fields's Baton Rouge residence in the district of a popular White Republican incumbent. Fields declined to run again.[13]

Most members of the CBC at the time supported the creation of majority-minority districts and opposed the Supreme Court's rulings in the mid-1990s. Earl Hilliard, an Alabama Representative who won his seat in a newly created majority-minority district, explained on the House Floor that "our High Court is straying from our Nation's democratic principles, the principles of fair play and equal representation." Cynthia McKinney argued, "Black-majority districts create opportunities for African-Americans, particularly those in the South, to choose someone who will represent *their* interest." The CBC also submitted amicus briefs for several Supreme Court cases in defense of majority-minority districts.[14]

On occasion, Black Members opposed efforts made by other Democrats in the House to improve their party's electoral chances by redistricting, especially if the changes threatened the seat of a Black lawmaker. In 2014, Marcia Fudge, the chair of the CBC, wrote a letter to the chair of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee (DCCC) opposing the Democratic Party's lawsuit in Florida that would have potentially increased the number of seats Democrats could win but would have redrawn Corrine Brown's northern Florida-based district in the process. "We are extremely disturbed by the DCCC's efforts to dismantle CBC districts in states that have historically proven to be difficult to elect minority members," Fudge wrote.[15]

Still, a few Black Members opposed the creation of majority-minority districts. John Lewis of Georgia expressed the concern that majority-Black districts could "ensnare blacks in separate enclaves, the exact opposite of what the civil rights movement intended." By the 2000 redistricting cycle, other Black Members, including Major R. Owens of New York, expressed concern about the Republican advantages from packing Black voters in one district. "Democrats have to be on their toes," Owens explained. "They understand it better now than they did 10 years ago

that Republicans are going to deliberately pack minorities and move them out of swing districts and guarantee the possibility of electing Republicans by having a more concentrated [electorate]."[16]

Republican Gary Franks, elected in an overwhelmingly White district, strongly opposed majority-minority redistricting. He argued that majority-minority districts were unjust because they gave "some Americans a manufactured advantage over other Americans." Franks, while still a member of the CBC, angered his CBC colleagues when he testified in federal court against a Georgia-based majority-minority district. The Connecticut Representative also introduced legislation in the 104th Congress (1995–1997) to ban what he called "the intentional creation of legislative districts based on race, color, [and] language minority status of voters within such districts."[17]

Despite the Supreme Court's rulings requiring several majority-Black districts to be redrawn, nearly every Black Member whose district had been reconfigured midway through the decade emerged unscathed. Often, as in the cases in North Carolina and Georgia, majority-Black districts became majority-White following a lawsuit. But given the power of incumbency, the fact that these districts still contained large Black populations, and the success of Black Members in creating multiracial coalitions, Black lawmakers continued to win re-election. The number of African Americans in Congress leveled off by the mid-1990s and hovered in the high 30s and low 40s for eight election cycles from 1992 through 2006. In many cases, reapportionment and redistricting plans in the South drawn in 2000 and 2010 strengthened both Black incumbent Democrats and White Republicans. These efforts have also been subject to repeated court challenges in which plaintiffs claim the districts amount to unconstitutional racial gerrymanders.[18]

The debate over the necessity and political utility of creating majority-minority districts has shifted over time. As late as 2015, 88 percent of Black Representatives had been elected from majority-minority districts. Black Republicans such as Franks and J.C. Watts Jr. of Oklahoma, as well as a small number of Black Democrats, were part of the small percentage of Black Members who had represented majority-White constituencies. In November 2018, however, eight of the nine new Black Members elected to the House of Representatives won in districts with significant non-Hispanic White majorities. Overall, by 2021, Black Members represented districts with smaller Black populations than in the past. As Black candidates found electoral success with more diverse constituencies, Black politicians and activists outside Congress became more supportive of creating districts that maximized Black political



A college football star and gifted public speaker, Representative J.C. Watts Jr. of Oklahoma became the first African American to join Republican leadership as the House Republican Conference chair.

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The first Black Republican Representative to serve in the House in nearly six decades, Gary A. Franks was also the first African American elected from Connecticut.

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power across districts, even if it made some current districts less demographically cohesive. By 2021 there was, according to a journalist, something "closer to a consensus that minority voters deserve to wield influence in more seats."[19]

While the boundaries of congressional districts framed the struggle for access to the House, African Americans seeking election to the Senate faced an obstinate, seemingly insuperable barrier. In 1966, Senator Edward Brooke became the first African American elected to the Senate since Reconstruction—and the first to be elected by popular vote. After Brooke's unsuccessful re-election bid in 1978, no Black American served in the Senate until the election of Carol Moseley Braun in 1992. She became just the fourth African American ever to serve in the Senate and the first to be elected as a Democrat.[20]

Lingering racial prejudices, difficulty in securing funding, and the relative weakness of Black voting blocs in statewide elections cumulatively discouraged many qualified candidates from seeking a Senate seat. The major parties nominated only nine African Americans as Senate candidates in the twentieth century, and these included Brooke and Moseley Braun. Reflecting on his career as the longest-serving African American in the chamber's history, Senator Brooke noted that when he came to Washington in 1967, Margaret Chase Smith of Maine, a former House Member, was the lone woman. But by 2018, 23 women, including one Black woman, served in the Senate—many of whom had served in the House. Black Representatives have not been able to follow a similar path to the Senate through the House. To date, only one African-American Representative has been elected to the Senate—Tim Scott—though several have attempted to make this transition, including Alan Wheat of Kansas, Denise L. Majette of Georgia, and Harold E. Ford Jr. of Tennessee. According to Brooke, the lack of Black representation in the Senate remained "a blight on the American electorate that should be removed."[21]



Carol Moseley Braun of Illinois testifies during Senate confirmation hearings on her concurrent appointment in 1999 as U.S. Ambassador to New Zealand and Samoa. Elected in 1992, Moseley Braun was the first Black woman to serve in the Senate.

Image courtesy of the U.S. Senate Historical Office

Since 2000, the number of Black Senators has increased at a glacial pace. In 2004, Barack Obama—a theretofore little-known Illinois state senator—won election to a seat held by retiring incumbent Peter G. Fitzgerald, who had defeated Senator Moseley Braun in her 1998 re-election bid. Throughout his time in office, he was the only Black Senator—as were his four African-American predecessors. Only in 2013, when William "Mo" Cowan of Massachusetts was appointed to the Senate and joined Senator Tim Scott, did that body include two African-American Members at the same time; Cowan resigned a few months later, but Senator Cory A. Booker of New Jersey won a special election in October 2013. At the start of the 115th Congress, the Senate reached another milestone when Kamala D. Harris of California brought the total number of concurrently serving African-American Senators to three for the first time. In January 2021, Raphael Warnock of Georgia became the 11th African American in history to serve in the Senate. That same month Harris resigned to become Vice President of the United States, and the Senate remained at three Black Senators.

ADJUSTING TO NEW CONGRESSIONAL POLITICS

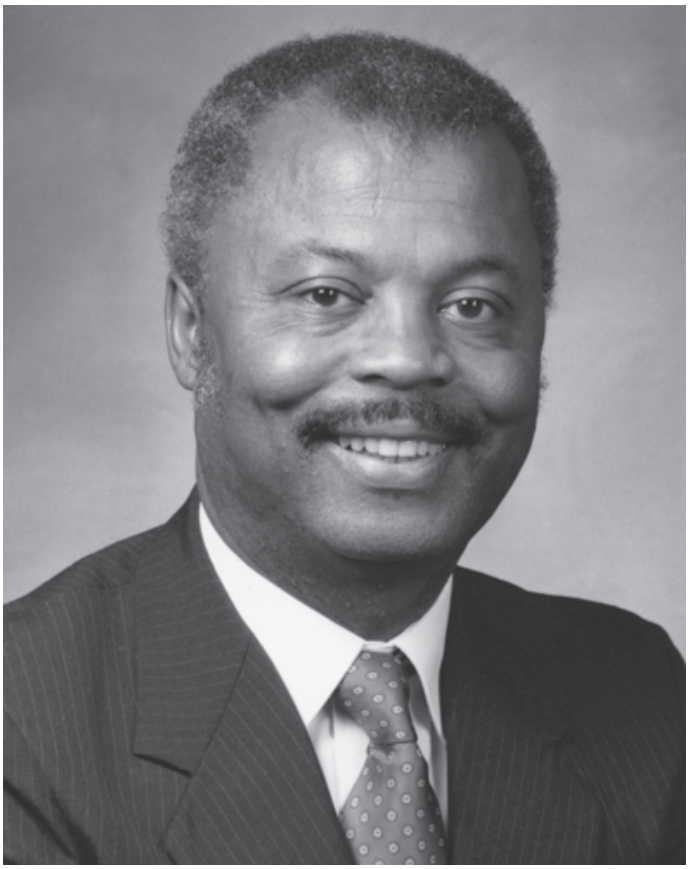
In 1992, with the election of the second Democratic President during the CBC's history, William J. Clinton, political commentators believed the group would be able to advance a broad legislative agenda. Yet, the CBC was

often at odds with the Clinton administration, much as the caucus found itself at odds with President James Earl "Jimmy" Carter 16 years prior. The key difference was that in 1993, the CBC was much more powerful than it was in 1977 when there were only 16 caucus members during Carter's first year. "It will make a tremendous difference," Donald M. Payne of New Jersey said in late 1992 of the potential influence of the soon-to-be enlarged caucus. "With additional members, the Congressional Black Caucus will be more effective. We will hold the balance on some crucial votes, just like the conservative Southern Democrats who sided with Republicans in the early years of the Reagan administration," he added. With more members, the CBC hoped to persuade the Clinton administration to support its preferred policies.[22]

Perhaps nowhere was the new power of the CBC more apparent than in the Clinton administration's changing policy towards Haiti. In September 1991, a military coup removed Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide from power. Aristide, a former Catholic priest and reformer, had been elected in 1990 after several years of political disorder following the end of the François "Papa Doc" Duvalier regime, a father-and-son dictatorship that ruled the island for almost 30 years, until 1986. Aristide moved to Washington, DC, where he began lobbying for the U.S. government to aid his return to power. Black Members of Congress quickly became some of Aristide's most important advocates.[23]

Following the coup that toppled the Aristide government, thousands of Haitians fled the country with the hope of receiving political refugee status in the United States. The George H.W. Bush administration intercepted Haitian refugees along the 700 miles of water between the island and Florida and repatriated them before they reached American shores. Clinton was critical of the policy during his 1992 presidential campaign but continued it after he took office. Many in the CBC criticized Clinton and called for humane treatment of refugees and the restoration of Aristide to power.[24]

The CBC had long denounced Democratic and Republican Presidents alike for what Shirley Chisholm called the government's "tragic and blatantly discriminatory treatment" of Haitian refugees. In March 1994, the CBC increased its pressure on the Clinton administration. All 40 members, including Senator Carol Moseley Braun and Representative Gary Franks, signed a letter to Clinton laying out a series of steps the administration should take to improve its refugee policies. The letter called for the resignation of Lawrence A. Pezzullo, the administration's special envoy to Haiti and someone the CBC saw as insufficiently tough on the coup leaders. The CBC also sought sanctions against the Haitian leaders who backed the coup, harsher trade restrictions against Haiti's government, and an end to the practice of intercepting Haitian refugees at sea. All House members of the CBC cosponsored legislation putting into effect the recommendations it made to the Clinton administration.[25]



As Congressional Black Caucus chair during the 104th Congress (1995–1997), Donald M. Payne of New Jersey earned a reputation for his low-key and thoughtful leadership style.

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Due largely to the pressure from the CBC, Clinton replaced Pezzullo with William H. Gray III, the former Pennsylvania Representative and, at the time of his retirement in 1991, the Majority Whip. For Kweisi Mfume, Gray's appointment signaled to the CBC that the Clinton administration was listening. "This was just like having one of us in the position," Mfume said about Gray's appointment. The Clinton administration also brought its policies toward Haiti and Haitian refugees into alignment with the legislation introduced by the CBC in March.



An ordained minister, New York Representative Floyd H. Flake served on the Banking and Financial Services Committee where he supported urban economic development.

Image courtesy of the U.S. House of Representatives Photography Office

Eventually, in late September 1994, President Clinton ordered troops to the Caribbean island, and Haiti's military rulers agreed to allow Aristide to resume power.[26]

Despite the unity the CBC showed during the debate over Haiti, the caucus often featured a range of different policy preferences, particularly when opposing a Democratic President's priorities.[27]

Divisions among Black Democrats over the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), for example, revealed how Black Members attempted to maneuver within a changing Democratic Party and how new ways of thinking about the relationship between government policy and the economy shaped debate within the CBC. The CBC opposed the trade agreement that eliminated restrictions on trade and investment between the United States, Mexico, and Canada. Black Members argued that the trade deal would cause factories, an important employer of working-class Black Americans, to leave the United States for Mexico in search of lower labor costs. The CBC was not alone in its opposition; a majority of House Democrats opposed it, including Majority Leader Richard Andrew Gephardt of Missouri. Nevertheless, eight Black Members in the House and Carol Moseley Braun in the Senate voted in favor of the bill, which went into effect in 1994.[28]

The influx of Members from rural and suburban districts brought new ideas and outlooks to the caucus, which in turn challenged the CBC's traditional domestic focus on urban issues. New Members won committee assignments that matched the interests of their southern and rural districts. For example, four Members elected in November 1992—Eva Clayton, Sanford Bishop, Earl Hilliard, and Cynthia McKinney—all from southern states, joined the Agriculture Committee in the 103rd Congress. In 2021, David Scott of Georgia, who has served on the committee since his first term in the 108th Congress (2003–2005), became the first African American to chair the Agriculture Committee. For Clayton, a seat on the Agriculture Committee allowed her to serve a diverse mix of people in her largely rural district. "I had the big poultry, I had peanut farmers, I had tobacco farmers, and I had small farmers and the black farmers. And I represented a lot of poor folks. So the issues intertwined for me," she explained.[29]

In 1995, Republicans won control of Congress and their first House majority in 40 years, stalling the CBC's legislative momentum and hard-fought institutional gains. The institutional structure of the House, which favors the majority, relegated all Democratic Representatives, regardless of race, to a secondary role. One of the first tasks of the new Republican majority was to end House funding for legislative service organizations, which included interest caucuses, including the CBC. With limited resources, the CBC relied more heavily on the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation and outside sources of funding. Despite the challenges, many members of the caucus promised to continue and redouble their mission. "The Congressional Black Caucus has got to yell louder and scream or be steamrollered," asserted Representative McKinney.[30]

Amid the party-control change, some Black Democrats sought ways to work with the new Republican majority on certain issues. On several occasions Representative Floyd H. Flake, a minister representing a largely middle-class Black constituency in Queens, New York, supported Republican efforts to direct tax breaks and private school vouchers to address poverty and low educational outcomes. For Flake, who ran a private school through his church, school vouchers represented a "choice" for parents, especially low-income parents in cities, to get their children out of

public schools that "in certain communities are failing our children," he said. Most Black Democratic Members opposed both school vouchers and Flake's efforts to work with Republicans to pass legislation. Opponents of private school vouchers argued that funding them took money, resources, and students away from public schools, further damaging the public education system. Nor was Flake alone in working across the aisle. Harold Ford Jr. and Artur Davis of Alabama also occasionally voted with the GOP on social and cultural issues such as a constitutional amendment prohibiting same-sex marriage.[31]

The change in party control in the House—largely the result of southern White Democrats being replaced by an insurgent Republican Party in the South—meant that Black Members now represented a larger percentage of the Democratic Caucus. The relative electoral safety of their districts helped Black legislators accrue seniority and move into Democratic leadership roles.[32]

The trajectory of Black Republicans in the Congress was different. In the last 40 years, a small but significant cohort of Black Republican Members joined the House after many decades of near-exclusive Democratic Party affiliation among elected African Americans. Nine Black Republican Members have been elected to the House since 1978, eight of them since 1990.[33]

There have been several notable trailblazers among them. During his brief tenure in the House in the 96th Congress (1979–1981), Delegate Melvin Evans of the Virgin Islands made history by becoming the first Republican member of the CBC. Gary Franks, elected in 1990, was the first African-American Republican Representative elected to the House since 1929. In 2013, Tim Scott became the first African American from the South to serve in the Senate since 1881. In 2014, Mia B. Love of Utah became the first African-American Republican woman elected to Congress.

For the most part, the Black Republicans discussed in this section held policy preferences in line with the majority of the Republican Conference: favoring a smaller federal government, increasing defense funding, and opposing abortion. On occasion, Black Members opposed important Republican initiatives. For example, Will Hurd of Texas voted in 2014 to repeal the Affordable Care Act but then voted against the GOP's alternative health care bill in 2017. There were also occasions when Black Republicans openly disagreed with each other over issues directly related to racial inequality. Gary Franks, for example, was adamantly opposed to affirmative action and introduced legislation in 1995 to end its use in the federal government. J.C. Watts also opposed affirmative action but he did not support Franks's efforts. "[T]his country has not reached a level playing field. You can't get rid of affirmative action until you have something to replace it," Watts said, dissenting from Franks's legislation.[34]

Since the 1970s, Black Republicans have formed a variety of relationships with the CBC. Senator Edward Brooke was never a formal member of the caucus, but he did meet with the organization and seek out its members' advice and assistance on occasion. Melvin Evans was a CBC member and advocated CBC policies in his committee work. In the 1990s, Franks chose to join the CBC, while his colleague Watts did not. Later, Mia Love and Allen West of Florida chose to become CBC members, whereas Will Hurd and Tim Scott declined to join the caucus. West saw his membership in the CBC as a chance to give Black Republicans "a voice in the Congressional Black Caucus."[35]

Although the CBC had for much of its history sought to keep its ranks open to both Democrats and Republicans, the election of Gary Franks saw the caucus struggle to accept Black Members of all political beliefs. Initially, the caucus welcomed Franks as a full member. By the 103rd Congress, however, several Members called for his removal. Some members argued that a Republican should not be involved in the caucus's discussion of policy and strategy, while others were upset with Franks's stances on civil rights and voting rights issues. By the summer of 1993, the tension had reached a point that the CBC voted to allow Franks to attend only the beginning of meetings, traditionally when lunch was served. Soon, the CBC backed away from excluding Franks, but the relationship never improved. Franks eventually opted to skip CBC meetings, though he refused to resign from the caucus. Mia Love had a more amicable relationship with the caucus. Love criticized the CBC while campaigning for office, but as the only Republican Member in the CBC during her tenure, she grew to appreciate the caucus and defended it, arguing that "if my leadership asked me to go after a member of the Congressional Black Caucus, I won't do it."[36]

LEGISLATIVE INTERESTS

Even as the number of Black Republicans in Congress continued to grow, most Black lawmakers in this period were Democrats. Because of the CBC's increased membership, the presence of senior Black Members on important committees, and the move into party leadership



The first Black Republican woman in Congress, Mia B. Love of Utah speaks against the medical device tax in a speech on the House Floor on July 24, 2018.

Debate on H.R. 184, July 24, 2018, House Live, Office of the Clerk, U.S. House of Representatives, https://live.house.gov

positions by James Clyburn and others, Black lawmakers in the Democratic Party wielded more influence over legislation than they had in previous generations. Black Members often found common cause on an array of legislative items from criminal justice to voting rights to reforming the health care system. Yet, the diversity within the CBC meant that Black Members also often disagreed over political strategies and policy solutions.

Criminal Justice

Since the late 1960s, Congress has regularly debated anti-crime legislation. From the 1960s through the early 1990s violent crime rates rose across the country, before entering a multidecade decline. Fighting crime, particularly violent crime and drug use, became a common campaign platform. Lawmakers, both Republicans and Democrats, at the local, state, and federal levels, found electoral success in both passing more and harsher penalties for crimes and in funding police departments and the expansion of the prison system. In Congress, Black Members offered numerous policies meant to combat crime. Charles B. Rangel of New York, for instance, was a vocal proponent of expanded policing to fight the War on Drugs, while John Conyers Jr. of Michigan spent years as chair of the Judiciary Committee's Subcommittees on Crime and Criminal Justice, challenging continued racial inequities in the criminal justice system. Amid debate over the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994, Black Members sought to control crime in less punitive ways. But the debates over the legislation also revealed areas where Black Members of Congress disagreed.[37]

With the support of President Clinton, then Senator Joseph R. Biden Jr. of Delaware, who chaired the Senate Committee on the Judiciary, and Texas Representative Jack Bascom Brooks, the chair of the House Judiciary Committee, introduced similar crime bills in September 1993. The Senate passed a $22 billion measure that included additional penalties for a variety of crimes and created new categories of offenders. Senator Carol Moseley Braun successfully added an amendment to the Senate bill that allowed for children older than 13 to be prosecuted as adults for certain federal crimes involving firearms.[38]

The House had a more difficult time finding a majority for an omnibus crime bill. From the beginning, Black Members were some of the loudest critics of the legislation, particularly the bill's new sentencing guidelines and expansion of the death penalty. African Americans, especially low-income and working-class Black Americans living in cities hit hard by deindustrialization and White flight, had already been disproportionately affected by both the increase in crime and America's earlier punitive responses. For Black Members such as first-term Representative Bobby Scott, the focus on punishment and imprisonment only increased the high rates of incarceration that already afflicted Black communities. "In some inner cities, the incarceration rate approaches 3,000 [per 100,000 people] at an average cost of $25,000 a year… . It seems absolutely insane to take initiatives to increase the incarceration rate," Scott explained.[39]

For its part, the CBC backed a bill introduced by Craig A. Washington of Texas, known as the Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Reform Act. According to its authors, the bill focused on measures that got "at the root of the problem before the tragedy of crime and violence occurs." Among the policies included in the legislation were grants for community policing, night-time sports leagues (intended to keep kids busy and supervised), funding for incarceration programs that sought to keep families intact if a parent became incarcerated, prison drug treatment programs, and alternative sentencing options that did not automatically result in prison time. The authors of the bill recognized that the funding provided could not stop crime on its own. Successful crime prevention, the authors wrote, needed additional resources for social programs like drug treatment, Head Start, and the Special Supplemental Nutrition

Program for Women, Infants, and Children. The bill was emblematic of the CBC's continued call for government assistance to neglected communities over punishment.[40]

The CBC bill also sought to directly confront racism in the criminal justice system. "Reform of the criminal justice system is necessary to restore the credibility and respect that have been undermined by racism, excessive and disproportionate prison sentences, abusive police practice and civil forfeiture practices," the bill's authors explained. The legislation included instructions to the U.S. Attorney General to investigate and punish police officers and police departments for wrongdoing, a proposal to create a commission to study the "impact of criminal justice policy on [people of color] and criticism that the criminal justice system functions in a racially disparate manner," and a provision to restore voting rights in federal elections to certain former offenders. In addition, the bill included the Racial Justice Act, which empowered death row inmates to use statistics showing racial disparities in death penalty cases to challenge their capital sentences, as well as the Crack-Cocaine Equitable Sentencing Act, which would have ended a federal law that punished crack cocaine possession more harshly than powder cocaine possession and that had fueled racial disparities in drug sentencing.[41]

Washington's bill never made it out of committee, but the CBC's emphasis on preventive measures and social spending helped shape the final House bill, which included $5 billion more in federal funding than the Senate bill for "community crime prevention" initiatives, including grants for summer and after-school youth activities, funds for job training and substance abuse programs, grants for community development, the creation of courts for drug crimes, and the use of alternative punishments, such as boot camps and weekend incarceration. The Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994, which passed the House on April 21, also included more traditional anti-crime measures, such as funding to hire and train more police, grants for states to construct prisons, tougher sentencing requirements, and new federal offenses punishable by death.[42]

Throughout the debate, the CBC was particularly adamant that the final bill contain the Racial Justice Act (RJA). John Conyers first proposed the legislation in 1988, aiming to overturn the 1987 Supreme Court decision in *McCleskey v. Kemp*. That ruling held that a defendant proving "discriminatory effect" in death penalty cases through statistical analysis alone was not enough to prove a violation of their constitutional rights. The defendant also had to prove discriminatory intent by officials involved in the case. Conyers's bill would have allowed those convicted in capital cases to base an appeal on statistics showing racial disparity in how courts applied the death penalty. The House Judiciary Committee included a similar bill sponsored by California Representative William Donlon "Don" Edwards in the crime bill it sent to the floor in 1994. On April 21, the House passed the omnibus bill with the RJA.[43]

Senate Republicans, however, opposed the RJA and threatened to filibuster any bill including the provision. When the conference committee stripped the RJA from the larger bill, Representative Kweisi Mfume, the chair of the CBC, suggested that enough members of the caucus opposed the exclusion of the RJA from the compromised conference legislation to prevent passage of the bill in the House. The conferees and the Clinton administration agreed to exclude the RJA as a compromise to keep the omnibus bill's assault weapon ban, which was unpopular among pro-gun rights Democrats and Republicans alike.[44]

On August 11, 1994, Democratic House leadership and the Clinton administration experienced a stunning rebuke: 58 Democrats joined 167 Republicans to oppose a rules package that would have brought the legislation up for a vote without the RJA. Most of the Democrats who changed their vote from April opposed the assault weapon ban. But among the 58 Democrats were 10 Black Members



An independent-minded politician, Craig A. Washington of Texas called for an emphasis on crime prevention in the 1994 crime bill.

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who opposed the conference bill because of the removal of the RJA. Ten days later, after Democrats agreed to cut $3 billion in funding mostly for social services and preventative measures, including job training for young people in high-crime areas, the conference version of the Violent Crime Control and Enforcement Act passed the House. A large majority of CBC members voted in favor of the final bill—a measure pushed by a Democratic administration and backed by Democratic leadership in Congress—albeit some with more reservations than others. Black lawmakers voted for the bill for several reasons: some supported anti-crime measures and more punitive responses from the beginning; some decided provisions like the federal assault weapons ban and the Violence Against Women Act outweighed the law's punitive measures; and still others said their Black constituents back home demanded a crime bill. Twelve Black Members voted no on the final bill, but six of them, including Charles Rangel and John Lewis, in a show of support for the Democratic Party, had earlier voted in favor of the rules package, moving the conference bill to debate.[45]



The first African American to earn a spot on and eventually chair the Judiciary Committee, Michigan Representative John Conyers Jr.'s House career spanned more than 50 years.

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Sentencing Disparities

Among the bills added to Craig Washington's Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Reform Act was the Crack-Cocaine Equitable Sentencing Act. Sponsored by Charles Rangel, the legislation sought to remove sentencing laws that required equal mandatory prison time for the distribution of five grams of crack cocaine or 500 grams of powder cocaine. Sentencing disparity had received little mention during the debate over the 1994 omnibus crime bill. But in later years, several Black Members in Congress made ending the extreme disparity in sentencing between convictions for crack and powder cocaine possession a major priority, pointing out that the disproportionate guidelines resulted in racial inequality in drug sentencing and incarceration rates.[46]

Rangel was an unlikely leader in the fight against sentencing disparities. The New York Representative was chair of the Select Committee on Narcotics Abuse and Control until it disbanded at the end of the 102nd Congress (1991–1993), and had been a leading advocate for the 1986 Anti-Drug Abuse Act that originally amended the Controlled Substances Act to include the disparity between sentences for possession of crack and powder cocaine. Representing a district hard hit by heroin and then crack, and from a state where political forces had already produced some of the toughest narcotics penalties in the so-called Rockefeller Drug Laws, Rangel had made fighting the drug trade a top priority during his congressional career. But by the late 1980s, Rangel had begun to challenge drug-related prison policies.[47]

In October 1993, as both chambers of Congress worked on the crime bill, Rangel proposed the Crack-Cocaine Equitable Sentencing Act to end the disparity. He sponsored similar legislation in the 104th and 105th Congresses. By the mid-1990s, several members of the CBC had become vocal opponents of the continued sentencing disparity, as well.

Black lawmakers kept the issue alive in the coming decades. In 2007, when Democrats regained control of the House, John Conyers, who had joined the Judiciary Committee in his first term in 1965 and had spent his career in Congress pushing for alternatives to America's criminal justice policies, became the committee's chair. Another Black lawmaker, Bobby Scott, became chair of the Judiciary Committee's Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, and Homeland Security. Conyers and Scott, along with Judiciary Committee colleagues Maxine Waters and Sheila Jackson Lee of Texas used their influential posts to pass

sentencing reform legislation. In the 110th and 111th Congresses (2007–2011), several bills in both the House and Senate were introduced to end the cocaine sentencing disparity, and in 2010, the Fair Sentencing Act became law. The new law reduced the sentencing disparity from 100:1 to 18:1 and ended the mandatory five-year prison sentence for possession of crack cocaine. In 2021, Hakeem S. Jeffries of New York introduced legislation to eliminate the remaining disparity in sentencing; the House passed the bill in September 2021.[48]

Law Enforcement Reform

Confronting police brutality had long been a concern of Black Members of Congress. Following the 1950 police shooting of John Derrick, a 24-year-old Black man and Army veteran, Adam Clayton Powell Jr. of New York pressured the FBI to investigate acts of brutality perpetrated by the New York Police Department. "If a lynch mob can be investigated in Georgia, the murder of a Negro by two police officers in New York should be investigated," Powell declared, making plain the national scope of extrajudicial killings of Black Americans, while also indicting the forces of the state for their role in the violence. Although the civil rights revolution delivered formal legal equality in the 1960s, police brutality remained a pressing civil rights concern for Black legislators. By the 1990s, Black Members of Congress frequently spoke out against acts of police brutality. In 1991, the CBC met with the Justice Department to persuade them to investigate the Los Angeles Police Department after the police beating of Rodney King was caught on tape and aired across the country.[49]

Their efforts to address inequities in policing remained stalled for many years when, in August 2014, a police officer killed Michael Brown, an 18-year-old Black man, in Ferguson, Missouri. The shooting and the ensuing decision by a grand jury not to indict the police officer who shot Brown set off a wave of protests in the St. Louis region and across the country. Pushed by activists, reform of the criminal justice system—from police departments, to the courts, to prisons—surged to the forefront of the legislative agendas for Black Members of Congress. In January 2015, nine CBC members visited Ferguson to honor Martin Luther King Jr. and to support the community. At a church ceremony honoring King, CBC chair G.K. Butterfield of North Carolina lamented, "Black America continues to be victim of decades of discrimination and neglect by those in power," and Butterfield promised "that the issue



In 2018, John Lewis reflects on the crossing of the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama, in 1965.

Image courtesy of House Creative Services

of Criminal Justice Reform is the centerpiece of the CBC agenda. Empowering black communities to make political change is our agenda." One activist who participated in the demonstrations in Ferguson, Cori Bush of Missouri, won election to Congress in November 2020. Bush championed in Congress the demands for criminal justice reform she and her allies made in Ferguson.[50]

In the years after Ferguson and subsequent protests over the deaths of other Black men and women at the hands of police, Black Members of Congress frequently proposed reform legislation, though the bills rarely advanced far. Missouri Representative William Lacy Clay Jr., whose district included Ferguson, introduced legislation that would have limited the ability of law enforcement agencies to receive military equipment from the federal government. In 2015, Senator Tim Scott introduced the Walter Scott Notification Act of 2015, named in honor of a Black man (unrelated to Senator Scott) who was murdered by a police officer in North Charleston, South Carolina. That legislation would have made the distribution of certain federal funds for policing contingent on states reporting shootings by police officers. Other Members introduced legislation that would have funded body cameras for police officers, made federal funding contingent on de-escalation training for police, and prohibited the use of certain police restraint techniques, including the chokehold.[51]

While the legislation languished, the problem persisted. In May 2020, Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin killed George Floyd, a Black man, during an arrest. The murder was witnessed by a large crowd, and video of the incident quickly spread through social media sites. Outrage

over Floyd's death led to nationwide protests against police brutality and racism. In the House, Karen Bass, chair of the CBC, took the lead in writing legislation to reform policing in America. The George Floyd Justice in Policing Act of 2020 removed barriers to effective prosecution of police misconduct in federal courts, limited the use of lethal police practices, funded a registry to track police misconduct, created new standards for law enforcement accreditation, and expanded the Department of Justice's role in investigating and punishing cases of racial profiling by police officers at all levels of government. On the House Floor, Bass explained that the legislation "establishes a bold, transformative vision of policing in America." She placed the legislation and the protest movement that compelled House Democrats to act within the long history of African American activism. "Black communities have been, sadly, marching for over 100 years against police abuse and for the police to protect and serve our communities like they do elsewhere," Bass said. The bill passed the House in June 2020.[52]

In the Senate, Democrat Cory Booker and Republican Tim Scott led negotiations over police reform legislation on the north side of the Capitol. While Booker supported the House-passed bill, Scott introduced the JUSTICE Act, a Republican-supported criminal justice bill. The JUSTICE Act funded initiatives for better and more complete reporting on policing practices, funding for more police body cameras, and grants for training on de-escalation. Despite bipartisan agreement on the need for legislation, Senate negotiators failed to find a compromise between their police reform packages on substantial issues such as police department transparency and accountability.[53]



With his fist raised in the air, a man peacefully protests. During the summer of 2020, protesters marched in Washington, DC, and around the country in support of the Black Lives Matter movement.

Image courtesy of the Library of Congress, photograph by Tracy Meehleib

In 2022, Black legislators achieved a long-sought victory in the fight to protect Black Americans and acknowledge historic injustice when President Joseph R. Biden Jr. signed into a law the Emmett Till Antilynching Act. More than 120 years earlier, during an era in which thousands of Black Americans were brutally murdered by lynch mobs, George Henry White of North Carolina had proposed the first federal antilynching law. Since then, Members of Congress had periodically sought to pass federal antilynching legislation. Often such bills were filibustered in the Senate. But in 2019, the Senate passed the Justice for Victims of Lynching Act, which had been introduced by Senators Kamala Harris, Tim Scott, and Cory Booker. That same year, Bobby Rush sponsored the Emmett Till Antilynching Act, which differed slightly from the Senate version; Rush's bill passed the House but did not receive a vote in the Senate. Rush named the bill in honor of a 14-year-old Chicago boy who in 1955 was kidnapped and murdered by White men in Mississippi for allegedly whistling at a White woman in a store. Till's murder, his mother's decision to give him an open-casket funeral to show the world the harm done to her son, and the acquittal of his murderers shocked the country and helped build support for the civil rights movement. Rush once again introduced his antilynching legislation in the 117th Congress. It passed both chambers and was signed into law by President Biden in March 2022. The legislation made lynching a federal hate crime and increased prison time for hate crimes that resulted in serious bodily injury or death.[54]

Voting Rights

In 2006, Congress extended the Voting Rights Act for 25 years. In the Judiciary Committee, CBC chair Melvin Watt, a member of the Subcommittee on the Constitution, and Judiciary ranking member John Conyers worked closely with committee chair Frank James Sensenbrenner Jr. of Wisconsin to structure a voting rights extension that could win support from both Democrats and Republicans. In the process, the committee let certain sections of the law expire while focusing on others. "The continued pervasiveness of

racially polarized voting in the jurisdictions covered by the [Voting Rights Act's] expiring provisions," Watt argued, "demonstrates that racial and language minorities remain politically vulnerable, warranting continued protection" by the law.[55]

Even though Republican leadership backed the extension, several Republicans opposed it, claiming that the districts that were required to meet the preclearance standards of Section 5 were being punished for voter repression that occurred in the past. They also objected to the bilingual voter assistance provisions of the law. As a compromise with the bill's most fervent opponents, House Republican leadership allowed four amendments to reach the floor that might kill the measure, but all of the amendments were rejected, and the law preserved the preclearance provision in Section 5 and mandated the printing of bilingual ballots.[56]

Despite the 2006 extension, opponents of the Voting Rights Act continued to challenge parts of the law in the courts. In *Shelby County v. Holder* (2013), the Supreme Court ruled that the coverage formula in Section 4 of the Voting Rights Act, which determined which jurisdictions would be subjected to federal preclearance, was unconstitutional. In a 5 to 4 decision, the court judged the Voting Rights Act's coverage formula to be outdated, "based on decades-old data and eradicated practices," it said, and allowed the formerly covered states to change their voting practices without Justice Department approval.[57]

With the end of the preclearance requirement, state legislatures, especially in the South, rolled out new laws, such as new voter identification requirements, that many Black Members of Congress worried would make it more difficult to register and vote. For some, the new laws threatened the gains made during the civil rights movement and intervening years. "This decision," CBC chair Marcia Fudge declared, "is not only a setback to voting rights; it's a setback to our country and to our democracy." As Sheila Jackson Lee explained, "Without Section 5, Congress recognized that many of the advances of the past decades could be wiped out overnight with new schemes and devices." In 2015, Terri A. Sewell, who grew up in Selma, Alabama—the site of a brutal attack by police on voting rights activists, including future Representative John Lewis—introduced legislation that revised the preclearance coverage formula in order to pass judicial review and once again allow for the Department of Justice to require certain state and local governments to seek approval before making any changes to voting laws. Sewell's legislation passed the House in 2019, after the Democrats regained the majority, and again in 2021, when the bill was renamed the John R. Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act, in honor of the voting rights activist and longtime Representative from Georgia who passed away in 2020.[58]



Representative John Lewis and his House Democratic colleagues launch a campaign to gain bipartisan support to restore key provisions of the Voting Rights Act. In 2015, advocates of H.R. 2867 failed to get the legislation discharged from the Judiciary Committee.

Image courtesy of the U.S. House of Representatives Photography Office

Challenging Inequality

Black Members profiled in this section continued to confront the persistent and specific problems of economic inequality faced by Black Americans. Despite significant gains in the half century since the passage of the Civil Rights Act and Voting Rights Act, in 2020 the Joint Economic Committee made clear that "these very visible signs of improvement mask deep inequities." Black Members, though increasingly diverse in political ideologies, party goals, and constituent pressures, continued to work to reduce these inequalities.[59]

Many Black Members in this period remained vocal opponents of efforts to cut back the federal social safety net. In the 1990s, the CBC resisted the call by Republicans and the Clinton administration to, in the words of the President, "end welfare as we know it." In the 104th Congress, the new Republican majority in both chambers pushed for massive reforms to the nation's welfare system. Clinton agreed to sign the bill into law, emphasizing the reduction in federal spending that would accompany the bill's passage. The Personal Responsibility and Work



From his seat on the Oversight and Government Reform Committee, Maryland Representative Elijah E. Cummings sought to provide support for mortgage holders during the foreclosure crisis in 2008. In 2019, Cummings became chair of the committee.

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Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 tied eligibility for assistance to work requirements, placed restrictions on aid to immigrants, and gave states control over the distribution of funds. All but three Black Members of Congress voted against the legislation. Black lawmakers argued that welfare recipients had long been demonized by generations of politicians as unworthy of public support. They rejected a bill that, in their view, shamed and punished families and children for being poor without making sufficient effort to correct and ameliorate the conditions that caused millions to live in poverty. Eva Clayton voiced the opinion of many of her colleagues when she argued the bill was "short on reform, weak on work, and tough on our children."[60]

During the financial crisis and Great Recession, which began in late 2007 and continued through 2009, Black Members played a prominent role advocating for policies to support Americans who had lost jobs and those whose homes had gone into foreclosure. Aiming to prevent the total collapse of the banking industry, the George W. Bush administration and congressional leaders, with Democratic majorities in both chambers, passed legislation to buy up toxic mortgage securities and bank stocks to stabilize the financial services industry. Across the political spectrum, the plan to first help banks rather than the millions of people who struggled to pay their mortgages proved controversial. Initially, a majority of the CBC, including the chair, Carolyn Kilpatrick, voted against the Emergency Stabilization Act of 2008. Elijah E. Cummings of Maryland explained his dissatisfaction with the legislation: "Any measure we adopt must include strict oversight and safeguards against giving blank checks to corporate executives whose poor judgment has led us down this road, and that provides substantial relief to millions of Americans who continue to suffer under the overbearing burden of our current economic state." Amendments to the legislation, and a worsening financial picture in the weeks after the initial vote, led most Black Members to support the legislation, which provided $700 billion in relief for financial companies.[61]

After Barack Obama became President in January 2009, he worked with the Democratic Congress to pass a stimulus plan designed to lift the economy out of the recession. Black lawmakers helped shape the legislation, working to ensure that their communities were not left out of the massive national relief effort. Ways and Means Chair Charles Rangel played a key role crafting and passing the bill that became the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. Working with Rangel, James Clyburn successfully included his 10-20-30 program in the final bill. The 10-20-30 program ensured that at least 10 percent of the stimulus funding went to areas where 20 percent of the population had lived in "persistent poverty" for 30 years.[62]

Financial regulation was another aspect of the recovery program in which Black lawmakers worked to aid Black Americans. Disappointed in the lack of federal aid for minority-owned businesses and minority home owners, the 10 Black Members of the Financial Services Committee, led by Maxine Waters, boycotted a committee session in order to delay a vote on a financial regulatory bill. "Since last September," Waters explained, "we have continuously voted for bailouts and reform for the very institutions that created this devastation without properly protecting the African American and minority communities or small businesses. That stops today." Waters and the other CBC members on the committee successfully placed several provisions in the legislation that would become the Dodd–Frank Wall Street

Reform and Consumer Protection Act, including $3 billion for homeowners facing the threat of foreclosure, an extra $1 billion in funding for communities to buy and renovate abandoned buildings, and the creation of an "Office of Minority and Women Inclusion" at several federal agencies overseeing financial regulations, including the U.S. Department of Treasury.[63]

In addition to managing the nation's economic recovery, the Obama administration and congressional Democrats sought ways to overhaul the American health care system. Rangel, as chair of the Ways and Means Committee, which had jurisdiction over taxes and Medicare, worked alongside George Miller of California, chair of the Committee on Education and Labor, and Henry Arnold Waxman of California, chair of the Energy and Commerce Committee, to shepherd the administration's health care bill through the House. As the chief tax writer, Rangel was adamant that the new legislation would not include a tax on employer-provided health benefits, which could have threatened the continued use of employer-provided plans by millions of workers—many of which were hard won by labor unions, a core Democratic constituency. Rangel also ensured that the public option, a federally funded health care insurance available to all, which the CBC strongly backed, made it through the committee. In November 2009, the House passed a health care bill that included a public option, but the provision was dropped amid Senate opposition. President Obama signed the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act into law on March 23, 2010. All but one Black Democrat, Artur Davis, voted for the final legislation.[64]

Debate over health care reform gave the Congressional Black Caucus, the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, and the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus—which together are known as the Congressional Tri-Caucus—an opportunity to advocate for legislation that addressed racial and ethnic inequities in health services and the health care industry. In 2009, Virgin Islands Delegate Donna M. Christensen, a physician who helped represent the CBC during the health care debate, sponsored the Health Equity and Accountability Act. The bill established federal programs to increase the racial, ethnic, and language diversity of the health care workforce; fund language services for non-English speakers; and created federal programs to collect data in an effort to remove disparities in health care. Through the efforts of the Tri-Caucus, several provisions related to ending disparities in health care were included in the Affordable Care Act.[65]

Honoring the History and Legacy of Black Americans

Black Members frequently sought to recognize and honor African-American history, icons of the civil rights movement, and other distinguished Black public figures. In 1973, the late Puerto Rican Major League Baseball player and humanitarian Roberto Clemente became the first Black man to win a Congressional Gold Medal—the highest honor Congress can bestow on the nation's outstanding citizens. In 1977, singer Marian Anderson became the first Black woman to receive the Gold Medal. Nearly 30 years later, Representative Julia May Carson of Indiana played a central role in securing legislation to recognize Rosa Parks, whose act of civil disobedience—refusing to give up her seat on a segregated bus in Montgomery, Alabama, in 1955—helped galvanize the modern civil rights movement. When Parks died in October 2005, Congress conferred an unprecedented honor on her by passing a resolution to have her body lie in honor in the Capitol Rotunda for two days to allow visitors to pay their respects—a distinction normally reserved for Presidents, military leaders, and other federal officials. Parks was the first woman ever accorded this honor. U.S. Capitol Police Officer Jacob J. Chestnut Jr. was the first African American in history to lie in honor; while on duty in July 1998, Officer Chestnut and Detective John M. Gibson were killed by a gunman in the Capitol.[66]



President Barack Obama meets with the Congressional Black Caucus in the White House on May 12, 2011. Featured in this image, from left to right: Melvin L. Watt of North Carolina, Sanford D. Bishop Jr. of Georgia, G.K. Butterfield of North Carolina, Emanuel Cleaver II of Missouri, President Barack Obama, Donna M. Christensen of the U.S. Virgin Islands, Yvette D. Clarke of New York, and André Carson of Indiana.

Image courtesy of the Barack Obama Presidential Library/National Archives and Records Administration



In February 2013, President Barack Obama unveiled the statue of civil rights icon Rosa Parks that is exhibited in National Statuary Hall. Eight years before the unveiling, Rosa Parks lay in honor in the Capitol Rotunda.

Image courtesy of House Creative Services

In the twenty-first century, African-American Members of Congress also worked to celebrate the contributions Black men and women made to congressional history. Portraits were commissioned of pioneering Representatives Joseph H. Rainey of South Carolina and Shirley Chisholm, as well as Senator Blanche K. Bruce of Mississippi. J.C. Watts introduced a successful resolution to create a task force to document the work of enslaved African Americans who built the Capitol, and with the opening of the Capitol Visitor Center (CVC) to the public in 2008, John Lewis sponsored a resolution to place a marker in the CVC to commemorate the same workers. Congress also dedicated the main space in the CVC, Emancipation Hall, in honor of the enslaved laborers.[67]

One of the most significant efforts to document and convey the African-American experience was the establishment of the National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC). In 1986, Mickey Leland of Texas introduced a joint resolution that called for the planning of an "Afro-American museum and cultural center." The resolution passed both chambers. Beginning in 1988, Representative John Lewis introduced legislation in every Congress to create a museum dedicated to African-American history and culture. A 2001 law established a presidential commission to plan the construction and design of the museum. And two years later, Congress passed legislation establishing the NMAAHC within the Smithsonian Institution. The museum opened in 2016, just steps from the Washington Monument, a testament to Black lawmakers' insistence on the centrality of the Black experience to American life.[68]

In June 2021, Congress passed and President Biden signed a new law establishing a holiday to commemorate the emancipation of enslaved peoples in the United States. Juneteenth was first celebrated by African Americans in Galveston, Texas, to celebrate June 19, 1865, the day U.S. General Gordon Granger issued General Order No. 3 announcing the emancipation of enslaved people throughout the state. What started as a holiday celebrated just in Texas spread to Black communities across the country. In 1996, Barbara-Rose Collins of Michigan successfully shepherded a joint resolution through the House recognizing Juneteenth and calling on Congress to celebrate "the end of slavery in the United States." A year later, J.C. Watts introduced a similar resolution that also passed the House; a partner resolution passed the Senate that year. In the 2000s, Black Members, including Danny K. Davis of Illinois and then Senator Barack Obama introduced legislation to commemorate the holiday. In 2020, Sheila Jackson Lee, who for several years had sponsored bills recognizing the holiday, introduced legislation to make Juneteenth a national holiday. Jackson Lee proposed the same bill the following year, and a related bill sponsored by Senator Edward John Markey of Massachusetts became law. On the day of the bill's passage in the House, Jackson Lee reminded her colleagues "that this has been a long journey. There have been mountains and valleys, but we stand here today, free to vote for the Juneteenth National Independence Day, a Federal holiday for America. Freedom is now."[69]

LEADERSHIP

Building off the successes of previous Black Members such as Shirley Chisholm, William Gray, and John Lewis, Black Members in this era ascended the leadership ranks of both parties.

The Republican Revolution, as the party's rise to power in the House in 1995 was called, provided an opportunity for a small but significant cohort of Black Republicans

to achieve influence within the party, including J.C. Watts. A star quarterback for the University of Oklahoma football team, Watts was one of 54 Republicans to win a Democratic-held seat in the 1994 elections. Watts quickly became a rising star in the Republican Conference. In 1997, he gave the televised Republican response to President Clinton's State of the Union Address. A year later, Watts defeated future Speaker of the House John A. Boehner of Ohio to become Republican Conference chair in the 106th Congress (1999–2001), the fourth ranking position in the conference. As chair, Watts presided over weekly party meetings and served as a spokesperson for the conference. House Republicans re-elected Watts as conference chair in the 107th Congress, his last term in office.[70]

In November 2006, the Democratic Party won a majority in the House of Representatives for the first time since the 103rd Congress. The caucus unanimously elected James Clyburn as Majority Whip, the third-ranking position in the Democratic Caucus. Clyburn, who had become chair of the Democratic Caucus in the previous Congress, was only the second Black Member to rise to Majority Whip, after William Gray, who served in the position from 1989 until his retirement in late 1991. Clyburn viewed his election as part of the long struggle by American Americans to be accepted in positions of authority, particularly political authority. "I basically have one goal in life, and that is to destroy every myth I possibly can about black people." He promised "to do this job in such a way to change attitudes, so it won't take another 20 years for another black person to be in leadership." Three other Black Members worked with Clyburn in the Whip's Office: John Lewis, who served as a chief deputy whip and then senior chief deputy whip beginning in the 102nd Congress; Maxine Waters, who began her tenure as chief deputy whip in the 106th Congress; and G.K. Butterfield, who became a chief deputy whip in the 110th Congress.[71]

Black Members also rose to chair several important committees in the 110th Congress. Charles Rangel became chair of Ways and Means. John Conyers, who had served as chair of the Committee on Government Operations in the 102nd and 103rd Congresses, led the Judiciary Committee. The 110th Congress also saw the first Black women rise to top committee posts. Stephanie Tubbs Jones of Ohio became chair of the Ethics Committee, and Juanita Millender-McDonald of California became chair of the Committee on House Administration. In addition, Bennie G. Thompson of Mississippi became chair of the Homeland Security Committee. By the summer of 2022, there were 58 Black Members in the House and three Black Members in the Senate, many of whom had acquired years of seniority on some of the House's most prominent committees. In the 117th Congress, Black Members chaired six standing committees, one select committee, and 27 subcommittees.

As the number of Black Members rose in the 1990s and 2000s, so did the number of Black congressional staffers. The House Office of Diversity and Inclusion, which the House created early in the 116th Congress, published data from a 2021 survey (in which roughly half of House staff participated) showing that Black Americans accounted for 15.2 percent of respondents—tracking above the percentage of the total U.S. population that identifies as African American (12.3 percent). But disparities in the workforce emerged when examining the inroads that people of color made among staff leadership positions. An independent study conducted in 2018 documented a significant lack of racial diversity among senior House staff—defined as chiefs of staff, legislative directors, and communications directors—in leadership offices, Member offices, and committees. For instance, African-American staffers



Juanita Millender-McDonald of California made history in 2007 by becoming one of the first African-American women to chair a standing committee in Congress.

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composed 6.7 percent of the House's senior staff roles, while Latinos and Latinas accounted for just 3.8 percent of senior House staff. For African Americans, that figure represented only half of their percentage of the total U.S. population. For Latinos and Latinas, the drop-off was even more severe: their proportion of senior staff accounted for less than a quarter of the 17.3 percent who identify as Latino and Latina among the total U.S. population.[72]

Despite the relative lack of diversity at the highest staff levels in the House, the period from 2007 to 2021 saw the service of several trailblazing aides and notable appointments among the institution's top officers. In 2007, Lorraine C. Miller became the first African American elected to serve as a House officer after she was appointed by Speaker Nancy Pelosi of California to serve as the Clerk of the House of Representatives. The Clerk plays a key role as the House's recordkeeper and assists with floor operations; Miller served in the post until January 2011. Miller, who was from Fort Worth, Texas, began her career as a teacher before working as a staff member for Speakers Jim Wright of Texas and Thomas S. Foley of Washington, Representative John Lewis, then Democratic Leader Pelosi, and in the executive office of President Clinton. Miller also served as president of the Washington, DC, chapter of the NAACP. After her career in the House, Miller became a member of the board of directors of the national NAACP and its interim president and CEO in 2013 and 2014. Eight years later, in January 2019, Cheryl L. Johnson, a New Orleans, Louisiana, native, became the second African-American Clerk. Before being elected Clerk, Johnson had spent 20 years working for several House committees and a decade working for the Smithsonian Institution. During her tenure at the Smithsonian, Johnson worked as chief of staff to the director of the National Museum of African American History and Culture. In 2021, Major General William Joseph Walker, Commanding General of the District of Columbia Army and Air Force National Guard, became the first African American elected to serve as Sergeant at Arms of the House of Representatives.[73]



In 2019, Cheryl L. Johnson became the second African-American woman elected as Clerk of the House of Representatives.

Image courtesy of the Office of the Clerk, U.S. House of Representatives

In the period covered in this section, the U.S. Senate also appointed African Americans to significant officer positions. In 2003, Reverend Barry Black became the first African American Chaplain of the U.S. Senate, a position he continues to hold. Black spent more than two decades in the U.S. Navy, rising to the rank of rear admiral, and retiring as the chief of chaplains of the U.S. Navy. On March 1, 2021, Sonceria Ann Berry was sworn in as the first African-American Secretary of the Senate, a position analogous to that of the Clerk of the House. Berry had served in Senate offices since 1979, when she came to Capitol Hill to work on the staff of Alabama Senator Howell Thomas Heflin.[74]

In November 2008, Senator Barack Obama, a member of the CBC, became the first African-American candidate to win election as President of the United States. On his victory night, Obama told a worldwide audience: "It's been a long time coming, but tonight, because of what we did on this day, in this election, at this defining moment, change has come to America." On Capitol Hill, Black lawmakers celebrated the historic nature of Obama's win. "This monumental victory represents a significant shift in our nation's politics and priorities," said CBC chair Carolyn Kilpatrick. "It signals that we have made great strides in breaking down racial and cultural barriers that have historically paralyzed the full participation of all Americans," she added.[75]

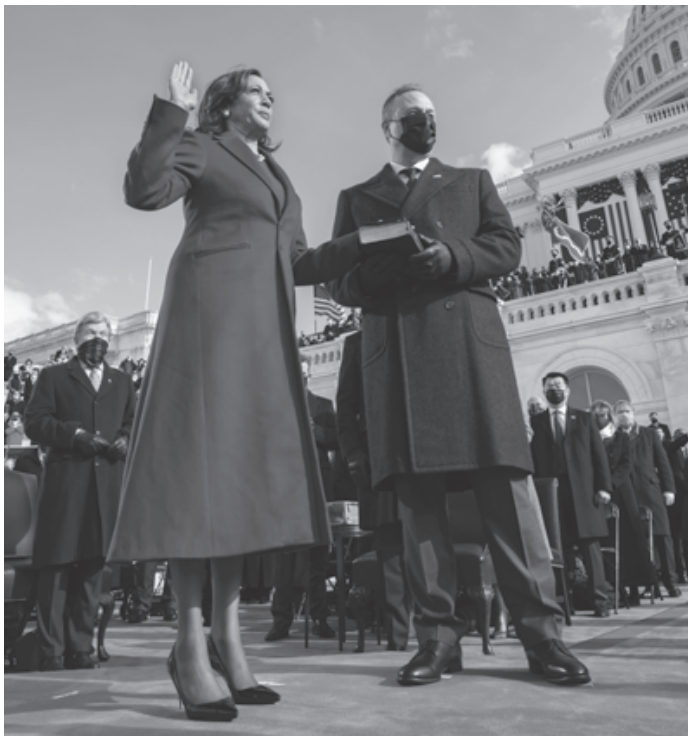
For many in the CBC, Obama's election meant that America had a President who knew firsthand the CBC's agenda. "We won't get preferential treatment because we

are black," Charles Rangel said, "but he will know who we are and what the struggle is and why our legislative agenda is there." Yet, other Black Members recognized that the demands of representing the whole country might limit Obama's ability to support many of the CBC's policy goals.[76]

The CBC occasionally expressed frustration with the Obama administration. In late 2009, for example, as lawmakers worked on responses to the Great Recession, some CBC members were critical of the Obama administration's refusal to support policies and programs specifically designed to support people of color. CBC members were critical of the President's willingness to consider cuts to Medicaid and Medicare, his Afghanistan War policies, and the lack of diversity in some of his Cabinet selections. Emanuel Cleaver, the chair of the CBC during the 112th Congress (2011–2013), explained that the CBC's occasional conflict with the Obama administration was in keeping with the CBC's tradition of holding presidential administrations accountable, regardless of party. "There has not been one president where they have been sworn in and we have said, 'Problem solved.' "[77]

Two years into President Obama's tenure, Republicans regained the majority in the House. Although they no longer controlled the legislative agenda on Capitol Hill, most Black Members had won re-election in 2010 and further solidified their influence within the Democratic Caucus. The return of the Democratic Party to the House majority in January 2019 enabled more Black lawmakers to join congressional leadership. James Clyburn returned to his position as Majority Whip, and Hakeem Jeffries, a third-term Representative, was elected chair of the House Democratic Caucus, the fourth-ranking position in the caucus. Barbara Lee of California became co-chair of the Democratic Steering and Policy Committee, which makes committee assignments and helps set the party's agenda.

Twelve years after the election of Barack Obama, another Senator, Kamala Harris, the daughter of immigrants from India and Jamaica, broke new ground by becoming the first woman elected Vice President of the United States. During her acceptance speech on election night, Harris reflected on the struggle of the "[w]omen who fought and sacrificed so much for equality, liberty, and justice for all, including Black women, who are often, too often overlooked, but so often prove that they are the backbone of our democracy." During her speech Vice President-elect Harris also recalled the words of the late John Lewis: "Democracy is not a state. It is an act." To Harris, Lewis meant that "democracy is not guaranteed. It is only as strong as our willingness to fight for it, to guard it and never take it for granted."[78]



Kamala D. Harris takes the oath of office on January 20, 2021, and becomes the first woman and first African American to serve as Vice President of the United States. Standing next to Harris is her husband Douglas Emhoff.

Image courtesy of the White House, photograph by Chuck Kennedy

The men and women profiled in this edition of *Black Americans in Congress* understood that democracy was worth fighting for. Since 1870, Black lawmakers have dedicated their careers to securing the aspirations articulated in the Declaration of Independence and guaranteeing the rights established by the Constitution. For more than 150 years, Black Americans in Congress have worked, and continue to work, to make the promises of democracy—fair representation, equal protection, and political power—a reality for all Americans.

Notes

1 *Congressional Record*, House, 56th Cong., 2nd sess. (29 January 1901): 1638; "Congressional Black Caucus Swearing-In," C-SPAN, 5 January 1993, https://www.c-span.org/video/?36808-1/congressional-black-caucus-swearing.

2 There were 15 new majority-Black districts created after the 1990 census, but one district in Houston, Texas, had elected a Black Member every two years since Barbara Jordan in 1973, and another in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, re-elected White Representative Thomas Michael Foglietta.

3 Kent Jenkins Jr., "Mfume on the Move; The Baltimore Congressman, With His Eye on the Caucus and His Finger to the Wind," 8 December 1992, *Washington Post*: D1. Quotation from Robert Singh, *The Congressional*

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Barbara-Rose Collins

1939–2021

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1991–1997

Democrat from Michigan



Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

A longtime community activist, Barbara-Rose Collins was elected to Congress in 1990 on a platform to bring federal dollars and aid to her underserved neighborhood in downtown Detroit. In the House, Collins, a single mother, focused on her lifelong effort to ensure that Black families and Black communities had the resources and opportunities they needed to thrive. "I look forward to the collapse of racism in America and the rise of real freedom and equality for all of Black America," Collins told her colleagues on the House Floor. "The death of racism will allow young African-Americans to overcome obstacles and enjoy expanded opportunities."[1]

The eldest of four children of Lamar Nathaniel and Lou Versa Jones Richardson, Barbara-Rose Collins was born Barbara Rose Richardson in Detroit, Michigan, on April 13, 1939. Her mother was a homemaker, and her father worked as an auto manufacturer and later as an independent contractor in home improvement. Collins graduated from Cass Technical High School in 1957 and attended Detroit's Wayne State University, where she studied political science and anthropology. Collins left college to marry her classmate, Virgil Gary Collins, who later worked as a pharmaceutical salesman. They had three children, one of whom died in infancy. The couple divorced in 1960, and, as a single mother, Collins had to work multiple jobs. She received public financial assistance until she was hired as a business manager in the physics department at Wayne State, a position she held for nine years. Collins subsequently became an assistant in the office of equal opportunity and neighborhood relations at Wayne State.[2]

In the late 1960s, Collins heard a speech by Black activist Stokely Carmichael at Detroit's Shrine of the Black Madonna of the Pan African Orthodox Christian Church. Inspired by Carmichael's Black Power philosophy and community activism, Collins purchased a house within a block of her childhood home and joined the Shrine Church, whose agenda focused on uplifting Black neighborhoods. In 1971, Collins was elected to Detroit's region one school board, earning widespread recognition for her work on school safety and academic achievement. Encouraged by the Shrine Church pastor, Collins campaigned for a seat in the state legislature in 1974, hyphenating her name, Barbara-Rose, to distinguish herself from the other candidates. Victorious, she embarked on a six-year career in the state house. Collins chaired the constitutional revision and women's rights committee, which produced *Women in*

the Legislative Process, the first published report to document the status of women in the Michigan state legislature.[3]

Bolstered by her work in Detroit's most underserved neighborhoods, Collins considered running for the U.S. House of Representatives in 1980 against embattled downtown Representative Charles C. Diggs Jr. Collins's mentor, Detroit Mayor Coleman A. Young, advised her to run for Detroit city council the following year instead, and she did successfully. Seven years later in the Democratic primary, she challenged incumbent U.S. Representative George W. Crockett Jr., who had succeeded Diggs. In a hard-fought campaign, Collins held Crockett to a narrow victory with less than 49 percent of the vote. Crockett chose not to run for re-election in 1990, and Collins declared her candidacy for the open seat. Collins's 1990 campaign focused on improving public safety and bringing federal money to Detroit, an underprivileged and segregated city with one of the highest crime rates in the nation. In 1989, Collins's son was convicted of armed robbery, and she concluded that his legal trouble stemmed from the absence of a strong male role model in his life. "I could teach a girl how to be a woman, but I could not teach a boy how to be a man," she later told the *Detroit Free Press*. Drawing from this experience, Collins promised to pursue legislation to support Black families, rallying under the banner "Save the Black Male." In a crowded field of eight candidates, Collins won the primary with 34 percent of the vote. Her victory was tantamount to election to Congress in the overwhelmingly Democratic district with a large Black majority. Collins sailed through the general election with 80 percent of the vote and was re-elected twice with even higher percentages.[4]

One of three Black women in her class of first-term lawmakers, Collins sought the influence and counsel of longtime Michigan Representative John David Dingell Jr., who helped her gain a seat on the Public Works and Transportation Committee (later Transportation and Infrastructure). She also received assignments to the Committee on Science, Space, and Technology and the Select Committee on Children, Youth, and Families. She later traded these two seats for a spot on the Government Operations Committee (renamed Government Reform and Oversight) and the Post Office and Civil Service Committee, where she chaired the Subcommittee on Postal Operations and Services in the 103rd Congress (1993–1995). A member of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) and the Congressional Women's Caucus, Representative Collins was appointed a majority Whip at-large from 1993 until 1994.[5]

In the House, Collins focused on directing federal resources and programs to improve opportunities in underserved Black communities. In October 1992, Collins began encouraging farmers to donate excess food that would otherwise go to waste to urban food banks and shelters. Collins generally supported President William J. Clinton's economic and job stimulus initiatives, but she opposed the North American Free Trade Agreement, arguing that importing cheaper foreign products would threaten unionized manufacturing jobs in her district. During debate on an omnibus crime bill, Collins drew on her experience in Detroit to introduce the Community Safety and Empowerment Act of 1993 as an alternative bill. Her proposal would have created a federal council to provide grants for local projects to combat crime and promote health and education in disadvantaged communities. "Our urban communities must help themselves," Collins implored. "No government official or agency knows more about the problems confronting a community more than the people who live and work in that community." Though she voted to advance the omnibus crime bill to debate, she voted against the final version of the bill in 1994. "I cannot in good conscience vote for over 60 new death penalty provisions and throw people into a system that is riddled with discrimination," she said, referring to the bill's extension of the death penalty to several more federal crimes and a section that mandated life in prison for people convicted of three felonies. Collins argued that these provisions would disproportionately affect minority communities, declaring, "I think justice is dispensed differently for people of color, be they black or Hispanic."[6]

In 1994, Collins organized the Congressional Caucus on Children and Families to promote efforts supporting the millions of American families living in poverty. "The future of African American children is particularly tenuous," Collins wrote in June 1994. "My message to children throughout this country is very simple: You are valued, you are loved, and you must survive for the good of all humanity," she continued. Voicing support for the Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993—which required employers to guarantee workers time off to care for loved ones—Collins declared, "If we pass this bill we have taken a step toward healing the ailing family in America."

Collins also called on federal officials to include housework, childcare, volunteer work, and time devoted to a family business as components of the gross national product. "If you raise the status of women," she declared, "we would be more conscious of the family unit." To champion the contributions Black men and women made to the country, Collins introduced two resolutions in 1994 designating two days that spring as "African-American Women Positive Role Model Day" and "African-American Men Positive Role Model Day." Collins's family advocacy also extended to her support for the Million Man March in Washington, DC, in October 1995, which drew attention to the social, economic, and political challenges faced by Black communities. Collins praised the march's emphasis on family and community and provided water for those in attendance.[7]

With her focus on domestic issues, Representative Collins generally opposed increasing foreign aid. "Our cities are hurting," she observed. "We must learn how to take care of America first." But Collins was not averse to challenging what she saw as racial discrimination in foreign policy. In the wake of a military coup on the island nation of Haiti, Collins stood alongside five other CBC members to stage a sit-in at the White House in April 1994 to protest the government's refusal to take in Haitian refugees. The protestors demanded a stronger embargo against Haiti and called on the Clinton administration to admit Haitian refugees. "What's being done to Haitians is inhumane and immoral," Collins said. "The fact of the matter is we welcome Hungarians with open arms, we welcome Vietnamese with open arms, we welcome Cubans with open arms, but when it comes to black Haitians, we tell them, 'Stand back we don't want you,' the result being that hundreds are drowned at sea, children and women eaten by sharks." All six Members were arrested, fined, and released.[8]

Collins was popular back home despite holding the third-worst attendance record for votes in the House in 1995, but when the U.S. Justice Department and the House Ethics Committee investigated her office for the alleged misuse of campaign and scholarship funds in 1996, she drew six challengers in the Democratic primary. Ultimately, Carolyn C. Kilpatrick defeated Collins for the Democratic nomination by a 20-point margin and went on to win the general election. In January 1997, the Ethics Committee determined that Collins had violated 11 House rules and federal laws but did not recommend disciplinary action because Collins had already left office.[9]

After Congress, Collins remained active in local politics. In 2001, she won a seat on the Detroit city council. Collins was re-elected to the council for a second term in 2005 and retired in 2009. She died in Detroit on November 4, 2021, of complications from COVID-19.[10]

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Gary A. Franks

1953–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1991–1997

Republican from Connecticut



Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

In 1991, Gary A. Franks became the first ever Black Representative from Connecticut and the first Black Republican Representative since 1935. On Capitol Hill, Franks championed Republican issues, including welfare reform, opposition to affirmative action, and support for Supreme Court nominee Clarence Thomas. "The whole Republican philosophy is self-help," Franks avowed. "I believe in less government. I believe that we don't have to tax and spend constantly to maintain our society." Franks's party identification and political beliefs put him at odds with most of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC), of which he was an active member. But Franks argued he was representing a vein of Black political thought rarely represented at the national level. "I see being a black *Republican* as unique," Franks explained, "I don't see being a black *conservative* as unique. I have a lot of views that many in the black community would agree with."[1]

Gary Alvin Franks was born in Waterbury, Connecticut, on February 9, 1953. He was the youngest of six children of Jenary Petteway Franks, a dietary aide at a hospital, and Richard Franks, a mill worker who left school in the sixth grade. Education was valued in the Franks home; all the children attended college, and three earned doctoral degrees. Gary Franks was an all-state basketball player at Sacred Heart High School in Waterbury. In 1975, he earned a bachelor's degree from Yale University. After working as an industrial relations agent for three companies in Connecticut, Franks started his own real estate firm in Waterbury. Inspired by his friend, Representative John Rowland of Connecticut, Franks entered politics to bring what he called "new blood" to the Waterbury Republican Party. In 1985, he was elected to the Waterbury board of aldermen, where he served three terms until 1990. Franks ran unsuccessfully for state comptroller in 1986. Franks married Donna Williams in 1990. The couple raised three children: Azia, who was Donna Williams's child from a previous relationship, Jessica, and Gary Jr.[2]

In 1990, Rowland, whose district encompassed a mix of working-class and wealthy towns in western and central Connecticut, including Gary Franks's hometown of Waterbury, resigned his House seat to run for governor of Connecticut. Franks sought the Republican nomination and won the GOP endorsement by beating out five candidates at the district's Republican convention in July 1990. In the general election, Franks faced former Democratic Representative and television anchor Anthony John "Toby"

Moffett Jr.; Moffett had been elected to Congress in 1974 to represent a neighboring Connecticut district and served four terms before losing bids for the U.S. Senate in 1982 and as Connecticut governor in 1986. Franks's campaign drew national attention. Though a Republican had held the district since Rowland upset the Democratic incumbent in 1984, the seat was considered vulnerable. Waterbury's blue collar southern suburbs had tilted Republican in recent elections. The district contained a small Black population (under five percent). Franks ran on a conservative platform, promising no new taxes, supporting a cut in the capital gains tax, and advocating a constitutional amendment outlawing the desecration of the American flag. He also attacked welfare and other aid programs for creating what he called a "spiral of government dependency." Franks won the election with 52 percent of the vote. As the first Black Republican Representative in five decades, Franks attracted a barrage of media attention, making him one of the most recognizable first-term Members.[3]

When Franks took his seat in January 1991, he received assignments on the Armed Services and Small Business Committees, as well as on the Select Committee on Aging. He also joined the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC), which traditionally supported an active federal government and strong social safety net. Franks spoke regularly at CBC meetings during his first term, and he often disagreed with the caucus's other members, all of whom were Democrats. For example, during his campaign, Franks opposed the proposed Civil Rights Act of 1990, which the CBC almost universally supported. When Democrats revived the legislation as the first bill of the 102nd Congress, Franks opposed it as well. Franks claimed he disagreed with the language but not the spirit of the bill, saying, "I question whether some Democrats truly want a civil rights bill or if they want a political issue." Franks argued the 1991 bill would compel employers to introduce quotas in their hiring process, a common argument from the bill's opponents. Although Franks voted against the initial House bill in June 1991, he ultimately voted for a compromise version of the Civil Rights Act of 1991 sponsored by Republican Senator John Claggett Danforth of Missouri. The law strengthened prohibitions against employment discrimination that had been weakened by a series of Supreme Court decisions and provided monetary rewards for victims of sexual discrimination. The bill passed by large margins and President George H.W. Bush signed it into law in November 1991.[4]

Franks also attracted national attention as the only member of the CBC to support the Supreme Court nomination of Clarence Thomas—an African-American judge who was named to replace Thurgood Marshall, the first Black Supreme Court Justice, when he retired. The CBC rejected Thomas's conservative record, particularly his opposition to affirmative action. By contrast, Franks defended him, calling the CBC's refusal to endorse Thomas "politics at its worst." Franks noted that Thomas's "approach to issues may be different from liberals, but his determination and concern for fairness and justice would be the same." The Senate confirmed him on October 15, 1991, by a nearly party-line vote of 52 to 48.[5]

In 1992, Franks faced a difficult re-election against Democratic probate judge James Lawlor and Independent Lynn Taborsak, a former Democratic state representative. Both opponents criticized Franks for what they called a weak stance on federal plans to cancel the construction of Seawolf submarines in Groton, Connecticut. The project was important to the state's economy and, as Connecticut's sole member on the Armed Services Committee, Franks received mail from constituents about the rumored closing of the military base in Groton. Concerned voters claimed he was often unavailable for comment on the subject. Franks dismissed the attacks as a liberal smear campaign spawned by fear that he would lure African-American voters to the Republican Party. On Election Day, Franks won with a 44 percent plurality after Lawlor and Taborsak split the remaining votes. Two years later, in 1994, Connecticut state senator James H. Maloney ran a similar race against Franks, accusing him of being out of touch with his constituents. Franks remained focused on his support of businesses and welfare reform and pulled out another narrow victory, with 52 percent of the vote. In 1995, Franks served in the first Republican House majority in 40 years after the GOP routed Democrats in campaigns across the country.[6]

In his second term, Franks relinquished his seat on the Armed Services Committee for an assignment to the Committee on Energy and Commerce, a highly desirable panel that usually requires Members to give up all other committee assignments. He also returned as a member of the CBC, which added 14 Representatives after the 1992 elections, bringing the organization's membership to 40 and establishing it as a significant voting bloc. Franks had previously been linked to Republican President Bush. But when Democrat William J. Clinton defeated Bush in the

1992 presidential election, Franks lost influence within the caucus. Several members of the CBC objected to Franks's attendance at the caucus's Democratic policy strategy sessions, insisting that he was a mole for the Republicans.[7]

In 1993, an exasperated Franks publicly announced his intention to resign from the CBC, but he soon recanted, citing an influx of phone calls and mail from constituents imploring him not to resign. Although he continued to criticize some of the caucus's policies, Franks declared, "As long as I am a Member of Congress and black, I will continue to belong to the CBC." As tensions continued to rise, the CBC voted to exclude Franks from all but the first half-hour of CBC meetings—traditionally reserved for lunch—essentially preventing Franks from participating in any formal caucus debate. Faced with growing negative publicity, CBC chair Kweisi Mfume of Maryland eventually smoothed over the rift, announcing in August 1993 that Franks would be allowed full participation in all caucus activities and promised that, during his tenure as chair, the caucus would embrace "diversity and plurality." Franks nevertheless remained at odds with the majority of the caucus and eventually stopped attending meetings.[8]

Franks played a significant role in crafting the GOP's welfare reform package, which was launched in the fall of 1995. The plan set strict penalties for aid recipients who refused to look for work after having collected benefits for two years and made welfare difficult for immigrants to access. The plan also made it more burdensome for mothers who could not determine their children's paternity to receive benefits. Franks spoke candidly about his own relatives' experience accessing federal aid, and he praised the Republican plan because he said it would encourage economic independence. "Our welfare system continues to play the role of fish-delivery man for able-bodied people. Instead, we should help—and insist—that able-bodied people catch their own fish," Franks said. In 1995, Franks was appointed to the conference committee to resolve the differences between the House and Senate versions of the welfare reform bill. Franks successfully fought to retain his proposal to encourage providing a debit card for food stamps and other benefits. He also supported the House bill's version of the "family cap," which limited the amount of money per child families could receive and was included in the final conference report. President Clinton vetoed the bill on January 9, 1996, forcing Congress to start again with new legislation that dropped both provisions.[9]

Franks opposed affirmative action more zealously than many of his GOP colleagues, who had championed the issue in their campaign to recapture the congressional majority. At the time, federal policy provided special set-asides and preferences for women and people of color, which Franks argued were forms of discrimination. "I do not want my children to feel that they are inferior to white children," he declared. "I do not want someone to put their thumb on the scale in order for them to succeed." In 1995, Franks announced he was going to propose an amendment to an appropriations bill that would, in his words, "eliminate race- and gender-based set-aside programs for the awarding of Federal contracts." Although congressional Republicans supported Franks's opposition to set-asides many GOP House Members objected to the abrupt nature of the proposed change, preferring to first authorize an executive review of affirmative action policies. Franks's efforts ended when the Republican-controlled Rules Committee refused to allow his amendment to come to the floor for debate on an appropriations bill. "I question the sincerity of a number of Republicans on the issue," Franks said to reporters. "They love to get the political mileage out of it, but when it comes time to vote, they don't want to do it." Franks even questioned the sincerity of Speaker Newt Gingrich of Georgia, claiming Gingrich had promised his support for the amendment. Franks apologized to Gingrich, noting that he would follow the Speaker's lead on the issue.[10]

Although Franks supported much of Gingrich's extensive "Contract with America" reform package during both the 1994 campaign and the early stages of the 105th Congress (1997–1999), he criticized proposed budget cuts he claimed disproportionately affected women, people of color, children, and urban centers. "Mr. Speaker," Franks said on the House Floor, "I am for dismantling the Great Society programs and the Roosevelt New Deal, but I do not believe that the solution is merely to cut, cap, or pass the buck to the States." Franks later voted against the cuts, alongside only five other Republicans. Facing a tough re-election in 1996, however, Franks eagerly invited Gingrich to campaign with him in Connecticut and touted the Contract with America to voters.[11]

In the 1996 election, Democrat James H. Maloney returned for a rematch against Franks in a campaign that was largely a referendum on the implementation of the GOP's legislative agenda. On Election Day, Maloney defeated Franks 52 percent to 46 percent. Though the long

coattails from President Clinton's decisive re-election victory factored into Franks's defeat, he also attributed his loss to a lack of support from the Republican Party—noting that the GOP estimated he was well ahead in the polls just months before the election and had refused to raise funds for what seemed like a safe Republican seat.[12]

In 1998, Franks challenged incumbent Democratic Senator Christopher John Dodd, an 18-year veteran of the Senate whose father, Thomas, had preceded him in the chamber. Franks pulled in support from Republicans, including former Vice President J. Danforth Quayle, who stumped for him. Franks described himself as a "real conservative and a real Republican," and campaigned on the national issues he had championed in Congress. He supported the creation of a modified flat income tax and the elimination of capital gains and inheritance taxes. Franks also endorsed a strong national defense, the preservation of Medicare and Social Security, and the death penalty. Ultimately, Dodd defeated Franks with 65 percent of the vote.[13]

Following his congressional career, Franks returned to his real estate business in Waterbury. He eventually moved to Florida where he ran a scrap metal recycling company in Fort Lauderdale. Franks also lectured at several universities—including Georgetown University in Washington, DC; Hampton University in Hampton, Virginia; and the University of Virginia in Charlottesville, Virginia—and wrote several books on the intersection of politics, faith, and the Black experience. He continues to speak on the issues of racial injustice and faith in politics.[14]

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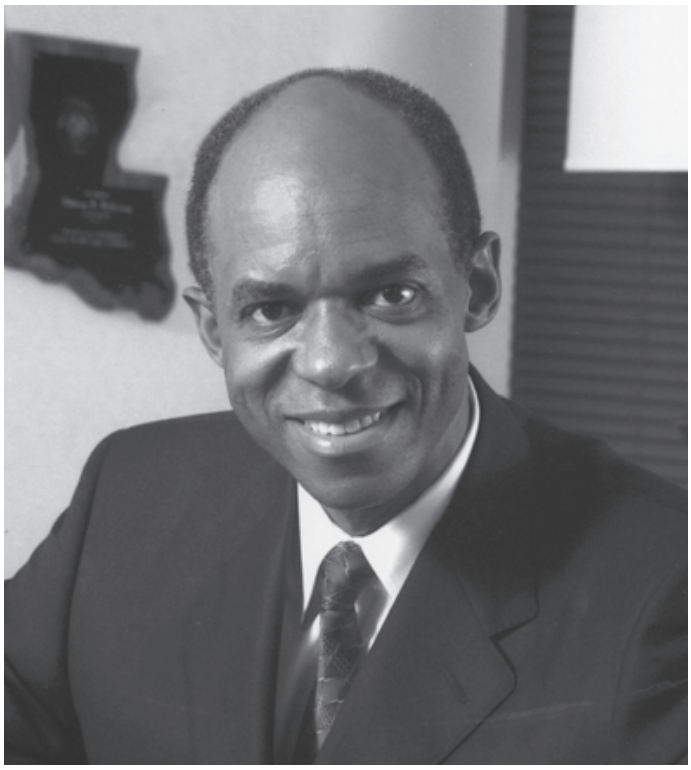
William J. Jefferson

1947–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1991–2009

Democrat from Louisiana



Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

When William J. Jefferson won election to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1990 from a New Orleans-centered district, he became the first African American to represent Louisiana since Reconstruction. Jefferson, who had more than a decade of experience in the Louisiana state senate, specialized in economic matters and eventually earned a seat on the influential Ways and Means Committee. Jefferson, who grew up in poverty in rural Louisiana, ran for Congress to help people from a similar background succeed. "I don't want to look back over my life," he once told a reporter, "and say that I could have been in a position to help some other people have the chance that I had and my wife had."[1]

William Jennings Jefferson was born on March 14, 1947, in Lake Providence, Louisiana, to Mose and Angeline Jefferson. Jefferson grew up in a family of 10 children in the far northeastern part of the state. Mose and Angeline owned a small farm, and his father also worked for the Army Corps of Engineers. William Jefferson often worked on other farms to help support the family. His mother, the president of the local Parent Teacher Association, emphasized education for all her children. In 1969, he graduated from Southern University, a historically Black university in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, with a bachelor's degree. As an undergraduate, Jefferson was a member of the Reserve Officer's Training Corps. He later served as an officer in the U.S. Navy's Judge Advocate General's Corps. Three years later, on scholarship, he earned a law degree from Harvard Law School. After law school, he served for a year as a law clerk for U.S. District Court Judge Alvin B. Rubin in New Orleans. From 1973 to 1975, Jefferson served as a legislative assistant to Senator John Bennett Johnston Jr. of Louisiana. He also went into private practice, cofounding his own law firm. In 1996, Jefferson earned a master of laws in taxation from Georgetown University in Washington, DC. Jefferson married Dr. Andrea Green-Jefferson, and they raised five daughters: Jamila, Jalila, Jelani, Nailah, and Akilah.[2]

Jefferson entered politics in the late 1970s, when he defeated a White incumbent for a Louisiana senate seat that covered the affluent Uptown section of New Orleans. He served in Baton Rouge for 12 years, working on the finance committee and chairing the special budget stabilization committee, which was created to rein in state spending and develop more accurate revenue projections. He also chaired the influential governmental affairs committee, which had oversight of reapportionment. In 1982 and 1986, Jefferson was an unsuccessful candidate for mayor of New Orleans.[3]

In 1990, when 17-year House veteran Corinne Claiborne "Lindy" Boggs announced her retirement, Jefferson entered a crowded field to succeed her. The congressional district covered much of New Orleans proper, the Uptown neighborhood, Algiers on the west bank of the Mississippi River, and the sprawling Kenner suburbs on the city's west side. In 1983, court-ordered redistricting made it the state's first majority-Black district. Jefferson was one of four principal contenders in the October open primary, which included Marc H. Morial, son of former mayor Dutch Morial, who served from 1978 to 1986 as the city's first African-American mayor; a state senator who had been endorsed by the governor; and a prominent city school board member. Jefferson finished first with 25 percent of the vote, with Morial trailing at 22 percent. In the spirited two-man November runoff, Jefferson prevailed with 53 percent of the vote. In his subsequent seven re-elections, Jefferson won handily with 73 percent of the vote or more.[4]

When Jefferson was sworn into the House in the 102nd Congress (1991–1993), he earned seats on the Education and Labor and the Merchant Marine and Fisheries Committees. In the following Congress, he relinquished those assignments for a coveted spot on the Ways and Means Committee. When the Republicans took control of the chamber for the 104th Congress (1995–1997) Jefferson lost his Ways and Means post and was transferred to the National Security Committee, the House Oversight Committee, and the Joint Committee on Printing. In the next Congress, Jefferson again won an assignment to the exclusive Ways and Means Committee, relinquishing his prior assignments. He remained on Ways and Means until June 2006, adding an assignment to the Budget Committee in the 109th Congress (2005–2007). In the 110th Congress (2007–2009), Jefferson was assigned to the Small Business Committee. Jefferson also was a member of the Congressional Black Caucus and served as the chair of the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation board of directors.[5]

In Congress, Jefferson specialized in trade and tax issues important to the port of New Orleans where shipping is a primary economic engine. Jefferson was a strong advocate of free trade and at times split from Democrats and sided with Republicans on trade issues. He voted for both the North American Free Trade Agreement in 1993 and the 2000 legislation that normalized trade relations with China. In 2001, Jefferson was one of three Democrats on the Ways and Means Committee who voted to give President George W. Bush the ability to fast track trade agreements through Congress. Jefferson also advocated for trade opportunities in neglected markets such as the Caribbean and sub-Saharan Africa. In March 1998, Jefferson was part of a delegation of lawmakers to travel with President William J. Clinton to six African countries promoting trade and democracy. Jefferson was one of the principal supporters of the African Growth and Opportunity Act. The legislation sought to improve and expand trade between the United States and sub-Saharan African countries by reducing tariffs and promoting reciprocal trade agreements. Defending the legislation, Jefferson told his colleagues: "We ought to treat Africa the way we treat the rest of the world. There is no reason to discriminate against that continent." The African Growth and Opportunity Act was eventually combined with legislation creating new trade benefits for countries in the Caribbean Basin. President Clinton signed the bill into law in May 2000. Jefferson also served as co-chair of the Africa Trade and Investment Caucus.[6]

In the wake of the devastating Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, which flooded New Orleans and its surrounding environs in August and September 2005, Jefferson's legislative attention focused on aiding the recovery effort in the Gulf region. In November 2005, Jefferson, from his position on the Ways and Means Committee, successfully shepherded the Gulf Opportunity Zone Public Finance Relief Act of 2005 through the House; the legislation provided a tax credit for Gulf states to fund bonds to help finance projects rebuilding the region. Jefferson's tax credit was included in the Gulf Opportunity Zone Act of 2005 which President Bush signed in December 2005. Jefferson, a strong supporter of the Gulf Opportunity Zone Act, explained on the House Floor that the legislation would "provide the entrepreneurs of the gulf coast a sturdy set of tools with which to jump start our recovery." Jefferson also pushed for reforms to the Small Business Administration (SBA) disaster loan program, which was criticized in the aftermath of the storm. The House also passed Jefferson's Disadvantaged Business Disaster Eligibility Act that would have extended the deadline for minority-owned businesses in his district to rebuild under the SBA's redevelopment program.[7]

In August 2005, the FBI raided Jefferson's Washington, DC, home following a months-long investigation into a bribery scheme involving the Louisiana Representative and a technology company. Based on evidence uncovered at his home, the FBI later searched his congressional office—the

first time the FBI ever performed a search of a congressional office. In June 2006, after the FBI made public the findings of their investigation, Democrats stripped Jefferson of his seat on the Ways and Means Committee. Despite the FBI investigation, Jefferson was re-elected to a ninth term against Democrat Karen Carter, with 57 percent of the vote in November 2006. In June 2007, Jefferson was indicted in a federal court in Virginia on 16 charges including racketeering, money laundering, and bribery.[8]

In November 2008, Jefferson, who remained in the House while awaiting trial, lost re-election by a margin of 50 to 47 percent of the vote to Republican Anh "Joseph" Cao, the first Vietnamese American elected to Congress. Jefferson's term expired at the conclusion of the 110th Congress on January 3, 2009. Later that year, a jury found Jefferson guilty on 11 counts including bribery and racketeering. He was sentenced to 13 years in prison. In 2017, Jefferson was released from prison after serving five years. A federal judge overturned seven of the remaining 10 counts against him following an unrelated Supreme Court decision regarding political corruption.[9]

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Lucien E. Blackwell

1931–2003

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1991–1995

Democrat from Pennsylvania



Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

In 1991, Lucien E. Blackwell, a popular, longtime member of the Philadelphia city council, won a special election to the U.S. House of Representatives to fill the vacancy caused by the resignation of Representative William H. Gray III. In the House, Blackwell, a former union president and resident of West Philadelphia with a "common man" reputation, focused on the needs of his primarily African-American and working-class constituents. "I started as a laborer shoveling iron ore, and thank God I did, because shoveling that iron ore and suffering and working hard, I learned to appreciate the plight of poor people," he once reflected.[1]

Lucien Edward Blackwell was born on August 1, 1931, in Whitsett, Pennsylvania, one of eleven children raised by Thomas and Mary Blackwell. As a young child, Lucien Blackwell moved to a West Philadelphia neighborhood known as "the Bottom," where his father opened a grocery store. Blackwell dropped out of West Philadelphia High School in 1950 to take a job as a dockworker on the Philadelphia waterfront. He briefly pursued a boxing career, winning an amateur title before being drafted into the Army to fight in the Korean War. During his military service, he was the middleweight boxing champion of his infantry division and was awarded a unit commendation and two bronze stars. Blackwell returned to the docks after the war and worked his way up the ranks of the International Longshoreman's Association, a labor union affiliated with the AFL-CIO, serving as president of its Philadelphia local from 1973 to 1991. Blackwell married his first wife, Gloria, at a young age, and they had six children before divorcing. In 1972, he married his second wife, Jannie, a schoolteacher. In 1991, Jannie Blackwell succeeded her husband on the Philadelphia city council and served in that position for nearly three decades.[2]

Blackwell's work with the longshoreman's union introduced him to politics. He described himself as a Democrat "from the top of my head to the bottom of my feet." Blackwell served briefly in the Pennsylvania house of representatives from 1973 to 1975, when he won a seat on the Philadelphia city council. During his 16 years on the council—from 1975 to 1991—Blackwell earned the nickname "Lucien the Solution" for his attention to the needs of his constituents in West and South Philadelphia. He ran unsuccessfully for Philadelphia mayor as the Consumer Party candidate in 1979 to succeed the controversial and notorious incumbent Frank Rizzo, who was under federal investigation for fostering police brutality

and violence against the city's Black citizens. In 1986, Blackwell lost a bid for the Democratic city committee chairmanship to future Representative Robert A. Brady. Blackwell, who led two key Philadelphia political groups—the Black Elected Officials and the United Black Ward Leaders—also worked on Jesse Jackson's 1988 presidential campaign. In 1991, Blackwell made his second mayoral run, finishing second to eventual winner Edward Rendell in a hotly contested Democratic primary.[3]

In June 1991, Representative William Gray, the House Majority Whip and third-ranking Democrat, announced his intention to retire. Gray had represented his West Philadelphia district, which was 80 percent Black and had a long Democratic voting record, since 1979. Blackwell declared his intention to run for the vacant seat and quickly became the front-runner. It was widely speculated that a special election would be scheduled for November 5—the same day Philadelphia voters would select a new mayor and a new U.S. Senator. But Gray—one of Blackwell's political rivals—decided to postpone his resignation until September 11, just 55 days before November 5. According to Pennsylvania state law, special elections could take place no sooner than 60 days after a Member resigned. Gray's late departure threatened to delay the special election until early 1992, giving Blackwell's opponents more time to campaign. The election was initially scheduled for January 1992, but on October 1, the Pennsylvania commonwealth court ruled that the 60-day election law was flexible and allowed for the special election to be scheduled in November.[4]

During a whirlwind campaign, Democratic ward leaders selected Blackwell as the party's official nominee at an October meeting. Blackwell's closest rivals included the young, charismatic state senator Chaka Fattah, a Democrat who was running as a Consumer Party candidate; and the former head of the Pennsylvania welfare department, John F. White Jr., who was running as an Independent. Drawing upon the strength of the local Democratic Party machine and his rapport as councilman with the city's working class, Blackwell prevailed with 39 percent of the vote. Fattah and White each won 28 percent. Blackwell took his seat in the 102nd Congress (1991–1993) on November 13, 1991.[5]

Just five months later, Blackwell faced C. Delores Tucker, a Black woman and Democratic National Committee official who was formerly the secretary of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, in the Democratic primary for the 103rd Congress (1993–1995). Redistricting had cut the Black majority in the district to 62 percent, forcing both candidates to court a bloc of wealthier White voters in the northwestern section of the city. Backed by national women's groups and civil rights leaders, Tucker accused Blackwell of being "a puppet" of the Philadelphia party bosses. Blackwell emphasized his traditional party and union support. Although Tucker did well in the district's new neighborhoods, Blackwell won the nomination with 54 percent of the vote. He went on to defeat Republican Larry Hollin with 77 percent in the general election.[6]

In the 102nd Congress, Blackwell received appointments to the Public Works Committee and the Merchant Marine and Fisheries Committee. Blackwell also served as a member of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC). In the 103rd Congress, widespread Member turnover allowed him to make the largest jump in seniority of any returning lawmaker. In 1993, Blackwell traded his assignment on Merchant Marine and Fisheries for a coveted position on the Budget Committee, formerly chaired by his predecessor, Representative Bill Gray.[7]

As a member of the Budget Committee, Blackwell worked alongside congressional leaders and the William J. Clinton administration to lift the national economy out of a recession. He opposed an amendment to the Constitution requiring a balanced federal budget and worked to dispel the idea "that a balanced budget amendment is a magic wand. One quick wave over the document that represents the heart and soul of this Nation, and the budget will be balanced, the economy restored, and the recession shattered by this almighty amendment." He asserted that reducing the deficit was necessary to improve the economy and recommended that Congress work to provide new jobs, create a system of fair trade, overhaul the country's tax laws, enact national health insurance legislation, and invest in American cities. Blackwell joined fellow Democrats in supporting the Clinton administration's economic initiatives, proposed in February 1993, which called for reduced federal spending and tax increases for the wealthy.[8]

Drawing on his union experience, Blackwell acted as an advocate for working Americans. He introduced a bill in the 102nd Congress to protect the credit ratings of employees who had lost their jobs because their employers relocated overseas. Blackwell backed the Clinton reform package guaranteeing all Americans basic health coverage, and he voted for the 1993 Family and Medical Leave Act. He also sponsored a bill to protect job applicants

from discrimination based on genetic factors, such as an employee's vulnerability to certain diseases. As the effects of the recession of the early 1990s continued and as his constituents struggled to find work, Blackwell favored extending the amount of time benefits were paid under the 1991 Emergency Unemployment Compensation Act. "The American worker is marching down the street asking for unemployment compensation because he has lost his job," Blackwell said to his colleagues. "I ask every Congressman who does not vote for unemployment compensation tonight, give up your wages, give up your employment, give up what you have earned here, and then tell me it is all right to live off of nothing." Blackwell strongly opposed the North American Free Trade Agreement out of concern that it would exacerbate unemployment rates around the country.[9]

In the May 1994 Democratic primary, Blackwell faced his former opponent Chaka Fattah. Blackwell received endorsements from Mayor Rendell and the local Democratic Party, but his party support was not unanimous—some ward leaders publicly supported Blackwell but backed Fattah in private. One ward leader observed, "Lu's in the fight of his life and Chaka's right on his heels." Though immensely popular among Black, working-class voters, Blackwell struggled to connect with residents in the wealthier and Whiter northwestern section of the district. Like Blackwell, Fattah was a career politician, but the young community activist favored a policy-oriented approach to politics independent of the entrenched Democratic Party organization, which broadened his appeal among voters outside of West Philadelphia, where the party machine held the most influence. "No one could talk to poor people any better than Lucien Blackwell," Fattah said. "But that's not 'the district.'" Fattah knew the district inside and out. As a state senator, Fattah had helped draw the boundaries of the new seat during the 1992 redistricting process. Fattah ultimately defeated Blackwell with 58 percent of the vote; Blackwell took 42 percent. In his concession speech Blackwell said, "What I have to do now is take a look at Lucien Blackwell and see what God has in store for him. And I'll show you that God isn't through with me yet."[10]

After leaving Congress in 1995, Blackwell joined a Washington-based lobbying firm, which boasted the city of Philadelphia as one of its largest clients. Blackwell used his congressional connections, particularly through the CBC, to work on the Clinton administration's defense conversion plan, which redirected Cold War-era defense spending to civilian sector technology grants, as well as welfare reform. He consulted for a Philadelphia debt collection company and served as a delegate to the 1996 Democratic National Convention. In 1997, Blackwell announced his candidacy in a special election to replace Philadelphia Representative Thomas Foglietta, who was appointed U.S. Ambassador to Italy, and whose district contained neighborhoods Blackwell had once represented in the House. Blackwell soon bowed out of the race, claiming he had "just decided it was time to go." On January 24, 2003, after returning home from a morning walk, Blackwell died of a heart attack. His funeral drew nearly 3,000 mourners. Blackwell was buried in Yeadon, Pennsylvania, just outside West Philadelphia.[11]

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Eva M. Clayton

1934–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1992–2003

Democrat from North Carolina



Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

In 1992, Eva M. Clayton won election to the U.S. House of Representatives to become the first African-American woman to represent North Carolina in Congress and the state's first Black Representative since 1901. From her post on the House Agriculture Committee, Clayton advanced the interests of her rural district in northeastern North Carolina and called attention to the economic inequalities that affected African Americans nationally. Years after leaving the House, Clayton reflected on why she entered public service. Politics, she explained, contained "the possibility that I could help, that I could serve, I could make a difference."[1]

Eva Clayton was born Eva McPherson in Savannah, Georgia, on September 16, 1934. She grew up in North Carolina and received a bachelor's degree in biology from Johnson C. Smith University in Charlotte, North Carolina, in 1955. In 1962, she earned a master's degree in biology and general science from North Carolina Central University in Durham. She planned to become a doctor and travel to Africa to do missionary work. Shortly after receiving her undergraduate degree, Eva McPherson married Theaoseus T. Clayton, who became a prominent lawyer. They had four children—Theaoseus Jr., Martin, Reuben, and Joanne—and while raising her family, Clayton turned her attention away from medicine and enrolled in law school, first at North Carolina Central University and then at University of North Carolina. Having to shoulder the responsibilities of both home life and classwork, however, Clayton reluctantly withdrew from law school after the birth of her fourth child. "I wasn't super enough to be a supermom," Clayton recalled years later. "I left to be a mom. My husband was supportive, but I felt enormously guilty. I think I would do it differently now. I think I would know how to demand more of my husband."[2]

During the 1960s, the civil rights movement motivated Clayton to become active in civic and political affairs. At one point, she picketed her husband's law office to protest his and his White law partner's ownership of a building that contained a segregated restaurant. In 1968, Eva Clayton was recruited by civil rights activist Vernon Jordan, head of the Voter Education Project, to run for Congress in a north-central North Carolina district. Clayton won 31 percent of the vote in the Democratic primary, but the incumbent, Lawrence H. Fountain, prevailed. "In 1968, the timing wasn't there," she later observed. Despite her loss, Clayton's campaign had mobilized volunteers and built a "kind of

community organization" that successfully increased Black voter registration and participation.[3]

In the early 1970s, Clayton worked for several public and private ventures, including the North Carolina health manpower development program at the University of North Carolina. At the time, Clayton and her husband were involved with Soul City, a planned community in rural North Carolina created by lawyer and civil rights activist Floyd McKissick with the intention of being "black owned and operated." In 1974, Clayton cofounded and served as the executive director of Soul City Foundation, a nonprofit funded mostly through the grants provided by the federal government to offer meal programs, health fairs, and other opportunities to Soul City and the surrounding area. Two years later, she worked on the successful gubernatorial campaign of Jim Hunt, who later appointed Clayton the assistant secretary of the North Carolina department of natural resources and community development. Clayton served as assistant secretary from 1977 until 1981 and developed "a feel for the interrelationship between state and federal government." After leaving state government, she founded an economic development consulting firm. In 1982, she won election to the Warren County board of commissioners, which she chaired until 1990. Over the next decade, Clayton helped steer more than $550 million in investments into the county and successfully passed a bond issue for the construction of new schools.[4]

When Representative Walter Beaman Jones Sr. announced his retirement in 1992, Clayton entered the Democratic primary to fill his seat. In contrast with her 1968 campaign, Clayton faced a more favorable electorate and had developed a wealth of experience in state politics and local economic development. Recently redrawn by the state legislature, North Carolina's First District was one of two new districts in the state with a Black majority. On the campaign trail, Clayton emphasized her career accomplishments and long-standing relationship with district residents. "I have a record, and I've demonstrated to you I care. … I care about rural areas. I care about poverty. I care about you."[5]

After Jones died in September 1992, his son Walter Beaman Jones Jr., who was considered the favorite in the Democratic primary, captured 38 percent to Clayton's 31 percent. But because he fell two points shy of winning the nomination outright, the race moved to a runoff. Clayton consolidated the support of her other primary opponents and won the nomination with 55 percent to Jones's 45 percent. In the general election, Clayton ran on a platform of increased public investment and job training for rural areas in the district, which covered a large swath of eastern North Carolina including the towns of Goldsboro, Rocky Mount, and Greenville. She advocated slashing the defense budget to lower the federal deficit. "We went into the projects and knocked on doors and got people out" to vote, Clayton recalled.[6]

On November 3, 1992, she won the special election to fill the last two months of Walter Jones Sr.'s unexpired term in the 102nd Congress (1991–1993) and defeated Republican Ted Tyler for a full term in the 103rd Congress (1993–1995). Although Melvin L. Watt, another Black candidate running in North Carolina that year, also won on November 3, Clayton's simultaneous election to the 102nd Congress meant that she became the first African-American Representative from North Carolina since George Henry White in 1901. Clayton defeated Tyler in her next three re-elections, taking 60 percent or more of the vote. In 1998, the third time she faced Tyler, state courts had redrawn the district by adding 165,000 new constituents and shrinking the African-American majority by 7 percent, effectively dividing the district between Black and White constituents. In 2000, the GOP ran Duane E. Kratzer Jr., who managed just 33 percent of the vote to Clayton's 66 percent.[7]

Clayton claimed her seat in the 102nd Congress on November 5, 1992, but she did not receive committee assignments until the 103rd Congress convened in January 1993. She won spots on the Agriculture and Small Business Committees. Clayton eventually became the ranking Democrat on the Agriculture Committee's Operations, Oversight, Nutrition, and Forestry Subcommittee. Clayton also became the first Democratic woman to serve as president of her class of freshman lawmakers. In 1995, she was appointed to the Democratic Advisory Committee to formulate party strategy. In the 105th Congress (1997–1999) she dropped her Small Business assignment for a seat on the prestigious Budget Committee. Clayton was also assigned to the Social Security Task Force.

Clayton was a staunch defender of the rural and agricultural interests of her district, which comprised 20 counties with numerous peanut and tobacco growers. Along with Missouri Republican Jo Ann Emerson, she revived the Rural Caucus and rallied more than 100 Members to pledge continued federal aid to farmers, new rural jobs,

and technology initiatives. In 1993 and 2000, respectively, Clayton voted against the North American Free Trade Agreement and Permanent Normal Trade Relations with China, insisting that both would adversely affect the agricultural industry and eliminate low-wage jobs from her district. "Must eastern North Carolina lose in order for the Research Triangle to win?" she asked, alluding to the state's booming high-tech corridor to the west of her district. Although Clayton advocated smaller defense budgets, she remained supportive of naval contracts for projects at the nearby Newport News shipyards, which employed her constituents.[8]

From her seat on the Agriculture Committee, Clayton, unlike many of her Democratic colleagues, supported extending tobacco subsidies to farmers at a time when critics sought to cut back the program. "This is not about smoking," Clayton said. "This is about discriminating against the poorest of the poor of that industry. … They really are attacking the small farmer." She also fought successfully to preserve Section 515 of the U.S. Agriculture Department's affordable housing program, which provided federal loans for multi-unit housing projects in rural areas.[9]

Clayton addressed food security and hunger as a member of the Agriculture Committee. She defended funding for food stamps and successfully fought to make documented immigrants eligible for the program. She traced her advocacy for food security to her mother. "Because of my age and also the segregation, we didn't have a lunchroom [at school]. …But my mother became the president of the PTA, and she was insistent that there be a lunchroom. They made a lunchroom out of almost a school closet where they kept books, and she and one other person, they would rotate. Finally, the school began giving oranges and fruit, and that was the beginning of a lunchroom."[10]

In 1999, Clayton's district suffered a major natural disaster when rain from Hurricane Floyd caused rivers to swell, flooding some parts of eastern North Carolina under 14 feet of water. Clayton and other Members of the state delegation secured billions in relief aid. Clayton helped obtain $1.5 million in federal money to reconstruct a dike along the Tar River in Princeville, one of the nation's first towns chartered by free African Americans after the Civil War. She also joined a volunteer force of more than 500 people to help flood victims throughout eastern North Carolina.[11]

As she gained seniority and power in the House, Clayton became a prominent advocate for programs to help poor and working-class African Americans. Throughout her career, she stressed the importance of job training. "The issue of equity in jobs and fairness of opportunities is paramount," Clayton said. "Job opportunities combined with a fair wage are key to strengthening families and communities and increasing our quality of life." As chair of the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation, a nonprofit associated with the Congressional Black Caucus, Clayton worked with mortgage lenders to establish the "With Ownership, Wealth" (WOW) program. The WOW program sought to help African American homebuyers through financial education programs and assistance in down payments and closing costs. Clayton's goal for WOW was to "help bridge the huge racial divide in homeownership rates." In 1996, she also played a key part in fighting GOP efforts to cut summer job programs for young people. Declaring that she intended "to wake up" the House, Clayton said that the programs helped more than 615,000 job seekers in 650 cities and towns. "This is the first opportunity many of these young people have to get a job."[12]

In the mid-1990s, amid a push on Capitol Hill to reform the nation's welfare system, Clayton urged lawmakers to keep individuals and families at the forefront of their work. "The family cannot be a footnote that is added at the end of this reform, but should be an integral part of this legislation in its infancy," she told the Ways and Means Committee in 1994. As welfare legislation advanced in the House, Clayton advocated for a raise in the minimum wage and for federal funding to help prevent teenage pregnancy. When the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act came to the floor in the 104th Congress (1995–1997), Clayton voted against it. In 1994, Clayton supported the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act believing "it had more positive features to fight crime in our communities than had troubling provisions," she explained. Even as the Congressional Black Caucus pulled its support and criticized the bill, saying it lacked protections against racial discrimination, Clayton remained in favor of it.[13]

In November 2001, Clayton declined to seek renomination to a sixth term in the House. She had been successful in intense negotiations with state legislators to ensure that her predominantly African-American district was "protected" during reapportionment after the 2000 Census. "My heart is leading me somewhere else," Clayton said. "I don't know exactly where that is, but I do want to have another opportunity for public service before I really hang it up." In the fall 2002 elections, Clayton was

succeeded by Frank W. Ballance Jr., a Black state legislator. After retiring in January 2003, Clayton became the assistant director-general of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, which focused on combatting global hunger from its headquarters in Rome, Italy. She remained in that position for three years before returning to her home in Littleton, North Carolina.[14]

Manuscript Collection

Johnson C. Smith University, Inez Moore Parker Archives, James B. Duke Memorial Library (Charlotte, NC). *Papers*: ca. 1992–2002, 359 archival boxes. The papers of Eva M. Clayton contain floor statements, committee reports, speeches, correspondence, records of donations and events, and other materials that chronicle Clayton's time in the U.S. House of Representatives. The collection includes material related to issues central to her House career, including the U.S. Department of Agriculture's treatment of Black farmers, Hurricane Floyd's impact on North Carolina's agricultural community, the Congressional Black Caucus, and the Rural Caucus of North Carolina. Researchers must contact the library for access to the collection.

Notes

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Corrine Brown

1946–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1993–2017

Democrat from Florida



Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

In 1992, Corrine Brown was part of the first group of African-American lawmakers to serve in the U.S. House of Representatives from Florida since 1876. During her congressional career, Brown worked to bring federal programs to her Jacksonville district using her seats on the Transportation and Infrastructure and the Veterans' Affairs Committees. She also pushed civil rights reforms both at home in Jacksonville and abroad. Brown believed her mission in the House went beyond her history-making election in 1992. "It means a lot more than the glamor of being elected," she once remarked. "Once you're elected it means getting things done. It means representing people that have not been part of the process."[1]

Corrine Brown was born in Jacksonville, Florida, on November 11, 1946. She grew up in the city's Northside neighborhood and graduated from Stanton High School. Brown earned a bachelor's degree in 1969 and a master's degree in 1971, both from Florida Agriculture and Mechanical University. In 1972, Brown graduated with an educational specialist degree from the University of Florida. She taught at the University of Florida and Edward Waters College before moving to Florida Community College in Jacksonville, where she taught and served as a guidance counselor from 1977 to 1992. She also opened her own travel agency in Jacksonville. Brown raised her daughter, Shantrel, as a single mother.[2]

Brown was introduced to politics during her college years at Florida A&M University. There she met Gwen Cherry, the first African-American woman to serve in the state house of representatives. Cherry was Brown's close friend, college sorority sister, and political mentor. Brown was also inspired by campus politics. "The board of regents took two or three programs, the nursing school and law school, from FAMU," she recollected. "That told me we needed to be politically involved." Three years after Cherry died in a car accident, Brown won a seat in the Florida legislature and served for a decade.[3]

In 1992, Brown made the jump from state politics and ran for the U.S. House. No African-American candidate had won election to Congress from Florida since Representative Josiah T. Walls served during Reconstruction 115 years earlier. During the redistricting process in the lead up to the 1992 elections, Brown was one of several plaintiffs in a federal lawsuit that accused state legislators of diluting Black voters in majority-White districts. She testified in favor of a map that would create several Black-majority

districts. When the legislature failed to agree on a map, the court redrew the district lines. One of the new districts was just over 50 percent Black and resembled a horseshoe stretching from Jacksonville to Orlando and west through Gainesville and Ocala. Having won the lawsuit, Brown filed her candidacy to represent the northeastern Florida district, which included her hometown.[4]

Brown faced stiff competition in the Democratic primary. Her three challengers included Arnett Girardeau, a Black state senator with 16 years' experience; Orlando-based school guidance counselor Glennie Mills; and the only White candidate, talk show host Andy Johnson. Looking to the grassroots, Brown branched out from Jacksonville and crisscrossed the district. "I have really learned the back roads," she noted. Brown came in first in the primary election, but since no candidate took a majority in the first round of voting, Brown went to an October runoff where she defeated Johnson.[5]

In the general election, Brown faced Republican Don Weidner, general counsel for the Florida Physicians Association. Her campaign promised to direct federal resources to the district, fix the school system, bring jobs to the area, and protect Social Security and Medicare. On Election Day, Brown won by 18 percent of the vote. She made history that fall alongside Alcee L. Hastings and Carrie P. Meek as the first African-American lawmakers elected from Florida since Reconstruction. Although Florida changed her district borders four times, she generally won re-election with 55 percent or more of the vote.[6]

When Brown took her seat in the 103rd Congress (1993–1995), she received assignments to three committees: Government Operations; Veterans' Affairs; and Public Works and Transportation. In the 104th Congress (1995–1997), she stepped down from Government Operations. She retained her seats on Public Works and Transportation (later named Transportation and Infrastructure) and Veterans' Affairs for her entire career. Brown chaired Transportation's Subcommittee on Railroads, Pipelines, and Hazardous Materials during the 110th and 111th Congresses (2007–2011) and became ranking member of Veterans' Affairs in the 114th Congress (2015–2017).[7]

Not only was Brown one of the first Black women elected from Florida, she was also part of a wave of Black lawmakers elected in 1992 that increased the membership of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) from 26 to 40. Brown was elected the CBC's first vice chair in the 109th Congress (2005–2007). The 1992 election cycle also saw huge growth in the number of women in Congress, and Brown was an active member of the Women's Caucus as well.[8]

Brown's main priority in Congress was to improve the economy in northern Florida by steering federal aid to her district. Using earmarks—the practice in which lawmakers fund specific projects and programs using large discretionary congressional spending bills—Brown led the effort to construct an $86 million federal courthouse in Jacksonville. She testified before the Transportation and Appropriations Committees to secure federal dollars to repair the Fuller Warren Bridge in Jacksonville, where Interstate 95 crossed the St. John's River. She later directed money to a new mental health and rehabilitation center in Jacksonville and funded a biofuel conversion project. Brown attributed these successes to "hard work, persistence, and a thorough understanding of the appropriations process." When Congress imposed a moratorium on earmarks in the 112th Congress (2011–2013), Brown did not alter course. She vowed "to continue what I have been doing every single day since my first election in 1992, specifically bring home a fair share of the federal dollars."[9]

From her seat on the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, Brown fought to initiate Florida rail projects to meet the state's booming transportation needs. While working on the 1998 surface transportation bill, she helped orchestrate a nearly 60-percent increase in funding for federal transportation programs back home. Throughout her career, she frequently advocated for a robust Amtrak budget. During debate over a 2006 appropriations bill, Brown successfully incorporated an amendment that ensured funding for 18 Amtrak routes across the country. "If we do not fund Amtrak, we will leave 25 million people waiting for a train that is not coming," she said on the House Floor. As chair of the Subcommittee on Railroads, Pipelines, and Hazardous Materials, she worked with the full committee's chair, James Louis Oberstar of Minnesota, to craft the Rail Safety Improvement Act, which provided funding for computer-assisted train operation and placed limits on work hours for rail employees, among other safety improvements. It was signed into law in 2008. Brown also frequently defended the CSX Corporation, a railway freight company based in her district.[10]

Less than a month after the September 11, 2001 attacks, Brown introduced the Port and Maritime Security Act of 2001, which sought to improve security procedures

in the country's seaports. As the top Democrat on the Transportation Committee's Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Marine Transportation, she served on the conference committee for a similar bill, the Maritime Transportation Security Act, which became law in 2002.[11]

With a large military presence in her district, most notably the Jacksonville Naval Air Station, Brown regularly supported defense funding. Brown described the military as a place where working-class Americans could find opportunities unavailable elsewhere, and she wanted more resources for personnel training. As a member of the Veterans' Affairs Committee, she was also attentive to the needs of women veterans and veteran's health care. Brown sponsored bills strengthening infant and maternal care, as well as legislation increasing access to breast cancer treatment. In 2011, her bill to grant a Congressional Gold Medal to the Montford Point Marines—the first African Americans to serve in the Marine Corps—was signed into law. She declared it to be "one of the proudest moments I have ever experienced in all my years of service."[12]

At times, Brown addressed issues far outside her district. In 1993, shortly after arriving on Capitol Hill, she worked with other Florida and CBC Members to push the William J. Clinton administration to apply economic pressure on Haiti to restore its democratic government by re-installing deposed President Jean-Bertrand Aristide. Brown saw military force in Haiti as an option of last resort, preferring to use foreign aid to encourage change. She urged U.S. officials to offer political asylum to thousands of Haitians who arrived in the United States looking for help. Brown also took up the cause of Liberians, pushing to extend temporary visa status for thousands who came to America after a civil war in Liberia during the early 1990s. "It seems as if we have two policies, one for people from Africa and Haiti and one for everybody else," she said. "Our policy pertaining to immigration is very racist in nature." In 2000, she gave an impassioned speech on the House Floor imploring Congress to budget more money to fight the global AIDS epidemic. "AIDS in Africa is a direct threat to our country, especially in today's interconnected world," she observed.[13]

Brown had an outspoken legislative style. In 2004, Brown briefly lost her speaking privileges on the House Floor when she accused Republicans of executing a "coup d'état" and of stealing the contested 2000 presidential election results in Florida. The House had her words taken down, a parliamentary procedure invoked when a Member has violated House decorum—in this case, accusing another Member of a crime. The House also voted to have her words stricken from the *Congressional Record*. Brown remained unapologetic about the incident. "If they're going to take down my words for telling the truth, that's OK," she responded.[14]

Although Brown ran into ethical and legal trouble during her career, her constituents continued to return her to office, and she ran unopposed in 2006 and 2008. As she approached her primary election in 2016, however, she faced two challenges. A state court ordered Florida to redraw its districts after ruling that the existing borders purposefully segregated minority voters into a single district. Brown's new district stretched east to west along the Georgia border from Jacksonville to Tallahassee, and though it was 45 percent African-American, Brown lost much of her traditional constituency along the St. John's River. Secondly, in July 2016, a grand jury charged Brown and her chief of staff with 24 counts of mail and wire fraud, conspiracy, obstruction, and filing false tax returns. The charges stemmed from Brown's tie to a charity which provided scholarships to low-income students. The lawsuit alleged that Brown and several associates siphoned off money to pay for personal expenses.[15]

A few weeks after her indictment, Brown lost a three-way race in the Democratic primary. On May 11, 2017, Brown was convicted on 18 fraud and tax charges. She reported to Coleman Federal Correctional Institute in Sumter County, Florida, on January 29, 2018, to begin a five-year sentence. Two years later, Brown was released from prison after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. On May 7, 2021, a federal appeals court, citing a trial error, overturned her conviction and ordered a new trial.[16]

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Cleo Fields

1962–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1993–1997

Democrat from Louisiana



Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

From an impoverished childhood, Cleo Fields rose to win a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives at age 29, serving as the youngest Member of the 103rd Congress (1993–1995). As the second Black Representative from Louisiana since Reconstruction, Fields worked to make banking lending practices equitable and advocated in favor of the state's efforts to draw majority-minority congressional districts. "The issue is not about whether I will serve in Congress, but it is about whether someone like me will have the opportunity to serve in Congress," he said.[1]

Cleo Fields was born in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, on November 22, 1962, one of 10 children of Isidore, a dockworker, and Alice Fields, a maid. Isidore died in a car crash on his way home from working a double shift. After his father's death, the Fields household struggled to make ends meet. "I didn't know what poor was," Fields later recalled, "I thought mommas were supposed to put three patches in a pair of pants. In junior high school, it really hit me in the face. That's when I realized what my mother was going through." At one point, the family was evicted from a Baton Rouge apartment. Throughout his youth, Fields worked several jobs to aid his family, taking a shift at a fast-food restaurant and working at the Baton Rouge mayor's office of youth opportunity to save money for college. After graduating from McKinley High School in Baton Rouge, Fields attended cross-town Southern University, earning a bachelor and law degree. Politics became his passion. During law school, he began circulating bumper stickers to classmates that read, "I'm waiting for Cleo Fields." Fields noted, "I didn't know which office I would run for, so I didn't want to be too specific."[2]

During his final year of law school in 1987, Fields ran a grassroots campaign for the Louisiana state senate. With the help of student volunteers and his family, Fields ousted an entrenched incumbent. Fields's victory made the 24-year-old the youngest state legislator elected in Louisiana history. In the state senate, Fields focused on environmental and economic opportunities, issues important to his constituents, especially people of color. He also emerged as a leader in the effort to combat illegal drugs. Fields married his high school sweetheart, Debra Horton. The couple had two sons: Cleo Brandon and Christopher.[3]

In 1990, Fields ran unsuccessfully against incumbent Republican Clyde Cecil Holloway for a U.S. House seat encompassing central Louisiana that included portions of the state capital, Baton Rouge. The district's population,

which was 38 percent Black, had voted for Democratic candidates in three of the past four presidential elections. Fields was runner-up in the open-party primary, unique to Louisiana at the time, in which candidates from all parties competed in the same race. On October 6, Holloway won with 56 percent of the vote to Fields's 30 percent.[4]

After Louisiana lost a seat in the House following the 1990 Census, Fields used his senate seat to help shape the state's redistricting plan, creating an oddly shaped congressional district that he would seek to represent in 1992. The new Fourth District hugged Louisiana's eastern and northern borders, jutting occasionally toward the central part of the state and forming a loose "Z" shape. It encompassed a large area, stretching east and west of Baton Rouge, north up the Mississippi River to the Arkansas border and west through Shreveport, taking in a wide mix of rural and urban communities. The state senate designed the district so that it would have a Black majority, and registered Democrats outnumbered Republicans 8 to 1. It was one of two Black-majority districts in the state; Representative William J. Jefferson represented the other, which covered greater New Orleans. In the open primary, Fields received 48 percent of the vote, making him the top vote-getter, but because he fell just short of the 50 percent he needed to win outright, he faced African-American state senator Charles "C.D." Jones in the Election Day runoff. Fields ran an energetic door-to-door campaign and defeated Jones handily with 74 percent of the vote. During the race, Fields emphasized three issues which would define his career: creating jobs, lowering the cost of health care, and reducing the federal deficit.[5]

Fields joined the 103rd Congress as its youngest Member, and at times he was mistaken for a staffer. He recalled his first opportunity to preside over the House: "The phones started to ring off the hook in the Parliamentarian's office, saying that a page was presiding over the House of Representatives." During his two terms in Congress, Fields was assigned to the Small Business Committee as well as the Banking, Finance, and Urban Affairs (later renamed Banking and Financial Services) Committee. As a legislator, Fields largely aligned himself with the President William J. Clinton administration's objectives. He voted in favor of the Brady Handgun Violence Prevention Act, which mandated a five-day waiting period for handgun sales, and backed Clinton's 1993 deficit reduction plan. He broke with the Clinton White House on two major issues, however. He opposed the North American Free Trade Agreement, out of concern that it would hurt businesses in his district, and he voted against the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 over its expanded use of capital punishment. "I cannot in my conscience vote for a crime bill that has 60 different death penalties," he declared, arguing that the policy could disproportionately affect African Americans.[6]

From his seat on the Banking Committee, Fields introduced two bills designed to regulate banks and other businesses that cash checks. The congressman learned that many of his low-income constituents faced difficulties when cashing checks, including government benefits. Check-bearers were turned away from banks where they did not have accounts and resorted to cashing checks at unregulated businesses that charged high fees. Fields's legislation sought to limit those fees and prohibit banks from refusing government checks. Neither bill got out of committee.[7]

During his time in the House, Fields defended the borders of his district against several lawsuits. In 1992, four residents of the Fourth District filed a lawsuit, arguing that by packing African Americans into two "super-majority" districts, Louisiana was diluting their political strength in the rest of the state. In December 1993, a federal three-judge panel invalidated Fields's district and required the state to conduct another redistricting. In April 1994, the state legislature redrew the district to resemble a wedge running between northwestern and central Louisiana. Fields's hometown of Baton Rouge remained within the district and the new borders still contained a majority-Black population (58 percent). Not satisfied, the same plaintiffs filed suit again. Only after the U.S. Supreme Court issued a stay in August did the 1994 election proceed with Fields running in the wedge-shaped district. Fields trounced his opponent, Republican Patricia Slocum, in the open primary with 70 percent of the vote. But the ongoing legal challenges required much of Fields's attention. "For four years, I had one foot in the House and one foot across the street in the Supreme Court," Fields later recalled. "I was under this dark cloud the whole time I was up there. I never knew if I would be there the next day." Fields blamed the political enemies he made during his years in the state senate for the relentless attacks on the boundaries of his district.[8]

Amid the redistricting battle, Fields ran for governor of Louisiana in 1995. Fields worked to mobilize Black voters, and in the crowded open-primary, Fields's campaign focused

on improving education and eliminating poverty. Fields won 19 percent of the vote, the top Democrat, and finished as the runner-up to Republican Mike Foster—whose family had a history of service in the state and who switched party affiliation just weeks before the primary election. Fields ended up losing the runoff—which was mostly divided on racial lines—taking 36 percent of the vote.[9]

On January 5, 1996, a U.S. District Court ruled that Fields's wedge-shaped district was unconstitutional because it was drawn with race as a primary factor. The court then drew a new map, which featured compact districts that ran largely along parish lines—Fields's district was redrawn into a rectangular shape that ran from Louisiana's northwest border south through Shreveport. Fields opposed the map because it eliminated his district's Black majority, leaving the state with only one majority-minority district. Fields also no longer lived in the new district; his Baton Rouge home ended up being drawn into a district represented by the veteran House Republican Richard Hugh Baker. Louisiana's attorney general appealed the District Court's ruling to the U.S. Supreme Court, but the state legislature—following the lead of the newly elected Governor Mike Foster—adopted the court's map in April 1996, despite Fields's plea to the statehouse. Fields chose not to run against Baker in 1996. "I don't want to leave the impression that I am bitter [about the apportionment battle]. I want people to know how honored I am," he told reporters, "I got 17 percent of the white vote [in the governor's race]. For a then-33-year-old candidate like me to get 17 percent of the cross-over vote, I think that says there's a bright future ahead."[10]

Though Fields debated running for an open U.S. Senate seat when Senator John Bennett Johnston Jr. retired, he ultimately decided to pass on the election, citing his earlier loss for governor. After leaving Congress, Fields was active in the 1996 presidential campaign, serving as a senior advisor on Clinton's re-election campaign. In 1997, he took an appointment with Vice President Albert Gore Jr. directing a federal program that awarded grants and economic incentives to impoverished communities, classified as "empowerment zones" and "enterprise communities," each receiving a different level of federal aid. Several of these zones were in Fields's former Louisiana district.[11]

Fields returned to the state senate in a special election in December 1997, serving simultaneously with his younger brother, Wilson. Fields began hosting a weekly radio program in Baton Rouge, called "Cleo Live," which drew prominent Black politicians as guests. He also opened a law practice. "The more I get into my law practice, the less appealing returning to Congress becomes," Fields confessed. "It's been one of the most productive things I've done with my life." But he also conceded, "When I was in Congress, I thought it was the greatest job in the world." Fields served in Baton Rouge until term limits forced him out of office in 2008. Term limits in the Louisiana legislature only applied to consecutive terms and were not a lifetime limit. After a 12-year period as a private citizen, Fields again won election to his old state senate seat in 2019 for a term that began in 2020.[12]

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Alcee L. Hastings

1936–2021

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1993–2021

Democrat from Florida



Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

In 1993, Alcee L. Hastings, a civil rights attorney who served as the first Black federal judge in Florida history before being impeached and removed from the bench, became one of the first Black Members of Congress from Florida since Reconstruction. Hastings went on to serve 14 terms in Congress where he was regarded as an expert on foreign policy, serving on both the Foreign Affairs and Select Permanent Committee on Intelligence; he also held a seat on the powerful Rules Committee. Looking back at his full career, Hastings explained: "All of those are extraordinary types of circumstances that would cause lesser people to buckle. I did not and I have not."[1]

Alcee Lamar Hastings was born in Altamonte Springs, Florida, at the time a small farming community north of Orlando, on September 5, 1936. Hastings was an only child. His parents, Julius C. and Mildred L. Hastings, were domestic workers who found work out of state for better wages. Hastings, who lived with his maternal grandmother, graduated from Crooms Academy in Sanford, Florida, in 1953. When Hastings was growing up, central Florida was thoroughly segregated. As a high school friend, and later law partner, remembered: "Both of us were bused in, to Crooms. It was the black school. Totally segregated. Everything. The whole town." Hastings attended historically Black universities for the entirety of his post-secondary education. In 1958, Hastings earned a bachelor's degree in zoology and botany from Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee, and later attended Howard University School of Law in Washington, DC. Hastings left Howard early and earned a law degree from Florida Agricultural & Mechanical University in Tallahassee, Florida. In 1964, he was admitted to the Florida bar, and he practiced as a civil rights and criminal defense attorney for the next 13 years. Hastings was married three times and had three children.[2]

Hastings became a lawyer at the height of the civil rights movement in Florida. He joined a practice in Fort Lauderdale and quickly became a prominent attorney and community leader in efforts to desegregate South Florida. Hastings and his partner successfully sued a local restaurant and hotel to end discriminatory practices. Working with the local NAACP, Hastings sued the Broward County school district to desegregate. In 1970, Hastings ran a largely symbolic campaign as the first African-American candidate for a U.S. Senate seat from Florida. As he explained to a reporter: "I want black children to know that this is their country and they have a right to run for any office

they choose, even the presidency." Hastings experienced violent opposition to his campaign; someone shot at his house, leaving a bullet embedded in his mailbox next to his front door. Hastings made several other unsuccessful runs for office, before being appointed as a circuit court judge in Broward County, Florida, in 1977. In 1979, President James Earl "Jimmy" Carter appointed Hastings to a U.S. District Court seat in Miami, making him the first Black federal judge in Florida history.[3]

In 1981, Alcee Hastings's promising judicial career came to an abrupt halt. Hastings was indicted by a federal grand jury for allegedly soliciting bribes in return for lessening the sentence in a case. A jury acquitted Hastings in 1983, but a lawyer who claimed he was working in tandem with the judge was sentenced to three years in prison. Soon after Hastings's acquittal, two fellow federal judges, believing Hastings was guilty and that he had perjured himself, used a 1980 federal law to file an official complaint against Hastings. A special committee was formed and led by John Doar, a former U.S. Attorney famous for his work during the civil rights movement and with the House Judiciary Committee during the impeachment investigation of President Richard M. Nixon. The committee concluded there was substantial evidence of wrongdoing by Hastings and forwarded their findings to the Judicial Conference of the United States. The Judicial Conference, headed by Supreme Court Chief Justice William H. Rehnquist, sent the U.S. House of Representatives its conclusion that Hastings participated in potentially impeachable offenses.[4]

In the House, Michigan Representative John Conyers Jr., chair of the Subcommittee on Criminal Justice of the Committee on the Judiciary led Hastings's impeachment investigation. Conyers, who spent his congressional career as an outspoken opponent of what he saw as a racist criminal justice system was initially skeptical of the charges against Hastings. But he eventually concluded Hastings was guilty. The House voted 413 to 3 to impeach Hastings on 17 counts. The Senate agreed and voted guilty on 8 of the 17 counts to remove Hastings from office. But, significantly for Hastings's future, the Senate did not ban him from holding other federal offices. Throughout the trial, Hastings maintained his innocence. Defiant, on the Capitol steps after the Senate trial, Hastings announced he was going to run for governor of Florida.[5]

Hastings ran for Florida secretary of state instead and finished a distant second. In 1992, he ran for Congress after court-ordered reapportionment in Florida—in compliance with the 1982 Voting Rights Amendments—created a majority-Black district covering large portions of Broward County including West Palm Beach and western Fort Lauderdale. In a close race in September 1992, Hastings placed second in a five-candidate primary behind Florida state representative Lois Frankel. In the ensuing runoff, Hastings defeated Frankel with 58 percent of the vote. The primary victory in the heavily Democratic district virtually assured Hastings a seat in the U.S. House; in November, he defeated Ed Fielding, a real estate salesman, with 58 percent of the vote. Along with newly elected Representatives Carrie P. Meek and Corrine Brown, Hastings became one of the first African Americans elected to the U.S. Congress from Florida since the Reconstruction era. In his subsequent elections, Hastings never won by less than 73 percent of the vote and occasionally ran unopposed.[6]

When Hastings entered the House in January 1993, he received assignments to three committees: Foreign Affairs; Merchant Marine and Fisheries; and Post Office and Civil Service. He served on Foreign Affairs through the 106th Congress (1999–2001). When the Republican majority disbanded both the Merchant Marine and Fisheries and Post Office and Civil Service Committees in the 104th Congress (1995–1997), he was reassigned to the Science Committee, where he served through the 105th Congress (1997–1999). In 1999, Hastings earned a seat on the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, where he eventually served as vice chair of the full committee and two of its subcommittees. He was a member of the Intelligence Committee from the beginning of the 106th Congress (1999–2001) through December 2007, and again in the 111th Congress (2009–2011). Members on the Intelligence Committee had a term limit; by stepping down before the end of the 110th Congress (2007–2009), Hastings was able to return to the committee later and serve another full two-year term.[7]

In 2001, Hastings was appointed to the Rules Committee to fill the vacancy caused by the death of Massachusetts Representative Joseph Moakley. He would stay on the committee for the rest of his career. The Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) was instrumental in winning Hastings the appointment; he was the first Black lawmaker on the committee since Alan Wheat retired in 1994. The Rules Committee has immense power in the House; it sets the

rules for debate and the number of amendments for every bill that reaches the floor. Hastings appreciated the opportunities provided on the panel. "People understand that term 'power' … rather than working on the fringes of legislation, I will be responsible for being directly involved." Hastings chaired the Rules Committee's Subcommittee on Legislative and Budget Process during the 110th, 111th, 116th (2019–2021), and 117th (2021–2023) Congresses.[8]

In 2007, Hastings was in the running for chair of the Intelligence Committee after the Democrats regained the majority in the House. The appointment ultimately went to Texas Democrat Silvestre Reyes. The national press, and Hastings as well, believed his previous impeachment prevented the South Florida Representative from becoming chair. Hastings understood he could not outlive the impeachment, that despite his successful congressional career, it was, as he told a reporter, "part of my life. … It will be in my obituary."[9]

Hastings gained a reputation for speaking out in defense of Democratic policies on the Rules Committee. During debate over a health care bill in 2017, Hastings explained to a Republican committee member who asked to bring down the tone of the debate: "I'm not going to bring my tone down. I'm mad as hell about what you all are doing, and I don't have to be nice to nobody when you're being nasty to poor people." Hasting's willingness to speak his mind was a viewed as a strength among his supporters. Theodore E. "Ted" Deutch, a fellow South Florida Democratic Representative, explained that Hastings was someone "who can stand up to a bull, who can represent people whose voices need to be heard, who's unafraid to say what needs to be said."[10]

Through his work on the Foreign Policy Committee and the Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, Hastings became regarded as an expert on American foreign policy in the House. In 2004, he was elected chair of the Organization for Security Cooperation in Europe's (OSCE) Parliamentary Assembly, an organization formed in the early 1990s to foster better communication between national parliaments. Then in 2007 he was selected as chair of the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, better known as the U.S. Helsinki Commission, which was created by Congress because of the 1975 Helsinki Accords to monitor human and democratic rights and cooperation among the participants in the diplomatic agreement.[11]

One of the primary tasks of the OSCE's Parliamentary Assembly was election monitoring to help ensure fair elections. As head of the OSCE, Hastings led teams to monitor the elections in, among other countries, Ukraine and Azerbaijan; in both elections, the OSCE highlighted evidence of fraud. The expansion and protection of fair democratic elections, abroad and at home, was one of Hastings's primary interests in the House. Hastings introduced resolutions that successfully passed the House calling for fair elections in Gabon and Haiti. In 2001, he won a promise from the chair of the Appropriations Committee, Florida Republican Charles William "Bill" Young, to provide federal money for election reforms in the United States. Hastings initially sponsored a $600 million amendment, but he withdrew it after he reached an agreement with Young. "It is essential that Congress provide states and local governments the necessary assistance needed to improve their antiquated systems," Hastings said.[12]

Since his time as a judge, Hastings had an interest in Haiti and the rights of Haitian immigrants. There was a large Haitian and Haitian American population in his South Florida district. In his first term in Congress, Hastings supported the intervention by the American military after a coup deposed Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide. In 1994, after President William J. Clinton had already sent troops to Haiti, Hastings helped write a substitute to a House Joint Resolution that supported the military intervention but called for the President to present to Congress a plan for the intervention. The substitute amendment passed the House. Hastings also introduced legislation to reform immigration policies to treat political refugees from Haiti in a similar manner to migrants with refugee status from other countries. The bill was not reported out of committee.[13]

On the Intelligence Committee, Representative Hastings prodded U.S. security agencies to recruit more widely, insisting that reforms to the intelligence community "should include diversity. There should be more women, more Arab-language speakers, more [foreign-]language speakers generally, more Asians, more Latinos, more blacks." Hastings also lobbied for funding for "centers of academic excellence," to recruit and train more women and racial minorities for intelligence work.[14]

As part of his foreign policy and intelligence work, Hastings, who opposed the Iraq War without support from the United Nations or a postwar plan, remained critical of

the threat to civil liberties he saw in some counter-terrorism legislation. During debate on a 2012 defense authorization bill, Hastings criticized the legislation, saying: "In one fell swoop we have set up a situation where American citizens could have their Fourth, Fifth, Sixth, Seventh, and Eighth amendment rights violated on mere suspicions. … This legislation goes too far."[15]

Allegations of ethical misconduct continued to follow Hastings throughout his congressional career. In 2010, a former employee accused Hastings of sexual harassment which Hasting denied. The House Ethics Committee found that the accusations did not "rise to level of a violation of House rules" and the U.S. Congress Office of Compliance eventually came to a financial settlement with the complainant. In 2019, the House Ethics Committee investigated Hastings following allegations that he had an improper relationship with an aide. The committee dropped the investigation in 2020.[16]

In early 2019, Hastings announced that he was diagnosed with stage 4 pancreatic cancer. He was re-elected to the 117th Congress but was too ill to attend his swearing-in in January 2021. Hastings died on April 6, 2021. At the time of his death, he was the dean of the Florida congressional delegation.[17]

Manuscript Collection

Broward County Library (Ft. Lauderdale, FL). *Papers*: The Alcee L. Hastings Collection features digital photographs of his career and is available on the Broward County Library website. *Memorabilia*: The Alcee L. Hasting Collection contains certificates, plaques, and other ephemera. The collection is open for use.

Notes

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Earl F. Hilliard

1942–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1993–2003

Democrat from Alabama



Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

In 1993, Earl F. Hilliard became the first African-American lawmaker from Alabama to serve in Congress since 1877 when Jeremiah Haralson held an Alabama seat during Reconstruction. After a long career in the state legislature, Hilliard served in the U.S. House of Representatives for five terms where he prioritized the needs of his constituents, pushing legislation to advance the agricultural prospects of rural communities throughout Alabama's Black Belt as well as advocating for jobs in its nearby cities. "We have not had a voice in 117 years," Hilliard declared upon his first election. "I will be able to articulate the views and opinions of a group that hasn't had representation in a very long time."[1]

Earl Frederick Hilliard was born in Birmingham, Alabama, on April 9, 1942, to Iola Frazier and William Hilliard. Hilliard grew up in a segregated society and graduated from Western-Olin High School in Birmingham. He pursued higher education at three prominent historically Black colleges and universities. At Morehouse College in Atlanta, Georgia, where Hilliard earned a bachelor's degree in 1964, Hilliard met Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. The meeting had a powerful effect on him, and Hilliard vowed to become "one of King's foot soldiers in the war for racial equality." Three years later, in 1967, Hilliard received a law degree from Howard University Law School in Washington, DC. In 1970, he received a master of business administration at Atlanta University in Georgia. Hilliard was admitted to the Alabama Bar and returned to his native Birmingham to practice law. He married Mary Franklin, and the couple had two children: Alesia and Earl Jr.[2]

Hilliard began his political career when he won a seat in the Alabama state house of representatives in 1974. In 1980, he was elected to the state senate. Hilliard's senate career focused on helping his low-income constituents in the Birmingham area. He also earned a reputation as a hard-fighting, tactical legislator. In 1991, Hilliard declared bankruptcy after a deal to sell a radio station he owned fell through. That experience, he said, gave him a new perspective that he believed benefited him as a legislator. "That bankruptcy gave me a chance to pay people back in an orderly manner," he noted. "I'm able to understand what it is not to be able to pay obligations."[3]

In 1992, when Alabama redrew its congressional districts following the 1990 Census, the state legislature created a single Black-majority district that stretched across west-central Alabama from the Mississippi border through Selma to Montgomery and included portions of Tuscaloosa and

Birmingham. Montgomery and Birmingham made up the bulk of the urban population, and the district also included rural communities in the state's "Black Belt," so-called for its dark, fertile soil. The district's three major cities—Selma, Montgomery, and Birmingham—had been focal points in the civil rights movement. Hilliard entered the race for the Democratic nomination for the new district and faced a crowded field of six candidates in his June 2 primary. The frontrunner was Hank Sanders of Selma, who, like Hilliard, served in the state senate. In an arduous campaign, Hilliard and Sanders squared off on issues including health care and job creation. On Election Day, Hilliard prevailed with 31 percent of the vote against Sanders's 24 percent. But because no candidate captured a majority, Hilliard and Sanders went to an August runoff election where Hilliard narrowly defeated Sanders with just over 50 percent of the vote. Because the district was overwhelmingly Democratic, winning the primary was tantamount to winning the general election. In that contest, Hilliard defeated Republican Kervin Jones, a Black Tuscaloosa farmer, with 70 percent of the vote. In his next four re-elections, Hilliard won at least 71 percent of the vote, running unopposed in 1998.[4]

In the House, Hilliard was initially assigned to the Agriculture and Small Business Committees. In 1996, he traded the Small Business post for a seat on the International Relations Committee. An active member of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC), Hilliard was elected vice chair of the organization for the 105th Congress (1997–1999).[5]

One of Hilliard's priorities in Congress was to secure job opportunities in his district. He advocated for expanding the Alabama military installations used by the U.S. Army and NASA and closing American military bases in Germany and Japan so that more funding would be available for domestic military installations. He also worked to protect a Tuscaloosa-area airport that served his rural constituents after the airport's only carrier threatened to leave in 1995. "Tuscaloosa and the surrounding communities would suffer terribly without local air service, and this travel option will become increasingly important as industrial development continues in the area," he wrote to a colleague. Due in large part to Hilliard's efforts, the House and Senate Appropriations Committees diverted funding to maintain the Tuscaloosa airport as part of the Essential Air Service program which had been created to ensure airlines served rural regions of the country. Hilliard also was crucial in convincing a Korean-based car manufacturer to open a plant outside Montgomery. Hilliard was a featured speaker at the plant's groundbreaking ceremony in April 2002.[6]

In 1993, Hilliard strongly opposed the North American Free Trade Agreement, which had been negotiated by the William J. Clinton administration to facilitate commerce between the United States, Mexico, and Canada, out of concern that it would eliminate working- and middle-class jobs from his district. "My constituents will not be around to reap the so-called long term benefits of this agreement," Hilliard warned. He also voted against a 1996 welfare reform bill that shifted much responsibility to fund and implement the country's safety net to the states. "Without the federal money there … I expect for Alabama to do less for the needy," he predicted. Hilliard broke with Democrats on several other major legislative provisions. In 1994, he voted against the Clinton administration's crime bill because he opposed the assault weapons ban and the lack of adequate funding available for crime prevention and educational programs. Hilliard was one of only 12 Democrats to vote against a 2002 bipartisan campaign reform bill because he believed that the legislation's restrictions on "soft money" campaign contributions would disproportionately hurt low-income and rural communities. Soft money, which is not directed towards a specific candidate, was often used to help pay for voter registration and mobilization.[7]

From his seat on the Agriculture Committee, Hilliard worked to help the rural regions of his district by submitting legislation to establish a Southern Rural Development Commission, which he modeled on the Appalachian Regional Commission. The purpose of the commission was to dispense federal money to projects enhancing economic development, improving health care, and offering job training. The new commission would have covered agricultural regions of 10 southern states, but the measure died in committee. Hilliard also offered creative legislation proposing to add rabbit to the list of meats that were federally inspected. Hilliard hoped federal safety requirements would increase rabbit's popularity among consumers and believed his constituents could breed the animals for national markets.[8]

In 1996 and again in 2002, Hilliard helped shape the farm bill, a massive legislative package that set America's agriculture policy that was regularly updated and reauthorized. Hilliard amended the 2002 bill to provide $25 million annually for a U.S. Agriculture Department program to provide educational

and technical assistance to minority farmers. "The number of black farmers who own their own land has dropped by over 90% since 1910, and we are still losing them rapidly. We need to help them stay on the land and be profitable," Hilliard declared.[9]

On the International Relations Committee, Hilliard sought to diversify the U.S. State Department's staff. During a committee markup, he inserted a provision into the 2003 foreign relations authorization bill to require the State Department to report to Congress its data on minority employment. Hilliard's frequent foreign travel as a member of the committee garnered national attention. In August 1997, he made an unauthorized trip to Libya. The State Department had banned American travel to Libya and all business and financial transactions with the country following the decision to sanction Libya and declare it a terrorist state in 1986.[10]

During an investigation by the Ethics Committee into Hilliard's travel, Hilliard revealed that an oil company headed by a wealthy Tunisian businessman had paid for the trip. Hilliard claimed he went to Libya to investigate how American money was being spent abroad and "develop channels for dialogue" with the Muslim world. "The majority of our foreign aid is spent in that Middle Eastern region between Egypt and other north African countries," Hilliard explained. "[Libya] was a country I had not been to, and I had the opportunity to go this time and I went." In a letter to his constituents, Hilliard noted that he did not use his American passport to enter the country and that he did not spend any money, which was later confirmed by the U.S. Treasury Department. In November 1997, the Ethics Committee dropped its investigation into Hilliard's trip. In June 2001, the Ethics Committee issued a written rebuke over a separate incident in which Hilliard was accused of misappropriating campaign funds for his and his family's personal use.[11]

In the 2000 Democratic primary, Hilliard faced Artur Davis, a former assistant district attorney who earned the endorsement of the mayor of Birmingham. Hilliard ultimately fended him off with 58 percent of the vote, but Davis returned two years later for a rematch. Davis accused Hilliard of doing little for the district in his decade in office. Moreover, redistricting had added more voters from counties that favored Davis and eliminated two counties that primarily favored Hilliard. Facing renewed criticism for his ethics issues, Hilliard defended his Libya trip and criticized Davis for accepting large campaign donations from out-of-state pro-Israel groups. Hilliard narrowly edged out Davis in the June primary, 46 to 43 percent, but because neither candidate secured a majority, the race went to a runoff election. Davis ultimately defeated Hilliard in the June 25 runoff, taking 56 percent of the vote to Hilliard's 44 percent.[12]

After leaving the House, Hilliard returned to his law firm in Birmingham. Although he did not seek elective office again, Hilliard remained active in local politics.[13]

Manuscript Collection

University of Alabama Libraries, Special Collection Repository (Tuscaloosa, AL). *Papers*: 1977; 1995–1998, 0.4 linear feet. Correspondence, clippings, notes, and publications from the office of Representative Earl F. Hilliard from 1993 to 2003. The bulk of the collection covers the period between 1995 and 1998, and the materials primarily pertain to international affairs.

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Cynthia A. McKinney

1955–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1993–2003; 2005–2007

Democrat from Georgia



Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

Elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1992, Cynthia A. McKinney was the first African-American woman from Georgia to serve in Congress. From her seat on the Armed Services and International Relations Committees, McKinney worked to address human rights issues and was known for her unorthodox views on U.S. foreign policy. After a decade on Capitol Hill, McKinney lost re-election in 2002. Two years later, voters in her DeKalb County district returned her to the House for a single term, making her one of a handful of Congresswomen who served nonconsecutive terms.

Cynthia Ann McKinney was born on March 17, 1955, in Atlanta, Georgia, to Leola Christion McKinney, a nurse, and James Edward "Billy" McKinney, a police officer, civil rights activist, and longtime legislator in the Georgia state house of representatives. Her father joined the Atlanta police department in 1948 as one of its first African-American officers. Cynthia McKinney was inspired to enter politics after participating in demonstrations with her father. While protesting the conviction of Tommy Lee Hines, a Black man with an intellectual disability who had been charged with raping a White woman in Alabama, McKinney and other protestors were threatened by the Ku Klux Klan. "That was probably my day of awakening," McKinney recalled. "That day, I experienced hatred for the first time. I learned that there really are people who hate me without even knowing me. … That was when I knew that politics was going to be something I would do."[1]

McKinney graduated from St. Joseph High School and, in 1978, earned a bachelor's degree in international relations from the University of Southern California. She later pursued graduate studies at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University in Medford, Massachusetts. In 1984, she served as a diplomatic fellow at Spelman College in Atlanta. She then taught political science at Agnes Scott College in Decatur and at Clark Atlanta University. Cynthia McKinney married Coy Grandison, a Jamaican politician. The couple had a son, Coy Jr., before divorcing.[2]

In 1986, Billy McKinney registered his daughter as a candidate for the Georgia state house of representatives without her knowledge. McKinney lost that race to the incumbent but, without even campaigning, won 20 percent of the vote on name recognition alone. Two years later, in 1988, McKinney won election as an at-large state representative in the Georgia legislature, defeating Herb Mabry, who would later head the state AFL-CIO. The

McKinneys became the first father-daughter combination to serve concurrently in the same state legislature. McKinney's father expected her to be a close political ally, but he was soon confronted with his daughter's political independence. "He thought he was going to have another vote," she recalled, "but once I got there, we disagreed on everything. … I was a chip off the old block, a maverick."[3]

During the late 1980s, McKinney and other Georgia legislators pressed the U.S. Justice Department to create more majority-Black congressional districts so that African-American voters would have more equitable representation. In 1992, the Georgia legislature created two additional majority-Black districts—Georgia previously had only one—and McKinney chose to run in the sprawling 260-mile-long district that included much of DeKalb County east of Atlanta to Augusta and extended southward to the coastal city of Savannah, encompassing or cutting through 22 counties, and both inner cities and rural communities.[4]

McKinney moved into the new district, and her father managed her campaign. In the five-way Democratic primary, McKinney used a strong grassroots network to place first, with 31 percent of the vote. In a runoff against second-place finisher George DeLoach—a funeral home director and the former mayor of Waynesboro, Georgia—McKinney won with 54 percent of the vote. In the heavily Democratic district, she defeated her Republican opponent with 73 percent of the vote. Reflecting on an election that propelled record numbers of women and African-American candidates into congressional office, McKinney said shortly afterward, "Now we have people in Congress who are like the rest of America. It's wonderful to have ordinary people making decisions about the lives of ordinary Americans. It brings a level of sensitivity that has not been there."[5]

When McKinney was sworn in to the 103rd Congress (1993–1995), she received assignments on the Committee on Agriculture and the Committee on Foreign Affairs, which was renamed International Relations the following Congress. In the 104th Congress (1995–1997) she won a spot on the Banking and Finance Committee, where she served two terms. In the 105th Congress (1997–1999) McKinney was assigned to the National Security Committee, which was renamed Armed Services the following Congress.

McKinney was part of a newly elected vanguard of Black Congresswomen, many from the South, who emerged from state legislatures onto the national political scene. She arrived on Capitol Hill after years of cultivating an unapologetic legislative style in the Georgia state house. In January 1991, she delivered a blistering speech attacking the Gulf War and President George H.W. Bush: two-thirds of the legislators in the Georgia statehouse left the chamber after McKinney called the military action "the most inane use of American will that I have witnessed in a very long time." She added, "America must be willing to fight injustice and prejudice at home as effectively as America is ready to take up arms to fight 'naked aggression' in the international arena." In 1995, she infuriated House Republican leaders when she suggested that an independent counsel investigate Speaker Newt Gingrich of Georgia for violating the chamber's gift rules because he accepted free air time on cable television to broadcast a college course. In 2000, McKinney accused Vice President Albert Gore Jr. of having a "low Negro tolerance level" for not having more African-American agents on his security detail. She later claimed the remark was part of a draft press release not intended for public distribution, but she did push the William J. Clinton administration to investigate charges of discrimination in the Secret Service.[6]

In the House, McKinney advocated for poor and working-class Americans and spoke out on issues ranging from human rights abuses abroad to social inequities at home. She also opposed federal efforts to restrict access to abortions—particularly a long-standing measure known as the Hyde amendment that largely eliminated Medicaid coverage for abortions. In a debate on the House Floor, McKinney described the amendment as "nothing but a discriminatory policy against poor women, who happen to be disproportionately black."[7]

A court challenge shortly after McKinney's 1994 re-election placed her at the epicenter of a national debate over the constitutionality of majority-minority districts, created to preserve the electoral power of racial and ethnic minorities in keeping with the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Five White voters from the rural parts of her district—including her former opponent in the Democratic primary, George DeLoach—filed a suit claiming they had been disenfranchised because the state drew "an illegally gerrymandered district to benefit black voters," as one plaintiff noted. McKinney said she had made great efforts to reach out to her rural constituents but that her entreaties had been met with "resistance" or "silence." A

U.S. Supreme Court decision in 1995 invalidated Georgia's congressional district map as a "racial gerrymander" that violated the Fourteenth Amendment's guarantee of equal protection under the law. A panel of federal judges from three courts remapped Georgia's districts before the 1996 elections, and the Black population of McKinney's district dropped from 64 percent to about 33 percent. Although McKinney was forced to run in a majority-White district, the political network that figured heavily in her previous campaigns helped her prevail against Republican challenger John M. Mitnick, with 58 percent of the vote. McKinney subsequently won re-election twice by comfortable margins of about 60 percent. After reapportionment in 2002, African Americans made up more than 50 percent of the population in McKinney's district.[8]

On the International Relations Committee, where she eventually served as ranking member on the International Operations and Human Rights Subcommittee, McKinney tried to curb weapons sales to countries that violated human rights and subverted democracy. She sponsored several bills and amendments to this effect; in 1997, she partnered with California Representative Dana Rohrabacher to offer an amendment to the 1998 Foreign Affairs Reform and Restructuring Act. The amendment passed, but the bill was vetoed by President Clinton. Undeterred, McKinney continue to push for an arms transfer code of conduct without success. In 2000, she voted against granting full trade relations with China, citing Beijing's poor human rights record. McKinney frequently challenged American foreign policy during this period, including American intervention in Kosovo, long-standing U.S. sanctions against Iraq, and much of U.S. policy in the Middle East.[9]

Following the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, McKinney made several statements that drew criticism from colleagues, the media, and constituents. First, when New York City Mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani rejected a donation for the victims of the attacks from a wealthy Saudi prince who claimed the September 11 attacks were a response to U.S. policies in the Middle East, McKinney offered to accept the money instead to combat poverty in her district. Then, in a 2002 radio interview, McKinney suggested that officials in the George W. Bush administration had prior knowledge about the attacks but remained silent because they stood to gain financially from military spending on a new war in the region. Alluding to the still-contentious recount of votes in Florida during the 2000 presidential election, and the Supreme Court ruling that resulted in Bush's presidency, McKinney said, "an administration of questionable legitimacy has been given unprecedented power."[10]

In the 2002 Democratic primary, McKinney faced Denise L. Majette, an African-American former state judge who had never run for office. Majette's campaign tried to draw a stark contrast between her decade of work as a judge with McKinney's mounting list of controversial comments, with particular emphasis on her statements regarding the September 11 attacks. McKinney's support for an independent Palestine drew national attention to the race, as Majette received significant backing from individuals and organizations that supported the close relationship between the United States and Israel. Some of McKinney's Jewish constituents were so frustrated by her stance that they sought to be moved into the district of neighboring Representative John Lewis during the 2002 redistricting. Majette took advantage of the open primary, benefiting from a coordinated effort by Republicans to vote for her in favor of McKinney. Majette amassed a two-to-one fundraising advantage and prevailed by a 58 to 42 percent margin in the primary before winning the general election.[11]

Two years later, when Majette made an unsuccessful bid for the U.S. Senate, McKinney entered the race to reclaim her old congressional seat. She won the Democratic primary with 54 percent of the vote. McKinney took advantage of her name recognition and backing from the Congressional Black Caucus. Her understated campaign steered clear of extensive media coverage and, as in her earlier runs for Congress, relied on a vigorous grassroots effort and focused on local concerns, including the locations of landfills, while touting her opposition to the Bush administration's wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. McKinney won the general election to the 109th Congress (2005–2007) with 64 percent of the vote against Republican Catherine Davis. McKinney regained her assignment on the Armed Services Committee and picked up a seat on the Budget Committee.[12]

Though McKinney primarily confined her legislative efforts to foreign policy, she also pursued a unique environmental agenda centered on the wildlife and public lands in her home state of Georgia. She introduced the National Forest Protection and Restoration Act three times between 1997 and 2001, which was designed to outlaw all logging and timber activities on federal public lands and allocate funding for the Environmental Protection

Agency to investigate alternatives to wood for paper and construction. In 2002, she introduced the Public Lands Forever Wild Act, which set limits on development and prioritized a return to "natural conditions" on public lands. She submitted the Arabia Mountain National Heritage Act four times during her final two nonconsecutive terms in office. This bill, which established the land surrounding and including Arabia Mountain near DeKalb County in Georgia as a national heritage site, was folded into the National Heritage Areas Act which became law in 2006.[13]

In late March 2006, McKinney allegedly hit a Capitol Hill police officer who stopped her at the entrance to one of the House office buildings and asked for identification. McKinney claimed she was a victim of racial profiling and, according to news accounts, described the police officer who stopped her as "racist." A grand jury investigated the incident but declined to indict McKinney.[14]

A few months later, in July 2006, McKinney failed to win 50 percent of the vote in the Democratic primary against DeKalb County commissioner Henry C. "Hank" Johnson Jr., an African-American lawyer whose campaign message was "Replace McKinney" and who criticized the incumbent for her history of controversial statements. Johnson also suggested that McKinney's foreign policy interests left her little time to tend to the interests of her home district. In the runoff, Johnson prevailed by a 59 to 41 percent margin, taking 60 percent of the vote in McKinney's former stronghold in DeKalb County.[15]

After leaving the House in January 2007, McKinney remained active in national politics. In December 2007, she announced her candidacy as the Green Party nominee for the 2008 presidential election, making the ballot in 32 states. In 2012, McKinney intended to challenge Johnson to reclaim her seat in the House but failed to qualify for the ballot.[16]

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Carrie P. Meek

1926–2021

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1993–2003

Democrat from Florida



Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

In 1992, Carrie P. Meek won election to the U.S. House of Representatives becoming one of the first African-American lawmakers to represent Florida in Congress since Reconstruction. In her first term, Meek secured a coveted seat on the powerful House Appropriations Committee where she helped determine federal spending. Over the course of her 10 years in Congress, Meek focused on economic development and immigration issues important to her district. She also worked across the aisle on health care reform and to protect welfare amid efforts to overhaul federal aid programs during the mid-1990s. "I knew what it was like to be treated differently," she said about growing up in segregated Florida. "I wanted to see things changed, and wanted to assist any movement to help with changing it."[1]

Carrie Meek was born Carrie Pittman on April 29, 1926, in Tallahassee, Florida, the daughter of Willie and Carrie Pittman. Meek was the granddaughter of a woman who had been born enslaved. Meek's parents were sharecroppers; her father later became a caretaker, and her mother was a laundry worker and then owned a boarding house. Nicknamed "Tot" by her siblings, Meek was the youngest of 12 children and lived with her family near the old Florida capitol. As a young girl, Meek participated in the Girl Scouts. When the group delivered brownies to the state capitol, Meek was barred from entering because she was Black. She waited on the sidewalk while her White peers walked in the front door.[2]

Meek went to Florida A&M University in Tallahassee, a historically Black university, and starred in track and field. In 1946, she graduated with a bachelor's degree in biology and physical education. At the time, Florida banned Black students from attending state graduate schools and arranged to pay full tuition if the students went to out-of-state schools. Meek enrolled at the University of Michigan. She graduated in 1948 with a master's degree in public health and physical education.[3]

Afterward, Meek coached basketball and taught biology and physical education at Bethune Cookman University, a historically Black university in Daytona Beach. She later taught at Florida A&M. In 1961, as a single mother with two young children, Meek accepted a position at Miami-Dade Community College, where she spent the next three decades teaching and working in college administration.[4]

After the death of Gwen Cherry, the first Black woman to serve in the Florida legislature, in 1979, Meek decided to run for the open seat in the state house of representatives.

Meek credited her experience on the federal city-planning committee, the Model Cities Program, in the late 1960s and early 1970s for teaching her "how to be competitive, how to make decisions and how to interact with the grassroots people," and preparing her for elective office. Although she did not receive the support of local Black leaders—who backed another candidate—Meek entered the crowded election and defeated 12 other candidates to win the seat. Her youngest child, Kendrick, recalled her creating campaign materials on a tight budget. Graphic design students from Miami Dade College drew signs "[with] waterproof markers, [writing] 'Carrie Meek.' And then we put a black and white picture [of her] in the middle of it and put a little cellophane over it. That was the sign."[5]

Meek served in the state house from 1979 to 1983, chairing the education appropriations subcommittee. From 1983 to 1993, Meek served in the Florida senate. She was the first African-American woman elected to the state senate. A skilled lawmaker who was once called "the conscience of the Florida Senate," Meek passed a minority business enterprise law and other legislation to promote literacy and help students stay in school.[6]

In 1992, Meek declared her candidacy for Congress when the incumbent, 10-term Democratic Representative William Lehman, decided to retire. Meek was 66 years old at the time, and one of her competitors turned her age into a campaign issue. But Meek, according to her son, saw it as an advantage. "He should continue to say that I'm too old," she said, "because the folks that are going to get out and vote are going to be my age or around my age, and they're told every day they're too old. He's doing nothing but helping us." Meek captured the Democratic nomination for the newly reapportioned district, which ran through Miami's northern suburbs in Dade County. In the majority-Black and largely Democratic district, she ran unopposed in the general election. Alongside Corrine Brown and Alcee L. Hastings, both of whom also won election to the House that November from Florida, Meek became one of the first three African-American lawmakers to serve in Congress from Florida since 1876.[7]

In her first term, Meek lobbied intensively for a seat on the Appropriations Committee, which set federal spending amounts. She met with Speaker Thomas S. Foley of Washington and, as her son remembers, said, "I just want to share with you that I've served in the appropriations committee in the [state] legislature. I would love to carry out your agenda on Appropriations. … Hurricane Andrew just hit my district. They really need me to be on this committee to help rebuild. … But I am committed to the things that … you would like to see happen on the Appropriations Committee." When she left the Speaker's office, Foley told his aide, "Put her on Appropriations." When Republicans took control of the House in 1994, Meek was reassigned to the Budget Committee and the Government Reform and Oversight Committee. In 1996, she returned to the Appropriations Committee and eventually served on two of its subcommittees: Treasury, Postal Service, and General Government; and VA, HUD, and Independent Agencies.[8]

Shortly after arriving on Capitol Hill, Meek sought federal disaster aid for her district which bore the brunt of Hurricane Andrew in August 1992. On Appropriations, Meek worked to expand federal programs to create jobs and provide opportunities for African-American entrepreneurs to open their own businesses. Meek also authored a measure to amend Social Security to cover household workers. On behalf of her district's Haitian community, Meek sought to grant U.S. residency to more immigrants and refugees. And in 1999 alone, from her seat on the Appropriations Committee, Meek secured tens of millions in tax breaks for developers working in underserved neighborhoods in her district and millions of dollars more for public housing programs and other community services.[9]

In 1997, Meek sought to restore welfare benefits to disabled legal immigrants after the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act cut off their eligibility to collect Supplemental Security Income (SSI). "The new welfare reform law was supposed to 'move people from welfare to work,' but ending life-sustaining payments to legal immigrants who are aged, blind or disabled has nothing to do with that goal," Meek said. In the Appropriations Committee, she introduced an amendment to continue SSI benefits for two years. A version of the amendment, introduced on the House Floor by Florida Congressman Lincoln Diaz-Balart and supported by Meek, passed into law in June and successfully extended the benefits. Meek also submitted a measure to allow welfare recipients in traditionally poor and undercounted neighborhoods to work temporarily for the U.S. Census Bureau without losing their benefits.[10]

Meek served in the minority party for all but her first term in Congress, and on certain national health issues,

she reached across the aisle to shape policy. She worked with Republicans to change warnings on cigarette labels to reflect the high rate of African-American deaths caused by smoking. And she teamed up with Republican Anne Meagher Northup of Kentucky to increase funding for research on lupus and to provide federal grants for college students with learning disabilities.[11]

Meek was not afraid to speak out against and challenge national officials. On January 18, 1995, Meek denounced Speaker Newt Gingrich of Georgia on the House Floor amid the controversy surrounding a $4.5 million advance he received for a book deal. "If anything, now, how much the Speaker earns has grown much more dependent upon how hard his publishing house hawks his book," Meek said. Republican Robert Smith Walker of Pennsylvania requested Meek's words be taken down, prompting clerks to write out her words and read them back to the House. Clifford Bundy Stearns of Florida, the presiding officer at the time, ruled what she said out of order, which led to an animated debate on the floor. The Republican majority successfully voted to strike Meek's words from the *Congressional Record*, 217 to 176. After the vote, Meek responded on the floor, "I have been elected to this House to speak the truth. There is nothing in the rules that says, 'Carrie Meek can't speak the truth,' and that is what I have done." Her Democratic colleagues applauded her remarks.[12]

Meek easily won all four of her re-elections. Her son, Kendrick, credited her success to her philosophy on campaigning. "She would always say to me, 'Kendrick, you have a choice. You can run for office for three months and probably get elected, or you can treat every day as though you're running for office and always be re-elected,'" he recalled. "She just worked all the time."[13]

In 2002, Meek declined to seek certain re-election to a sixth term, citing her age. "I wish I could say I was tired of [Congress]," she told the *Miami Herald*. "I love it still. But at age 76, understandably, some of my abilities have diminished. I don't have the same vigor that I had at age 65. I have the fire, but I don't have the physical ability. So it's time."[14]

Kendrick B. Meek, who served in the Florida senate, announced his candidacy for the Democratic nomination in her district. When he won the November 2002 general election, he became the second child, after James Kee of West Virginia who followed his mother, Maude Elizabeth Kee, in 1965, to directly succeed his mother in Congress.

Meek continued to serve as a sounding board for her son during his House career. She offered advice on legislative strategy, campaign techniques, and constituent relations. To help him better understand the history and experiences of African Americans in Florida, she told him stories of the racial discrimination she faced growing up. Years after she retired from Congress, he recalled, "She shared those experiences with me to make sure that I was well-rooted and understood the experience in Florida, which she, in many ways, was able to use … as a policymaker. I think that's what made her so powerful." Carrie Meek died on November 28, 2021, at her home in Miami, Florida.[15]

Manuscript Collection

Florida A&M University, Carrie Meek-James N. Eaton Sr. Southeastern Regional Black Archives Research Center and Museum (Tallahassee, FL). *Papers*: ca. 1993–2003, 250 cubic feet. The Carrie P. Meek Collection documents her career in the U.S. House of Representatives and includes campaign materials, legislation, constituent correspondence, press releases, programs, calendars, photographs, videotapes, and a museum collection. The manuscript collection is closed for processing; however, part of the museum collection is open.

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Carol Moseley Braun

1947–

UNITED STATES SENATOR

1993–1999

Democrat from Illinois



Image courtesy of the U.S. Senate Historical Office

Elected in 1992, Carol Moseley Braun was the first African-American woman Senator, and only the second Black Senator since Reconstruction. "I cannot escape the fact that I come to the Senate as a symbol of hope and change," Moseley Braun said shortly after being sworn in to office in 1993. "Nor would I want to, because my presence in and of itself will change the U.S. Senate." During her single term on Capitol Hill, Senator Moseley Braun worked to improve civil rights in America and sought legislation on crime, education, and families.[1]

Carol Moseley Braun was born Carol Moseley in Chicago, Illinois, on August 16, 1947. Her father, Joseph Moseley, a policeman, and her mother, Edna Moseley, a medical technician, divorced when she was a teenager. The oldest of four children in a middle-class family, Moseley Braun graduated from Parker High School in Chicago and earned a bachelor's degree in political science from the University of Illinois in 1969. As a teenager, Moseley Braun joined Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in a 1966 open housing march through the Chicago Lawn neighborhood on the southwest side of the city. When White residents opposed to neighborhood integration set cars on fire and violently attacked the peaceful marchers with rocks and bottles, she observed King's steadfast commitment to nonviolent protest and refrained from retaliation. By taking "the moral high road," Moseley Braun recalled, King demonstrated that "we value each other's humanity, that violence has no place in that." Her experience marching with King was formative and shaped her approach to politics.[2]

Moseley Braun's early interest in politics led her to work on the campaigns of state senator Richard Newhouse and state representative Harold Washington; Washington would later serve as a U.S. Representative and as the first African-American mayor of Chicago. In 1972, Moseley Braun graduated from the University of Chicago School of Law, where she founded the school's Black law students' association. In Chicago she met and later married Michael Braun; they divorced in 1986. The couple raised a son, Matthew. Moseley Braun worked as a prosecutor in the office of the U.S. Attorney in Chicago from 1973 until 1977. In 1978, she won election to the Illinois state house of representatives and served for a decade. In the state house, she coordinated with Harold Washington's powerful mayoral administration on issues and policies important to Chicago. After an unsuccessful bid for Illinois lieutenant governor in 1986, Moseley Braun was elected the Cook

County, Illinois, recorder of deeds in 1988, becoming the first African American to hold an executive position in Cook County.[3]

Unsatisfied with her position as recorder of deeds—and frustrated with national politicians she believed to be out of touch with the average American—Moseley Braun contemplated running for Congress. Following the controversial confirmation hearing for Supreme Court nominee Clarence Thomas in 1991, Moseley Braun set her sights on the Senate, resolving to run when several Senators dismissively questioned Anita Hill, Thomas's former employee who had accused him of sexual harassment. The Senate, she observed, "absolutely needed a healthy dose of democracy … it wasn't enough to have millionaire white males over the age of 50 representing all the people in this country."[4]

Moseley Braun officially entered the race for the Senate in November 1991, challenging two-term Democratic incumbent Alan John Dixon in the 1992 primary. Moseley Braun focused her primary campaign on the need for diversity in the Senate and Dixon's vote to confirm Thomas's appointment to the Supreme Court. Moseley Braun struggled to raise funding during the race, but on Election Day she stunned the experts, defeating her two opponents, Dixon and Alfred Hofeld, an affluent Chicago lawyer, by capturing 38 percent of the primary vote. "This democracy is alive and well, and ordinary people can have a voice with no money," Moseley Braun proclaimed. In the general election, she faced Republican candidate Richard Williamson, a lawyer and former official in the Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush administrations, focusing on a message of change and diversity expressed in slogans such as, "We don't need another arrogant rich guy in the senate." In November 1992, Moseley Braun defeated Williamson with 53 percent of the vote. In the "Year of the Woman," during which a record-breaking number of female candidates won election to Congress, Moseley Braun's election became a national symbol of change, reform, and equality. But she was not satisfied with the status afforded by her victory. "Symbols will not create jobs and economic growth," she declared. "They do not do the hard work of solving the health care crisis. They will not save the children of our cities from drugs and guns and murder."[5]

In the Senate, Moseley Braun and Senator Dianne Feinstein of California became just the second and third women ever to serve on the influential Judiciary Committee. Moseley Braun also served on the Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs Committee and on the Small Business Committee. In the 104th Congress (1995–1997), she became the first Democratic woman to serve on the powerful Finance Committee when a top-ranking Democrat, Thomas Andrew Daschle of South Dakota, gave up his seat in exchange for her vote to elect him as Democratic Leader. She also picked up a seat on the Special Committee on Aging. As one of the Senate's few female Members at the time, Moseley Braun quickly developed a camaraderie with the other women in the chamber, including Barbara Ann Mikulski of Maryland as well as Feinstein. "The women senators were all pretty much facing the same things, whether they were Republican or Democrat," she recalled. "We were forced into bipartisanship because we were such a minority."[6]

In 1993, Moseley Braun waged a prolonged fight to prevent the renewal of a design patent for the United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC) because it contained the Confederate flag. The patent had been routinely renewed for nearly a century, but Moseley Braun used her seat on the Judiciary Committee to strip the renewal provision from pending legislation. When Senator Jesse Helms of North Carolina responded by preparing an amendment to approve the patent extension which he planned to offer on the Senate Floor, Moseley Braun threatened to filibuster the legislation "until this room freezes over." While discussing the symbolism of the Confederate flag, she declared, "This is something that has no place in our modern times. … It has no place in the Senate. It has no place in our society." Moseley Braun's impassioned plea launched a candid discussion on race and the legacy of slavery on the Senate Floor. "We were human chattel. We were property. We could be traded, bought, and sold," she reminded her colleagues, adding that "on this issue there can be no consensus." Swayed by Moseley Braun's argument, the Senate rejected the UDC's application to renew its patent.[7]

Moseley Braun sparred with Helms once again during debate on a measure providing federal funding for the Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday Commission, which had been established in 1984 to promote national recognition of the holiday. Moseley Braun helped thwart a Helms amendment to the legislation that would have replaced government money with private donations. The Illinois Senator invoked memories of her participation in the

1966 march with King in Chicago to win support for the legislation. The Senate eventually approved the bill. Moseley Braun also sought to commemorate earlier parts of African-American history and sponsored a bill to fund historic preservation of Underground Railroad sites within the National Park Service; a companion House bill became law in 1998.[8]

Moseley Braun held prominent roles in shaping and passing major legislation spearheaded by party leaders and the William J. Clinton administration. When the Senate debated the 1994 crime bill, it approved Moseley Braun's amendment to allow adolescents as young as 13 to be charged as adults for certain violent crimes. The Illinois Senator was also a major proponent of crime prevention initiatives. She introduced a bill to establish additional "midnight basketball" leagues, a crime diversion program that hosted youth sports games between 10:00 p.m. and 2:00 a.m. The bill was incorporated into the major education bill known as the Goals 2000: Educate America Act. As Congress considered another education reform bill known as the Improving America's Schools Act (IASA), Moseley Braun brought attention to the crumbling physical infrastructure of the nation's schools. She requested a General Accounting Office study which revealed that public schools faced a $112 billion repair backlog. Portions of her bill—the Education Infrastructure Act of 1994—were included in the IASA, and authorized grants for the renovation and repair of school buildings.[9]

During her term in the Senate, Moseley Braun regularly addressed issues affecting women. She introduced legislation to assist divorced and widowed women, arguing, "Pension laws were never written for women … no wonder the vast majority of the elderly poor are women." In 1994, the President signed her bill requiring states to enforce the child support laws of other states. Moseley Braun was a consistent supporter of equal opportunity and affirmative action and spoke out against sexual harassment. In 1995, she joined five of her women colleagues in the Senate to call for public hearings on alleged sexual misconduct by Senator Robert William Packwood of Oregon.[10]

Moseley Braun faced a handful of controversies during her Senate career. Initially accused of violating campaign finance regulations during her 1992 race, the charges were dismissed when a five-year investigation by the Federal Election Commission turned up only a minor discrepancy of $311. In 1996, the Congressional Black Caucus and human rights organizations criticized Moseley Braun for taking a private trip to Nigeria to attend the funeral of General Sani Abacha's son despite objections by the U.S. State Department.[11]

Closely scrutinized and lacking strong financial support from her party, Moseley Braun faced a difficult challenge in her 1998 bid for re-election. In the November general election, she came up short with 47 percent of the vote, losing to Republican Peter G. Fitzgerald, an Illinois state senator who spent nearly $12 million of his own money on the campaign. After leaving the Senate, President Clinton appointed Moseley Braun the U.S. Ambassador to New Zealand and Samoa; she served from 1999 until 2001. Moseley Braun later founded an organic food company, taught college courses in political science, and managed a business consulting company in Chicago. In 2004, she unsuccessfully sought the Democratic presidential nomination, and in 2011, she waged a losing campaign for mayor of Chicago.[12]

Manuscript Collection

Chicago Historical Society (Chicago, IL). *Papers*: 1992–1998, 371 feet. Correspondence, phone logs, personnel files, reports, press releases, research materials, invitations, voting records, briefing books, speeches, newspaper clippings, legislation, grants, and audits comprise the collection, documenting Carol Moseley Braun's term in the U.S. Senate. Also included are materials from her senatorial campaigns in 1992 and 1998. Topics include health care and education reform, civil rights, women's rights, and social security. *Additional Papers*: Carol Moseley Braun, one folder of manuscript materials on the 2011 mayoral election; a Federal Election Commission report on Moseley Braun's campaign spending in 1991 and 1992 and newspaper clippings, speech notes, and other campaign material from her 1992 campaign. A finding aid is available in the repository and online.

Notes

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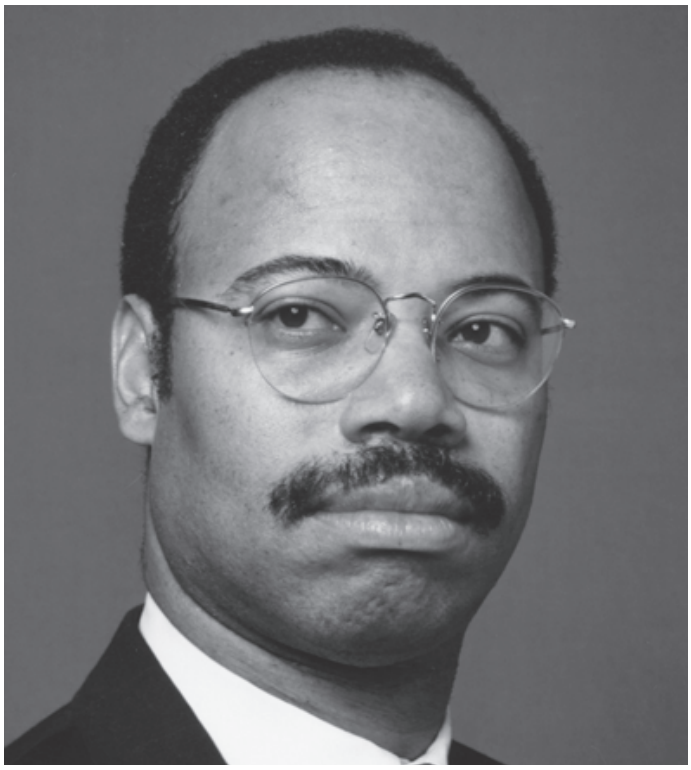
Mel Reynolds

1952–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1993–1995

Democrat from Illinois



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In 1992, Mel Reynolds won a seat in the 103rd Congress (1993–1995) after two unsuccessful earlier campaigns against the incumbent Representative Gus Savage in the Democratic primary. In his first term in the U.S. House of Representatives, Reynolds received a seat on the influential Ways and Means Committee where he supported a major international trade deal.[1]

Mel Reynolds was born on January 8, 1952, in Mound Bayou, Mississippi, to Essie Mae and Reverend J.J. Reynolds. When Reynolds was a child, his family moved to Chicago, where he attended public schools, including Mather High School. Reynolds received an associate's degree from Chicago City College in 1972, and two years later graduated with a bachelor's degree from the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana. One of the first African-American students from Illinois to be selected as a Rhodes Scholar, Reynolds earned a bachelor of laws from Oxford University in 1979. He later completed a master's degree in public administration at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government in 1986. While at Harvard, Reynolds met his future wife, Marisol Concepcion. The couple married in 1990 and had three children: Corean, Marisol Elizabeth, and Mel Jr.[2]

Reynolds initially worked as an assistant professor of political science at Roosevelt University in Chicago and hosted a local radio talk show. He also launched the organization American Scholars Against World Hunger to fight famine in Africa. Reynolds became involved as a community activist, participating in an anti-drug campaign on Chicago's South Side and directing the Community Economic Development and Education Foundation, which provided scholarships to local students. He gained political experience working on the campaigns of several unsuccessful Democratic presidential candidates, including Edward Moore "Ted" Kennedy, Reverend Jesse Jackson, and Michael Dukakis. In 1987, Reynolds participated in Chicago Mayor Harold Washington's victorious re-election campaign.[3]

In 1988, Reynolds challenged the four-term Democratic incumbent Gus Savage for the congressional district encompassing portions of Chicago's predominantly African-American South Side. Reynolds focused his campaign on his roots in the community and his status as an outsider to Chicago's powerful ward system. "It's more of a commitment to me than just a job," he remarked during the election. "Obviously as a black Rhodes Scholar, I can work in any corporation in America. I've chosen to

be in my community." Reynolds placed a distant third in the primary with 14 percent of the vote. Reynolds made another run for the seat two years later, citing unhappiness with Savage's representation of the Chicago district. In a three-candidate primary, Reynolds took 43 percent of the vote against Savage who had a history of making controversial remarks as well as a volatile relationship with the press.[4]

In 1992, Reynolds orchestrated a third campaign to unseat Savage. Reynolds received a boost after redistricting that year shrank Savage's stronghold in the city's Black neighborhoods, replacing them with White suburbs south of Chicago. In the March primary, Reynolds easily defeated Savage, 63 to 37 percent. Reynolds went on to earn 78 percent of the vote in the general election against Republican candidate Ron Blackstone and third-party opponent Louanner Peters. In his subsequent election, he bested two challengers in the Democratic primary with 56 percent of the vote and easily defeated a write-in candidate in the general election to earn a second term in the House.[5]

During his first term in Congress, Reynolds successfully lobbied for a seat on the powerful Ways and Means Committee. With the backing of longtime committee chair and fellow Illinois Representative Daniel David Rostenkowski, Reynolds became the first freshman lawmaker in 14 years to sit on Ways and Means. In 1993, Reynolds joined Rostenkowski in voting for the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which sought to facilitate trade between United States, Canada, and Mexico. As the only two Democrats representing Chicago to back the controversial trade deal, both Members faced widespread criticism from organized labor leaders who believed the agreement would undermine wages and job security for American workers. In response for his support, President William J. Clinton—who had pushed for NAFTA's passage in the House and Senate—personally campaigned for Reynolds during his 1994 re-election.[6]

During his time in the House, Reynolds worked to improve conditions for his many impoverished constituents by backing an earned income tax credit and hosting a series of job fairs in Chicago. He also worked to curb crime in his district by supporting gun control legislation. In 1993, the Chicago Representative authored a bill to facilitate lawsuits against gun manufacturers for deaths or injuries caused by their firearms. He also proposed doubling the excise tax on guns, with a portion of the additional revenue to be allocated for urban hospitals that cared for uninsured patients with gunshot injuries. Reynolds insisted, "We must hold people and corporations responsible for their actions, as well as provide relief to those impacted so heavily by the destructive cost of gun violence."[7]

Reynolds faced a series of legal problems during his House career. Early in his first term, published reports emerged alleging that Reynolds owed thousands of dollars in campaign debts and educational loans. The Illinois Representative explained that he had delayed paying his student loans so that he could fund his three election campaigns. In August 1994, a Cook County grand jury indicted Reynolds on counts of criminal sexual assault, child pornography, and obstruction of justice. Reynolds denied the accusations.[8]

Despite these charges, Reynolds won re-election to a second term with no significant opposition in 1994. But with the opening of the 104th Congress (1995–1997), Republicans gained control of the House for the first time in 40 years. As the lowest-ranking Democrat on the Ways and Means Committee, Reynolds lost his position when Republicans reduced the number of seats on the panel; he instead received a spot on the Economic and Educational Opportunities Committee. When a Chicago jury found Reynolds guilty of multiple criminal counts in August 1995, House Democratic leadership called for his resignation. Reynolds resigned from the House, effective October 1, 1995.[9]

While imprisoned Reynolds was indicted and convicted on federal charges of bank and campaign fraud. President Clinton commuted his sentence shortly before leaving office in 2001. In 2004, Reynolds attempted to resurrect his political career by running against Representative Jesse L. Jackson Jr., who had succeeded him in office, but his comeback stalled when he received only 6 percent of the vote in the Democratic primary. In a February 2013 Democratic special primary election, Reynolds again unsuccessfully sought to succeed Jackson, who had resigned three months earlier.[10]

After his political career, Reynolds engaged in business and consulting work overseas. He represented American business interests attempting to finance hotel and construction projects in Zimbabwe, where he was convicted of violating the nation's immigration laws and was subsequently deported in 2014. Back in the United States, Reynolds was convicted of failing to pay federal income taxes in 2018.[11]

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Walter R. Tucker III

1957–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1993–1995

Democrat from California



Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

In 1992, Walter R. Tucker III won election to the U.S. House of Representatives from Southern California. Tucker came from a prominent political family and, just a year before entering Congress, had served as the youngest mayor of Compton, California. He arrived in Washington in 1993 with the goal of bringing "positive attention to Compton," a city that had been wracked by destructive civil violence months earlier following the acquittal of police officers in the beating of Rodney King.[1]

Walter R. Tucker III was born on May 28, 1957, one of four children in a prominent political family in Compton, California. His father, Walter R. Tucker II, worked as a dentist and entered politics in 1967, when he won election to the Compton school board. He was eventually elected mayor of Compton. Tucker's mother, Martha, was a real estate agent and writer. The Tucker family was often referred to as the "Kennedys of Compton" because of its political power. Tucker graduated from Compton High School in 1974. He attended Princeton University from 1974 to 1976 before returning home to finish his studies at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles in 1978. Tucker earned a law degree at Georgetown University Law School in Washington, DC, in 1981, after which he returned to Compton to work as an attorney. Tucker served as deputy district attorney for Los Angeles County from 1984 to 1986 as well as an associate minister in Carson. Tucker's wife, Robin, and their two children—Walter IV and Autumn—lived with the extended Tucker family near Compton city hall.[2]

In 1991, Tucker's father died of cancer during his third term as Compton's mayor. Tucker ran to succeed his father and won on April 16, 1991, at the age of 33. Tucker's mayoral tenure focused on economic improvement in the impoverished city. Once a bustling economic center—former President George H.W. Bush had a home in the city in the late 1940s—Compton had experienced an economic downturn in the second half of the twentieth century after civil violence spread across the city and nearby Watts in the summer of 1965. The city struggled with poverty, crime, and gang violence in the ensuing decades.[3]

When six-term U.S. Representative Mervyn M. Dymally announced his retirement in 1992, Tucker entered the race to fill the seat. Dymally's district encompassed working-class neighborhoods south of Los Angeles, including Compton; it was roughly 34 percent African American, and 40 percent Hispanic. Dymally endorsed his daughter, Lynn, a member

of the Compton school board, to succeed him. One month before the primary, in May 1992, a Los Angeles jury's acquittal of four police officers accused of beating Black motorist Rodney King sparked widespread violence and property destruction in the city. Compton suffered an estimated $100 million in damage: nearly 200 buildings were vandalized, and more than 130 reports of arson. As mayor, Tucker worked to stop the violence, and images of him touring the city with civil rights activist Reverend Jesse Jackson were shown on national television. Tucker won the nomination with 39 percent against Dymally's 37 percent. Vera Robles DeWitt, who served on the Carson city council, took 11 percent, with two other candidates splitting 12 percent. Tucker easily won the general election in the overwhelmingly Democratic district, with 86 percent of the vote.[4]

On Capitol Hill, Tucker was assigned to the Public Works and Transportation Committee and the Small Business Committee. He backed tax-exempt funding to construct the Alameda Corridor, a truck and rail line that would expedite the shipment of cargo from the port of Los Angeles inland through the congested city. Despite heavy lobbying, Tucker made a rare break from President William J. Clinton's administration by voting against the North American Free Trade Agreement, which he worried would result in the loss of low-wage jobs in the Los Angeles area. Tucker focused on alleviating unemployment and poverty, particularly in his district. He was credited with securing $5.9 million in extra police funds for Southern California.[5]

In March 1994, federal prosecutors revealed that Tucker and a member of the Compton city council were the subjects of a federal bribery investigation. Tucker denied the charges, adding "I will not allow this matter to impede on the important work that I am doing in the U.S. Congress." On August 22, Tucker pled not guilty to 10 counts in a federal district court in Los Angeles. After easily winning the Democratic nomination that year, he defeated his lone opponent, Libertarian Guy Wilson, in the general election with 77 percent of the vote.[6]

On December 8, 1995—one month after his re-election—Tucker was convicted on seven counts of extortion and two counts of tax evasion. During the trial, the prosecution had presented evidence including video and audio tapes of Tucker demanding cash in exchange for public projects. Tucker maintained his innocence and accused the government of what he said was "entrapment." He resigned from Congress on December 15, 1995. On April 17, 1996, Tucker was sentenced to 27 months in prison—prior to his sentencing the citizens of Compton wrote more than 200 letters in support of him.[7]

Shortly after his resignation, Tucker endorsed his wife, Robin, to fill his vacancy. She finished sixth in the crowded special election, losing to California state lawmaker Juanita Millender-McDonald, who prevailed with a 27 percent plurality.[8]

Upon his release in September 1998, Tucker served as the Southern California director of a prison fellowship program headed by Charles "Chuck" Colson, a former aide to President Richard M. Nixon and a central figure in the Watergate scandal. Tucker was ordained in 2003 and pastored in Chicago for nine years before establishing a church in Carson, California, in 2012.[9]

Notes

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Melvin L. Watt

1945–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1993–2014

Democrat from North Carolina



Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

Melvin L. Watt, an eleven-term U.S. Representative from North Carolina, served as a vocal advocate for civil liberties and played an influential role in shaping the relationship between the banking industry and the government from his seat on the Financial Services Committee. Born into poverty, Watt brought a unique perspective to a district known for its banking sector. "People look at you in a suit as a member of Congress, and they think you've always been in a suit and always been a member of Congress," he once said. "I came out of a different kind of history."[1]

Melvin Luther Watt was born in Charlotte, North Carolina, on August 26, 1945, to Graham Edward Watt and Evelyn Lucille Mauney. He grew up in a tin-roofed shack without running water or electricity and attended segregated public schools in Mecklenburg County. Watt started college shortly after many southern universities had been desegregated, and he was among a relatively small number of Black students enrolled in the North Carolina state university system. He attended the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, graduating Phi Beta Kappa with a business administration degree in 1967. Three years later, Watt earned a law degree from Yale University Law School. He returned to Charlotte, passed the North Carolina bar, and for the next 20 years worked in the law firm of civil rights attorney Julius Chambers, specializing in minority business and economic development law. Watt eventually served as president of the Mecklenburg County bar. He married Eulada Paysour, and they raised two sons: Brian and Jason. He served a single term in the North Carolina state senate, from 1985 to 1987, but left to spend more time with his teenage sons. Much of Watt's early political work was behind the scenes, including stints as campaign manager for Harvey Gantt, a rising African-American politician who served on the Charlotte city council and as mayor.[2]

After managing Gantt's unsuccessful effort to win a U.S. Senate seat against incumbent Jesse Helms in 1990, Watt ran for office himself. In 1992, redistricting created a central North Carolina congressional district that was 53 percent African American, stretched through parts of 10 counties, and included portions of Durham, Greensboro, Winston-Salem, and Charlotte. Watt won the crowded Democratic primary with 47 percent of the vote, defeating his closest rival, North Carolina state representative Mickey Michaux, by 19 points. Against Republican Barbara Gore Washington in the general election, Watt captured 70 percent of the vote.[3]

Watt's uniquely-shaped district led to a number of challenges in court, but Watt embraced his role as "the poster child of redistricting." To maintain its majority-Black population demographics, the district meandered along the I-85 corridor, causing one court decision in 1993 to note that "northbound and southbound drivers on I-85 sometimes find themselves in separate districts in one county, only to 'trade' districts when they enter the next." Watt's district was redrawn five times between the late 1990s and early 2000s but retained its "serpentine" appearance. In 1998, during a particularly controversial effort to reconfigure the district, Watt experienced his narrowest margin of victory, when he defeated Republican challenger John "Scott" Keadle with 56 percent of the vote. In his subsequent seven re-elections, Watt won by comfortable margins, usually by 60 percent of the vote or more.[4]

When Watt entered the U.S. House in January 1993 he received appointments to the Banking, Finance, and Urban Affairs Committee (later renamed Financial Services) and to the Judiciary Committee. Watt served on both panels throughout his House career. In the 109th Congress (2005–2007), he was ranking member of the Judiciary Committee's Subcommittee on Commercial and Administrative Law. On Financial Services, Watt chaired the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations in the 110th Congress (2007–2009) and the Subcommittee on Domestic Monetary Policy and Technology in the 111th Congress (2009–2011). For a single term in the 103rd Congress (1993–1995), he served on the Post Office and Civil Service Committee before it was abolished. In addition, Watt was named to the Joint Economic Committee in the 107th and 108th Congresses (2001–2005). Watt was unanimously elected chair of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) for the 109th Congress.

As a freshman in the 103rd Congress, Watt voted with the Democratic majority nearly 90 percent of the time, although he broke with President William J. Clinton to vote against the North American Free Trade Agreement and the administration's 1994 crime bill. During the 1990s, Watt also criticized efforts to dismantle federal welfare programs and legislation that reinforced or upheld use of the death penalty.[5]

Watt put his experience as an attorney to use on the Judiciary Committee, and his extensive preparation and detailed knowledge of legislation were widely recognized by his peers. He co-authored the 2006 extension of the Voting Rights Act with Judiciary's Republican chair, Frank James Sensenbrenner Jr. of Wisconsin. The reauthorization tightened the enforcement language for the bill by considering both the intent and impact of changes to state voting laws and district lines. Watt's investment in the bill stemmed from his frequent experience with redistricting, as the federal preclearance provision of the Voting Rights Act, which originally passed in 1965, applied to 40 counties in North Carolina. On the House Floor, Watt joined Sensenbrenner in leading the opposition to several restrictive amendments designed to weaken the Voting Rights Act. Watt reflected on the uneven history of Black representation in Congress, particularly in states like North Carolina, which did not elect a Black Member during the twentieth century until Watt and Representative Eva M. Clayton in 1992. He urged lawmakers to support reauthorization, stressing that "although the successes of the Voting Rights Act have been substantial, they have not been fast and they have not been furious." The bipartisan bill passed by a vote of 390 to 33 in the House and with unanimous support in the Senate.[6]

On the Judiciary Committee, Watt vigorously defended constitutional prerogatives and civil liberties. After the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, he was one of a minority of House Members to oppose the USA PATRIOT Act, which vastly expanded the surveillance powers available to law enforcement agencies. Though Watt voted for a prior version of the bill in committee and supported provisions added to counter money laundering as a funding tool for criminal and terrorist activities, he feared the law would enable the government to "abuse due process through law enforcement." Watt advised his colleagues to balance the needs of law enforcement with the concerns of those "who have a different history in America," such as African Americans, who "do not have the luxury of being able to just sit back and give more authority than is warranted."[7]

After 2011, when Democrats lost the House majority, Watt became the ranking Democrat on the Financial Services Subcommittee on Intellectual Property, Competition, and the Internet, which was responsible for internet policy and intellectual property rights. He was a leading advocate for the Stop Online Piracy Act in 2011, a bill aimed at combating online copyright infringement and counterfeit goods. In a Judiciary Committee hearing on the bill, Watt insisted that the bill was designed to protect intellectual property rather than impose "government censorship." The bill never made it to the floor for a vote.[8]

Watt also worked to balance the needs of the major banking industries headquartered in his district against

the consumer-oriented concerns of his constituents. Early in his career on the Financial Services Committee, Watt often collaborated with Republicans to focus on banking and other business interests that dominated his district. In 1994, he supported an interstate banking provision that led to a dramatic expansion of national and international banking corporations as they rapidly bought out local branches, which Watt considered a "much more logical way to expand into a new territory instead of setting up a whole new line of branches there and having to compete." He also backed a 1999 measure to revise the Glass–Steagall Act, which allowed commercial banks to sell stocks, bonds, and insurance. Later in his career, Watt embraced the role of consumer advocate. In 2009, he aligned with consumer groups against major banks in his own district to support bans against predatory credit card billing practices.[9]

In 2003, President George W. Bush proposed the creation of a new regulatory office overseeing Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, the federally-backed mortgage insurers originally chartered by Congress to boost the mortgage industry and provide funding for more affordable, longer-term loans. The move followed an investigation into manipulated accounting records and risky lending practices by the two financial giants and was designed to eliminate congressional oversight by shifting regulatory responsibilities to the U.S. Department of Treasury. Watt labeled the reforms a "shell game" that would lead to tighter regulation and discourage the financing of affordable housing. His position shifted following the housing crisis in 2008, when Watt supported a similar reorganization as part of the Housing and Economic Recovery Act of 2008, which created the Federal Housing Finance Agency (FHFA). Watt worked with Massachusetts Representative Barney Frank both in committee and on the floor to limit civil litigation against the banks and instead provide funding for financial counseling to citizens affected by bad loans. He also called on mortgage holders to delay foreclosures until the housing reform bill containing consumer aid had passed. At the same time, Watt opposed a plan to suspend compensation packages for Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac executives, arguing the action would negatively impact the future of the companies.[10]

As the economic downturn continued in late 2009, Watt joined nine of his CBC colleagues on the Financial Services Committee to call attention to what they said were limited efforts by the Obama administration to help African-American communities. The CBC members abstained from a committee vote on a banking bill that was an administration priority and threatened to continue boycotting the bill on the floor. The CBC claimed victory two weeks later after House leadership added several requested provisions to the final bill, including funding for low-interest loans and a federal program to purchase foreclosed homes and rent them to low-income families.[11]

Watt also participated in negotiations on the Dodd–Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act in the 111th Congress, which aimed to improve regulations and transparency in the financial services industry in the wake of the mortgage industry collapse and Great Recession. Through their positions on the Financial Services Committee, Watt and California Representative Maxine Waters secured funding for a new Office of Minority and Women Inclusion within the Securities and Exchange Commission, to ensure equal employment in federal financial services agencies. Watt worked with fellow North Carolina Democrat Brad Miller to include safeguards against predatory lending and defended the provision establishing the new Consumer Financial Protection Bureau.[12]

Ahead of President Obama's second term, the CBC lobbied the president to include more people of color in his Cabinet, suggesting Watt for the position of U.S. Commerce Secretary. On May 1, 2013, President Obama nominated Watt to head the FHFA. Watt's appointment to the regulatory agency drew scrutiny given his connection to prominent banks in his district. The CBC continued to advocate for his appointment during the lengthy seven-month confirmation process. The Senate confirmed him on December 10, 2013, and he was sworn in as director of the FHFA on January 6, 2014. Watt resigned on January 6, 2019, following an investigation by the FHFA's Office of the Inspector General into accusations of sexual harassment and misuse of his position.[13]

Manuscript Collection

University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library (Chapel Hill, NC). *Papers*: ca. 1990–2014, 90 linear feet. Melvin L. Watt's papers consist mostly of office files related to his time in Congress, including correspondence, campaign materials, financial papers, memos, clippings, programs, and other materials. A finding aid is available in the repository and online.

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Albert Russell Wynn

1951–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1993–2008

Democrat from Maryland



Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

Albert Russell Wynn won election to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1992, in an affluent, predominantly African-American district in suburban Maryland. With a decade of service in the state legislature, Wynn quickly adapted to the U.S. House, eventually earning a seat on the prestigious Energy and Commerce Committee, becoming a subcommittee chair, and moving into a prominent role in the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC). During his tenure, Wynn focused on helping his constituents. "I wanted to always be in a position where the office was saying, 'Yes,' and, 'We'll try,' and trying to help, as opposed to saying, 'Oh no, we don't do this. We don't do that. We don't do the other.' Because people, they're looking for leadership. They're not looking for who has what title and what narrow jurisdiction."[1]

Albert Wynn was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, on September 10, 1951. His family moved to North Carolina, where his father, Albert Fitzgerald Wynn, farmed and his mother, Rose Russell Wynn, taught school. The Wynns lived in a supportive community, but he recognized the stark racial divisions of the Jim Crow South. "Day-to-day, you were in a Black, African American culture with the churches and all the other activities and the school activities, on a separate basis, but you were always aware that there were people out there who really hated Blacks, and there was significant hostility." When his father was hired by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the family moved to the Washington, DC, area, where Wynn attended the public schools in Prince George's County, Maryland. In 1973, Wynn graduated with a degree in political science from the University of Pittsburgh. He briefly studied public administration at Howard University in Washington, DC, before entering Georgetown University and earning a law degree in 1977. Wynn later served as director of the consumer protection commission for Prince George's County. After opening his own law firm in 1982, Wynn won election to the Maryland house of delegates, where he served from 1983 to 1987. He was then elected to the Maryland state senate, serving there until 1993 and rising to the post of deputy majority whip. Wynn was married to Gaines Clore Wynn until her death in 2011. He has a daughter, Gabrielle, and a stepdaughter, Meredith.[2]

In 1992, Wynn entered a crowded Democratic primary for a newly created congressional district that encompassed sections of Prince George's and Montgomery counties along the border of the District of Columbia. African Americans accounted for 58 percent of the heavily Democratic district,

which had one of the largest concentrations of middle-class African Americans in the country. In a field of 12 other candidates, many with political backgrounds, Wynn recalled searching for ways "to break out." Wynn prioritized direct, personal contact with the voters: waving on street corners in the morning and shaking hands at grocery stores, train stations, barber shops, and back-to-school nights. "Wherever there were people, we would go." Wynn won the March 3 primary with 28 percent of the vote, defeating his closest opponent Alex Williams, the state's attorney for Prince George's County, by several percentage points. Wynn easily prevailed in the general election, capturing 75 percent of the vote against Republican candidate Michele Dyson, an African-American business consultant. In each of his subsequent seven re-elections, Wynn won with more than 75 percent of the vote and faced no serious challenges until 2006.[3]

Wynn was one of 16 new African-American lawmakers elected in 1992, bolstering the ranks of the CBC. Thirteen of the first-term Members came from southern states—some as the first Black Members since Reconstruction—and many represented rural or suburban areas outside majority-Black urban districts. "By virtue of that election in '92, the caucus broadened, its interest broadened," Wynn remembered. "People brought in rural issues that had not been in the forefront before. … But also, suburban issues that I wanted to talk about, like federal employees and minority small business issues."[4]

With these interests in mind, Wynn requested to be put on the prestigious Commerce Committee. Instead, he received assignments on three different committees: Banking, Finance, and Urban Affairs (later named Financial Services); Foreign Affairs; and Post Office and Civil Service.

In his first term, the *Washington Post* reported on the lack of commercial and mortgage loans granted to Black residents of the Washington area. Wynn worked with Banking, Finance, and Urban Affairs Committee Chair Henry B. González to combat lending discrimination. "As a Hispanic Member, he knew exactly what I was talking about," Wynn recalled. "His community was experiencing the same thing. So, he was very amenable to doing this, to putting a spotlight on this issue." The committee chose part of Wynn's district as a test site and challenged banks and regulators to improve their lending practices in one year.[5]

In 1997, Wynn focused on increasing the number of government contracts granted to small businesses and assessed the tendency of many federal agencies to consolidate contracts: "Bundled contracts require companies to have more equipment, personnel, insurance and more bonding," Wynn explained. "Large companies are designed to handle these requirements; but they are barriers for small businesses, particularly minority small businesses, who want to compete for government business." Wynn's bill, the Small Business Opportunity Preservation Act, aimed to make more contracts available to small businesses, but it was never reported out of committee. Wynn also organized business fairs in his district, inviting "women-owned businesses, Hispanic businesses, African-American businesses, small businesses generally, to come out" and meet representatives of federal agencies. "I was able to connect a lot of people to the contracting procurement process in government."[6]

Wynn's district was home to more than 70,000 federal workers—the largest in the country—many of whom commuted into Washington, DC. With similar interests, he teamed up with his regional colleagues to pass legislation and appropriations related to the area. In the 104th Congress (1995–1997), he cosponsored the District of Columbia Emergency Highway Relief Act, introduced by DC Delegate Eleanor Holmes Norton. The bill was signed into law and increased funds for transportation projects in the city. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, Wynn worked to secure funding to add more lanes and emergency shoulders to the Woodrow Wilson Memorial Bridge, connecting Maryland and Virginia across the Potomac River. In 2006, Wynn went to bat for 1.3 million Washington Nationals baseball fans who were unable to watch games because of broadcasting contracts in the region.[7]

Wynn addressed discrimination against workers of color within federal agencies. "I worked with a lot of people who were on strike. I protested at almost every agency," Wynn recalled. "Constituents would come in, and everyone would say, 'My agency's the worst. It's the last plantation.'" In 1994, he and his colleagues introduced the Architect of the Capitol Human Resources Act to improve personnel management in the office of the Architect of the Capitol, the agency that maintains the grounds and buildings of the Capitol campus. "We've passed hundreds of laws here in Congress so that American workers have basic rights. It is a disgrace that employees of the Capitol, itself, aren't covered by those laws," Wynn said when the bill was introduced. Three years later, Wynn sided with Black employees of the Library of Congress in their protest of unequal hiring and

promoting practices. "People want to move forward. They want to move up into management," Wynn said. "They are not just satisfied with a 'good government job.'"[8]

In the House, Wynn steadily accrued leadership roles in the CBC and the Democratic Party. From 2002 until 2007, Wynn chaired the CBC's Political Action Committee and headed task forces on campaign finance reform and minority business. He also served as a senior regional whip for the Democratic Party.[9]

In the 105th Congress (1997–1999), Representative Wynn gained a seat on the Commerce Committee, requiring him to give up his prior assignments. In 2005, House leadership chose Wynn to sit on the conference committee with the Senate to finalize the Energy Policy Act of 2005. The bill, signed into law in August 2005, primarily focused on the competition, regulation, and development of power markets and infrastructure. The final version included language from Wynn's bill, the Interstate Transmission Act, which supported mandatory standards for electricity providers and was written to prevent widespread blackouts, such as the one the northeastern region experienced in 2003.[10]

With his party in the majority in the 110th Congress (2007–2009), Wynn was appointed chair of the Subcommittee on Environment and Hazardous Materials on the renamed Committee on Energy and Commerce. He held hearings on the regulation of asbestos, perchlorate, and mercury, citing the rampant misuse of these harmful substances in Black communities around the country. In October 2007, he held a hearing on proposed legislation governing how and when the Environmental Protection Agency reports toxic emission data to the public.[11]

Reapportionment after the 2000 Census changed the political makeup of the district; it added more Republican voters in the suburbs of Montgomery County, but it also brought in additional progressive White voters. In 2006, Wynn faced a stiff primary challenge from Donna F. Edwards, a lawyer and nonprofit director, who criticized what she said were his frequent absences from the district and his support for the George W. Bush administration's decision to take military action in Iraq. Local newspapers from the time of the primary election claimed Wynn was not tuned into the needs of the district's new progressive voters, who disagreed with his support of estate tax repeals and oil and gas subsidies, and his disinterest in campaign finance reform. Although the *Washington Post* endorsed Edwards two weeks before the election, Wynn prevailed in the primary by roughly 3,000 votes and then won re-election with 80 percent of the vote. After his victory in 2006, Wynn and his team decided to approach constituent service differently. He met with constituents both one-on-one and in group church meetings and promised to continue his college and job fairs. When Edwards ran against him again, in 2008, she challenged Wynn's leadership in the district and criticized his environmental activism as ineffective. In the Democratic primary on February 12, 2008, Wynn lost to Edwards who had won 60 percent of the vote. Wynn resigned from the House on May 31, 2008, and joined a lobbying firm.[12]

Manuscript Collection

University of Maryland Libraries, Special Collections and University Archives, Hornbake Library (College Park, MD). *Papers*: 1983–2008, 37.5 linear feet. This collection pertains entirely to Albert Russell Wynn's service in the U.S. House of Representatives. A large portion of the collection consists of news clippings, correspondence, and committee files, as well as extensive video and audiotapes and photographs documenting Wynn's activities. Subjects include the war in Iraq, the environment, minority-owned and small businesses, energy policy, television ratings, affirmative action, and employment discrimination. Correspondents include many national politicians active from 1993 to 2008, especially other members of Maryland's congressional delegation, Presidents William J. Clinton and George W. Bush, Vice President Albert Gore Jr., and members of the Congressional Black Caucus. The collection is unprocessed, but a preliminary inventory is available.

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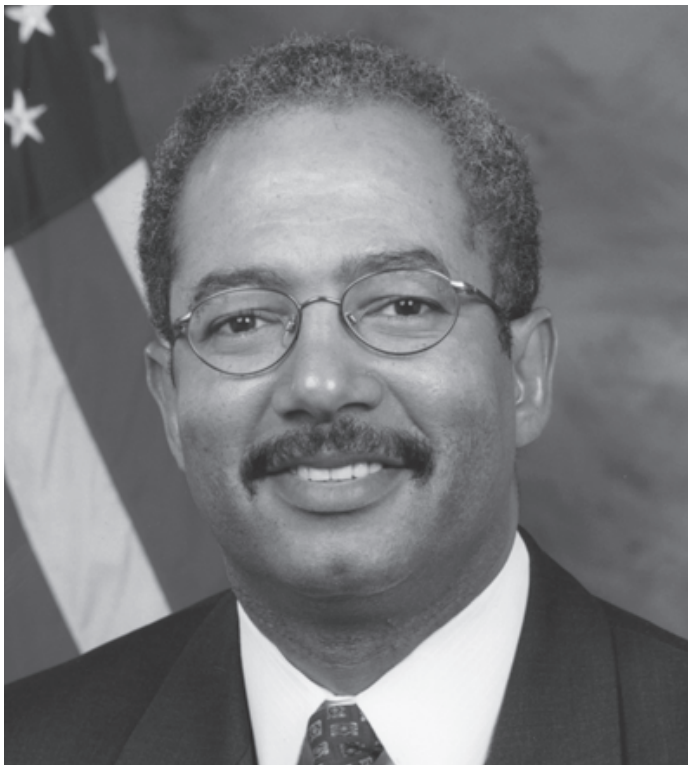
Chaka Fattah

1956–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1995–2016

Democrat from Pennsylvania



Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

Chaka Fattah represented a U.S. House of Representatives district covering northern and western Philadelphia for 11 terms. A political activist from an early age, Fattah served 12 years in the Pennsylvania state legislature before winning his first House election in 1994, building a powerful local organization that enabled him to acquire resources for his district. "Even though my family wasn't involved in politics, I had this political interest in terms of community involvement," he noted. "My thinking … is that you can provide community service in a variety of venues. But as a politician, you could provide community service that no one else really could."[1]

Chaka Fattah was born Arthur Davenport, the fourth of six sons, on November 21, 1956, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. His father, Russell Davenport, was a U.S. Army sergeant, and his mother, Frances Davenport, was an editor at the *Philadelphia Tribune*, the oldest continuously published Black newspaper in America and a community activist. His father died when he was young. In 1968, Frances married David Waters, a local activist, and they adopted the surname Fattah. Frances took the name Falaka and renamed her son Chaka after a Zulu warrior. The social activism of his mother and stepfather shaped Fattah's political development. "I grew up in a home where being involved in community life was a norm," he recalled.[2]

In 1968, the family opened the House of Umoja, a shelter that helped homeless youth and young men looking to escape unstable home lives find secure housing. While sharing his room, clothes, and food with the residents, Fattah recalled discussing every subject under the sun. "These guys were like my older brothers … so I thought it was a great thing." Fattah's first exposure to local politics occurred when he was 14 years old. As the House of Umoja grew beyond the first floor of the Fattah family home, Chaka, still only a teenager, successfully submitted a proposal to a local bank to purchase several vacant houses on the block. The organization relied on community support, and Fattah became adept at acquiring resources, building relationships with local leaders, and working with a variety of people in his neighborhood and in the local government. The House of Umoja expanded into more than 25 homes within the next 30 years.[3]

Out of Fattah's experience with the House of Umoja, he became involved in community politics and started volunteering for local campaigns. "I saw these people marching up and down the street saying 'power to the

people' and putting up posters. … I fell into this, giving out leaflets and having fun." By 1971, Fattah, still not even old enough to get a driver's license, had volunteered to work on a mayoral campaign, participated in voter registration drives, and mediated gang conflict with his parents throughout Philadelphia. With his parents' permission, Fattah dropped out of Overbrook High School and earned a GED. "I was involved in a lot of things and school didn't have a lot of rigor. There's nothing remarkable about it … 15 million people have a G.E.D." Fattah attended the Community College of Philadelphia, but he did not earn a degree. He briefly worked in the Philadelphia housing department. Fattah graduated with a master's degree in government administration from the University of Pennsylvania's Fels School of State and Local Government in 1986.[4]

A seasoned political activist at the age of 22, Fattah ran for a seat on the Philadelphia city commission in 1979, where he placed fourth in a field of 22 candidates. In 1982, he unseated a Democratic incumbent by 58 votes to win a seat in the Pennsylvania state house of representatives. At age 25, he was one of the youngest people ever to serve in the state legislature. In 1988, Fattah won a seat in the Pennsylvania state senate, where he beat a 20-year incumbent in the primary. He chaired the education committee in his first term and went on to serve in the state senate for six years. In 1996, Fattah married Patricia Renfroe, a local attorney. The couple had two children, Frances and Chaka Jr., and divorced in 1997. In 2001, Fattah married Renee Yvette Chenault, a former lawyer and prominent television reporter in Philadelphia. Fattah became stepfather to Chenault's daughter Cameron, and they are the parents of another daughter, Chandler.[5]

Fattah made his first bid for the U.S. House in a 1991 special election, when Congressman William H. Gray III resigned from a seat that covered large areas of Center City Philadelphia, West Philadelphia, Chestnut Hill, and the University of Pennsylvania. Fattah served in what he called the "historically African American Second District," which he described as an "urban, economically and ethnically diverse" area that had a mixture of the richest and poorest sections of the city. In the special election to succeed Gray, city councilman Lucien E. Blackwell received the Democratic nomination, and Fattah ran under the Consumer Party banner. Blackwell won with 39 percent of the vote to Fattah's 28 percent. Fattah recalled, "It was a twenty-eight-day campaign and the organization was able to slot their candidate before I got started. Since I had said I was going to run, I felt I had to."[6]

Following reapportionment in 1992, Pennsylvania lost two seats in Congress. As a state senator, Fattah helped redraw Pennsylvania's House districts and ensured that the new seat covering northern Philadelphia—the Second District—overlapped with much of his state senate district. "My advantage … over Blackwell was that I knew every inch of the Second Congressional District—because as a state senator, I drew the lines." Over his career, Fattah had also built a multi-ethnic coalition of supporters independent of the local Democratic Party organization, and he used this network to challenge Blackwell's mostly working-class, African-American support base. Fattah's campaign ignored television ads, and instead "relied on radio … we did direct mail. We walked door-to-door … and we had phone banks," he recalled. Fattah won the Democratic primary in 1994 with 58 percent of the vote. In the heavily Democratic and majority-Black district, he won the general election with 86 percent of the vote. With his win, Fattah became the fourth African American from Pennsylvania to be elected to Congress. Fattah went on to win his subsequent 10 re-elections with at least 86 percent of the vote.[7]

When Fattah entered the House in 1995, he was assigned to the Small Business Committee and to the Government Reform and Oversight Committee. Later in his first term, he joined the Committee on Economic and Educational Opportunities. Fattah left Small Business and joined the Committee on the Standards of Official Conduct—colloquially known as the Ethics Committee—for the 105th and 106th Congresses (1997–2001), and the Committee on House Administration in the 106th Congress. In 2001, Fattah resigned from these committees when he joined the Appropriations Committee, where he served for the remainder of his House career. He was also a member of the Joint Committee on Printing for the 106th and 107th Congresses (1999–2003).

Fattah's primary legislative interest as a state legislator had been to open access to quality educational opportunities for minority students, and he continued that effort in the House. His biggest legislative success came in the 105th Congress when he submitted the 21st Century Scholars Act, which directed federal funds to prepare low-income students to enter college through a competitive grant program that provided six to seven years of financial support. Although

the bill did not survive on its own, Fattah found bipartisan support in the House and Senate and inserted the bill into an omnibus educational package. Throughout the process, Fattah coordinated support between his House colleagues, the White House, and the Senate to usher the legislation through to final passage. The final version, GEAR UP (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs), was signed by President William J. Clinton as part of the Higher Education Amendments of 1998. Fattah submitted other education bills throughout his congressional career, including the Student Bill of Rights Act, which required each state to certify with the U.S. Secretary of Education that its public school system provided students with equal access to resources and qualified teachers.[8]

Fattah's initial term in the House during the 104th Congress (1995–1997) coincided with the first Republican majority in nearly 40 years. House Democrats recognized Fattah's state legislative experience serving in the minority party and tapped him to serve on the Democratic Steering and Policy Committee, which determined committee assignments and helped coordinate the party's overall strategy. Fattah also served as whip for the Congressional Black Caucus.[9]

Alongside his educational policy work, Fattah took an interest in tax reform and debt reduction. In the 108th Congress (2003–2005), Fattah submitted the Transform America Transaction Fee proposal, which sought to replace all federal individual and business taxes with a revenue system based on fees for most transactions higher than $500. In the 111th Congress (2009–2011), Fattah submitted the Debt Free America Act, which outlined a plan to pay off the national debt in seven years and eliminate individual income taxes by allowing cities and towns to levy a 1 percent transaction fee. Although neither bill made it out of committee, Fattah submitted similar versions of these bills in subsequent Congresses.[10]

Early in his House career, Fattah strongly opposed the "Contract with America," the legislative agenda of Speaker Newt Gingrich of Georgia; he voted against more of the measures in the Republican package than nearly any other Member. Fattah defended President Clinton during his impeachment but regularly broke with the Clinton administration on policy. He objected to Clinton's requests for fast-track authority to negotiate trade deals, concerned about the lack of safeguards for workers. He also opposed a welfare reform bill—the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act—that the President negotiated with the Republican House majority. Over the course of four days, Fattah took to the floor three times to voice his frustrations with the bill. "We have some tough cowboys here on the floor of the House," Fattah declared on the final day of debate. "This is a new interesting kind of wagon train in which the cowboys have decided to throw the women and infants and the children and the senior citizens out of the wagon train so they can get where they are going faster. It is cruel."[11]

When it came to investing in America's cities, Fattah reached across the aisle on bipartisan projects. He worked with Republicans to promote President Barack Obama's tax cut extension deal in 2010. And as chair of the Urban Caucus, Fattah brought together House Members who represented the nation's largest metropolitan areas to develop solutions to the challenges in America's cities. Fattah submitted bills such as the 2007 Homeowners' Emergency Mortgage Assistance Act to create an emergency mortgage fund for single- and multi-family households and the Urban Jobs Act in 2013 designed to provide Labor Department grants for job training programs for young people.[12]

About a decade into his House tenure Fattah began considering a run for mayor of Philadelphia. He was able to run for both mayor and his House seat according to Pennsylvania law. Fattah declared his candidacy for mayor in November 2006 and entered a crowded field. His platform sought to expand economic opportunities for Philadelphians and to use new technology to make the city safer; Fattah also promoted after-school activities for teenagers. He promised a "new era of openness" by strengthening ethics requirements in city hall while promoting small businesses. In the May 2007 primary, Fattah placed fourth, losing to Michael Nutter, a city council member who went on to win the general election.[13]

After losing the mayoral race, Fattah served in the House for four more terms. During that time, he directed federal funding and resources to his district while continuing his work to improve America's educational system and to overhaul how the U.S. Treasury collected revenue. In July 2015, Fattah was charged in a racketeering conspiracy for using campaign funds and federal grant money to finance his 2007 mayoral run, repaying illegal campaign loans, and rewarding members of his local political network. Following his indictment, Fattah drew three challengers in the 2016 Democratic primary. In April of that year, he lost

the nomination to state senator Dwight Evans. Two months later, Fattah was found guilty of all charges. Fattah resigned from the House on June 22, 2016.[14]

On December 12, 2016, Fattah was sentenced to 10 years in prison. He reported to the Federal Correctional Institution-McKean in Lewis Run, Pennsylvania, on January 25, 2017. On August 9, 2018, a federal appeals court overturned some of Fattah's convictions based on a ruling from the U.S. Supreme Court but allowed the other convictions to stand. In 2020, Fattah returned to Philadelphia to serve the remainder of his sentence in "community confinement."[15]

Manuscript Collection

Temple University Libraries, Special Collections Research Center (Philadelphia, PA). *Papers*: 1986–1995, 17 linear feet. The papers of Chaka Fattah contain correspondence; financial records; subject files on activities, organizations, and political subjects; election and legislative materials; brochures, newsletters, and pamphlets; audiovisual materials; and memorabilia. A finding aid is available in the repository and online. The collection is open to research with some restrictions.

Notes

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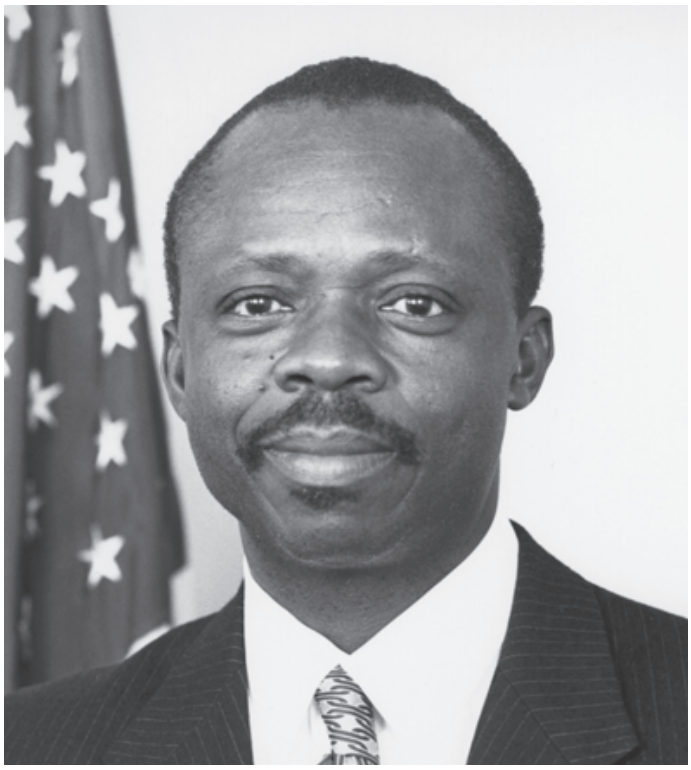
Victor O. Frazer

1943–

DELEGATE

1995–1997

Independent from the U.S. Virgin Islands



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After a surprise victory in 1994, Victor O. Frazer became the second Black Delegate to represent the U.S. Virgin Islands in the U.S. House of Representatives. During his brief stint in Congress, Frazer promoted the interests of his constituents in the American territory, focusing on procuring federal money for hurricane relief and attracting tourism to the eastern Caribbean.

Victor O. Frazer was born on May 24, 1943, in Charlotte Amalie, St. Thomas, Virgin Islands, one of 10 children to Albert Frazer and Amanda Blyden. After graduating from Charlotte Amalie High School in 1960, Frazer earned a bachelor's degree from Fisk University, in Nashville, Tennessee, in 1964, and a law degree from Howard University Law School in Washington, DC, in 1971. Frazer worked as an attorney for the District of Columbia office of the corporation counsel (later called the office of the attorney general of the District of Columbia) from 1974 to 1978, before stints as a banker and as a lawyer for the Interstate Commerce Commission and the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office. He later served as general counsel for the Virgin Islands water and power authority from 1987 to 1989. Frazer acquired congressional experience as an administrative assistant for California Representative Mervyn M. Dymally, as a special assistant for Michigan Representative John Conyers Jr., and as counsel for the House Committee on the District of Columbia. He also worked in a private legal practice. Frazer has two daughters: Kaaren and Aileene.[1]

In 1992, Frazer made an unsuccessful run for Congress against longtime Virgin Islands Delegate Ron de Lugo. Frazer, a Democrat who ran as an Independent, lost by more than 5,000 votes in a race that drew 22,997 total voters. When de Lugo announced his retirement in 1994, Frazer ran for the House again as an Independent. In a four-way race to represent the Virgin Islands in Congress, he placed second to Democrat Eileen R. Petersen, a former judge, but qualified for the runoff election on November 22 after none of the candidates earned a majority of the vote. Petersen had the support of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC), but Frazer had secured the endorsement of retired U.S. Ambassador Terrance Todman, who was from the Virgin Islands. Despite struggling to raise funding, Frazer upset Petersen in the runoff, winning 55 percent of the vote and astounding the experts; publishers scrambled to locate a photograph of Frazer to include with those of the other new Members in upcoming publications about the

104th Congress (1995–1997). Following his win, Frazer proclaimed, "This is the people's victory."[2]

During the 104th Congress, Frazer served on the Committee on International Relations. As one of the five nonvoting Members of the House—four territorial Delegates and one Resident Commissioner—Frazer could vote in committee but not on the House Floor. The rights of the Delegates and the Puerto Rican Resident Commissioner had been expanded in the 103rd Congress (1993–1995), allowing them to vote in the Committee of the Whole. But when Republicans took control of the House in 1995, they rescinded the privilege. "We are not less American because we live in the Virgin Islands," Frazer remarked. As an Independent, Frazer lacked a formal party organization in the House, and after several weeks of deliberation, he opted to caucus with the Democratic Party. He also became one of a handful of non-Democratic Members to join the CBC.[3]

Frazer used his one term in Congress to highlight issues important to his constituents in the Virgin Islands. When Hurricane Marilyn struck the chain of islands in 1995—St. Thomas sustained the most damage—Frazer worked with President William J. Clinton to ensure that the Virgin Islands received federal funds for disaster relief. In the aftermath of the hurricane, Frazer emphasized the need for additional protection against natural disasters. He urged the federal government to require private insurance companies to provide coverage for wind damage in their standard policies for homeowners in areas prone to experiencing hurricanes. In 1996, he sponsored legislation directing the Federal Emergency Management Agency to study the feasibility of providing insurance protection from windstorms for residents of the Virgin Islands.[4]

Frazer also sought to revive the tourism industry of the Virgin Islands—an essential segment of its economy. In 1995, he backed the Travel and Tourism Partnership Act aimed at promoting international travel and tourism to the United States because it "would enhance the limited resources of the Virgin Islands." Frazer also successfully lobbied for an increase in funds to fight the growing problem of international drug trafficking in the U.S. territory. Shortly after he took office in 1995, Frazer joined Representatives from Hawaii, the Delegates from Guam and American Samoa, and the Resident Commissioner from Puerto Rico, to protest a shipment of nuclear waste that was scheduled to travel through the Caribbean. The radioactive materials, which originated from Japanese nuclear plants, were shipped to France to extract plutonium and then sent back to Japan as part of an energy program sponsored by the Japanese government. Frazer also supported an increase in the federal minimum wage, warning that even though "the Virgin Islands is considered an American paradise," many of its residents lived below the poverty line.[5]

In his bid for re-election to the 105th Congress (1997–1999), Frazer portrayed himself as an active advocate for the Virgin Islands in the House and argued that his status as an Independent allowed him the flexibility to cross party lines to better represent his constituents. In a three-way race, Frazer's opponents criticized his legislative style, especially his frequent trips abroad. During his one term in office, Frazer took more than 10 trips overseas. He defended his travel as necessary given his seat on the International Relations Committee, assuring voters, "I have never traveled without promoting the Virgin Islands." During the campaign, Frazer's two challengers contended that the incumbent should have lobbied for exemptions from the 1996 welfare reform legislation to protect the citizens of the Virgin Islands. "No one member of Congress is going to hold back the tide of legislation," Frazer responded. "We ought not to embrace welfare as something we welcome." None of the candidates earned 50 percent of the vote in the general election, sending the contest to a runoff. Frazer and Donna M. Christensen, a physician, received the largest shares of the votes cast. On November 19, 1996, Frazer lost to Christensen by fewer than 1,000 votes. Frazer alleged that fraud and error at the polling sites had undermined the integrity of the election. He demanded a recount but failed to prove his claim of vote tampering.[6]

After his term in Congress, Frazer worked as an attorney and opened his own consulting firm in Washington, DC. In 2008, he challenged Christensen in the Democratic primary for his old seat in Congress, but lost, taking 20 percent of the vote.[7]

Notes

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J.C. Watts Jr.

1957–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1995–2003

Republican from Oklahoma



Carl Albert Congressional Research and Studies Center Archives, University of Oklahoma, Julius Caesar "J.C." Watts Jr. Photo, Box 1, Folder 4, Item 3

In 1994, J.C. Watts Jr. became the first African-American lawmaker from Oklahoma to serve in Congress. The first Republican to win the southwest Oklahoma seat in 72 years, Watts was one of two Black Republicans elected in a year which saw the GOP capture the House majority for the first time in decades. Watts became one of the most prominent legislators in the House, quickly rising to the position of Republican Conference chair, the fourth-ranking Republican in the House and responsible for communicating much of the party's agenda. Watts cited his humble roots in a segregated Oklahoma farm town as the source of his politics and his belief in self-reliance. "My parents just taught by example," Watts recalled. "They taught me and my brothers and sisters that if you lived under their roof, you were going to work."[1]

Julius Caesar "J.C." Watts Jr. was born in the farming community of Eufaula, Oklahoma, on November 18, 1957. His mother, Helen Watts, a homemaker, raised six children: Melvin, Lawrence, Mildred, Gwen, J.C., and Darlene. Watts's father, Julius Caesar "Buddy" Watts, was a police officer, a businessman, and a minister. The elder Watts also served on the Eufaula city council, and along with his brother, Wade, was active in the Democratic Party and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Wade Watts headed the Oklahoma branch of the NAACP for 16 years. J.C. Watts was one of the first Black children to attend a previously all-White elementary school in Eufaula. At Eufaula High School, Watts was the first African-American quarterback on the school's football team; some of Watts's teammates from the mostly segregated local community initially protested his spot on the team. Watts married Frankie Jones in 1977. The couple, who first met at Watts's seventh birthday party, have five children: LaKesha, Jerrell, Jennifer, Julia, and Trey. Watts has a child, Tia, from another relationship before his marriage who was adopted by a family member.[2]

Watts played football and studied journalism at the University of Oklahoma in Norman. At first, he was a seventh-string quarterback. Discouraged with his minimal playing time, he left school multiple times. In each instance, his father persuaded him to return. In 1979, Watts became the starting quarterback and led the Sooners to Orange Bowl victories in 1980 and 1981. He was named the bowl's most valuable player both years and was inducted into the Orange Bowl Hall of Fame in 1992.[3]

Following Watts's graduation in 1981, the New York Jets, a National Football League (NFL) team, offered him a place on their roster, but not as quarterback. Instead, Watts turned down the NFL and played from 1981 to 1986 in the Canadian Football League. Watts then became a youth minister at Sunnyvale Baptist Church, in Del City, Oklahoma. Ordained in 1993, he supplemented his ministerial income by opening a highway construction company. However, Watts soon found himself courted by state Republican officials eager to back his entry into politics.[4]

Watts grew up in a family with long-standing ties to the Democratic Party. Buddy Watts once quipped that "a black man voting for the Republicans makes about as much sense as a chicken voting for Colonel Sanders." But in 1980, as Watts covered a 1980 Oklahoma senate campaign as a journalism student, he found that his views were more in line with those of the Republican candidate, Don Nickles. After years of careful thought, Watts officially changed his party affiliation in 1989. "I switched my registration not out of convenience but out of conviction," Watts later recalled. "I knew what I was doing would not be popular. It created some strain, even in relationships I had built over the years. But I knew in my heart that this was the right road, the honest road for me to take and remain true to my own principles." In 1990, officials in the state Republican Party eagerly embraced Watts when he ran for and won a seat on the Oklahoma corporation commission, which regulated the state's telephone, oil, and gas industries. He was the first African-American to hold statewide office in Oklahoma and served as chairman of the commission from 1993 until his departure in 1995.[5]

In 1994, when seven-term Representative David Keith McCurdy of Oklahoma announced his candidacy for the U.S. Senate, local Republicans and business leaders urged Watts to run for McCurdy's seat. McCurdy represented a conservative southwest Oklahoma district, with several oil reserves and three major military installations. Agriculture was also a major industry and the district included the University of Oklahoma in Norman. In the primary, Watts ran on a platform squarely in line with the emerging consensus in the Republican Party. He favored the death penalty, school prayer, a balanced budget amendment to the Constitution, and welfare reform. He also opposed abortion and cuts in defense spending.[6]

In a tough August primary challenge against state representative Ed Apple, Watts won 49 percent to Apple's 48 percent, but since neither candidate captured 50 percent of the vote, the race moved to a runoff in September. Watts brought in high-powered Republicans to campaign for him, including New York Representative Jack French Kemp, a former football star, and National Rifle Association spokesman and actor Charlton Heston. Watts also secured the endorsement of the House Republican leadership. Apple lambasted Watts's courting of out-of-state luminaries. But while the runoff remained close, Watts prevailed with 52 percent of the vote.[7]

Heading into the general election, Watts continued to host high-profile Republicans, including former President George H.W. Bush, Kansas Senator Robert Joseph Dole, and Republican Whip—and future Speaker of the House—Newt Gingrich of Georgia. Watts faced a close, heated campaign against his Democratic opponent, local attorney and self-described conservative David Perryman. In a controversial advertisement that attracted national attention and accusations of racism, Perryman juxtaposed images of himself as a teenager posing with his prize-winning pigs at a youth farming contest with a photo of Watts in his high school football uniform. The state GOP chair said Perryman's advertisement was a "deeply disturbing" attempt to use race as a divisive issue in the campaign. On Election Day, Watts defeated Perryman with 52 percent of the vote. Watts increased his victories in his next three re-elections, winning with as much as 65 percent in 2000.[8]

Watts was sworn in to the 104th Congress (1995–1997) as part of the first GOP House majority in 40 years. He received assignments on the Banking and Financial Services Committee and the National Security Committee. The latter panel was crucial to the oversight of the three military installations in his district. Watts left the Banking and Financial Services Committee for a spot on the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee in the 105th Congress (1997–1999). Watts valued his seat on the Transportation Committee so much that he turned down a position on the prestigious Appropriations Committee when a seat opened midway through the 106th Congress (1999–2001).

The GOP hoped that Watts and Representative Gary A. Franks of Connecticut—the two Black Republicans in the House—would help the party attract African-American voters, who overwhelmingly voted Democratic in national elections. Watts focused on promoting the GOP through Black organizations, such as the NAACP and historically

Black colleges and universities. "Most black people don't think alike. Most black people just vote alike," he said. "Why is it that so many people in the black community [who] would agree with Republican issues, why don't they vote Republican? I think that's the question we have to ask." Watts also declined an invitation to join the overwhelmingly Democratic Congressional Black Caucus (CBC). "I think the CBC and I want the same things for the black community," he observed. "The difference is how we get there."[9]

Representative Watts voted 95 percent of the time for legislative initiatives from the "Contract with America," a 1994 Republican campaign promise to reduce government spending and reform how the House operated. In 1995, Watts teamed with Representative James Matthes Talent of Missouri to create Saving Our Children: The American Community Renewal Act of 1996, which sought to create tax breaks, remove regulation on small businesses, institute school vouchers for parents who wanted to choose their children's schools, and provide funding for faith-based organizations assisting low-income communities. Although the bill never received a vote on the House Floor, Watts regularly reintroduced it, adding tax cuts for disadvantaged communities as well as opportunities for homeownership. Watts also worked with Ways and Means Committee Chair William Reynolds Archer Jr. of Texas to include provisions in the Financial Freedom Act of 1999, which was designed to eliminate the capital gains tax and provide a "wage credit" for businesses that hired qualified low-income employees. Watts argued these changes would ultimately help families save money. "Under the current tax system, we penalize savings and investment and productivity," he argued. "Those are three things we should be rewarding." Although President William J. Clinton vetoed the Financial Freedom Act, Archer folded Watts's funding provision for religious organizations into the Community Renewal Tax Relief Act of 2000. The bill became law as part of an omnibus appropriations act in December 2000.[10]

On other issues, including affirmative action, Watts took a different approach than many in his party. "Affirmative action isn't the problem," Watts argued. "Lousy education for black kids is the problem. Until you fix these schools don't talk to me about equal opportunity." Watts pointed to his own personal experience with racism to show that the United States was not ready to abolish inclusive policies for minorities in education and employment. In the 104th Congress, he opposed a bill submitted by Gary Franks and Florida Republican Charles Terrance Canady to eliminate affirmative action practices in the federal government. As the bill gained momentum in the Republican House, Watts appealed directly to Speaker Newt Gingrich to block it. "Look, in principle I don't agree with affirmative action," he told Gingrich, "but in practice, we still don't have a level playing field." After their conversation, Gingrich told Franks to pull the bill. Watts also suspected that Gingrich prevented an effort the following year to try and repeal the policy again.[11]

During his time in the House, Watts became known as the GOP's "Great Black Hope" amid efforts by the party to rehabilitate its image with African-American voters. In 1997, the Republican Party tapped him to deliver the response to President Clinton's State of the Union Address. He was the first African-American Republican chosen by the party to deliver a televised response to the President's address. Watts spoke about reducing the role of government in American society and urged voters to move past anti-poverty programs and legislative efforts to end racism and discrimination. "Government can't ease all pain. In fact, Government sometimes rubs the wound raw and makes healing harder," he argued, adding that the Clinton administration only offered "the same old, same old—a bunch of sermons and sloganizing that defends the old assumption that Government can heal the racial divide." Instead, Watts concluded, the GOP's "mission is to return power to your home, to where mothers and fathers can exercise it according to their beliefs." In 1996, Watts was named as a possible vice-presidential candidate, serving as co-chair for the campaign of GOP presidential candidate Bob Dole.[12]

In 1998, Watts challenged incumbent Republican Conference chair and future Speaker John A. Boehner of Ohio after the party lost a handful of seats in the midterm elections. Though Republicans had maintained their majority, exit polls showed high African-American voter turnout in the South, the GOP's stronghold, but that only 11 percent of Black voters in the region voted Republican—down from 18 percent in 1996. Watts emphasized the GOP's need to broaden its appeal among people of color. In a letter to House Republicans, he wrote, "It is time to let the American people know that the Republican Party is the party of all Americans. We are the party of inclusiveness. Our ideas are good for everyone." Watts prevailed against Boehner, 121 to 93, to win election as chair of the Republican Conference, the GOP's fourth-ranking position in the House. Watts was

the first African American to join the Republican leadership and was subsequently re-elected to the position for the 107th Congress (2001–2003).[13]

Watts's time in leadership proved challenging. Watts claimed he did not receive staff or a budget as conference chair until four months into the job, and he largely eschewed appearances on talk shows and rarely spoke at leadership meetings. The criticism directed at him from rank-and-file Members combined with the lack of support from his colleagues in party leadership led him to feel alienated by GOP decision makers. He found himself at odds with powerful Republican Whip Thomas Dale DeLay of Texas. Watts disagreed with DeLay's heavy-handed tactics to maintain party unity, and DeLay often overstepped Watts's role as the hub for communication within the Republican Conference. In July 1999, Watts threatened to resign from leadership to protest DeLay's aggressive tactics, but he stopped short of doing so. When Majority Leader Richard Keith Armey of Texas announced his retirement in 2002, Watts considered running to replace him and quietly solicited the aid of congressional allies. But before Watts could make a formal announcement about his candidacy, DeLay had secured enough votes to all but guarantee his election as Majority Leader.[14]

An early and avid supporter of Republican President George W. Bush, Watts was dissatisfied with the Pentagon's 2002 handling of funding for an $11 billion weapons system that would be partially assembled in Watts's district in Elgin, Oklahoma. Watts later claimed that President Bush refused to return his phone calls after targeting the project for spending cuts. Watts was furious when Secretary of Defense Donald Henry Rumsfeld announced the end of the program without consulting him. When the President addressed the Republican Conference on Capitol Hill the following week, Watts did not attend.[15]

In 2002, Watts declined to run for re-election to the 108th Congress (2003–2005), citing a desire to spend more time with his family, who had remained in Oklahoma during his tenure in Washington. "This business is hard on families," he said. "I don't want to do this for the rest of my life. There are other things I want to do and can do. You have to be careful about getting on this treadmill." Leaders in both parties implored him to stay, recognizing that his unique position brought new ideas to the House. "I hate to see him go," noted prominent Democrat and CBC member James E. Clyburn of South Carolina. "J.C. is someone who really has been quietly and forcefully doing a lot of good." Civil rights activist Rosa Parks, who, in 1955, famously refused to give up her seat on a Montgomery, Alabama, bus, wrote to Watts. "If you can," Parks implored him, "please remain as a pioneer on the Republicans' side until others come to assist you. I am glad that I stayed in my seat." After leaving Congress Watts formed a lobbying and consulting business and served as chair of political action committee working to elect Republican candidates. He also appeared on television as a political analyst and worked as a news media entrepreneur.[16]

Manuscript Collection

University of Oklahoma, Carl Albert Congressional Research and Studies Center, Congressional and Political Collections (Norman, OK). *Papers*: 1992–2002, 100 boxes. The papers of J.C. Watts Jr. consist of speeches, photographs, correspondence, and other material documenting his legislative activities. The collection contains audiovisual materials. A finding aid is available in the repository and online.

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Jesse L. Jackson Jr.

1965–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1995–2012

Democrat from Illinois



Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

Jesse L. Jackson Jr. won his first campaign for elected office at the age of 30 when he prevailed in a special election to represent a U.S. House of Representatives district that stretched across South Chicago and outlying communities. The son of one of the foremost civil rights activists of the twentieth century, Jackson used his seat on the House Appropriations Committee to focus on improving the economy of his largely suburban district and attended to national issues affecting African Americans, such as voting reform and health care. "I'm in Congress not because of something I've done," Jackson once said, "but because of the many African Americans who have fought for me to be there."[1]

Jesse L. Jackson Jr. was born in Greenville, South Carolina, on March 11, 1965, the second of five children of Reverend Jesse Jackson Sr. and Jacqueline Davis Jackson. Jackson Sr., one of the country's foremost civil rights activists, was in Alabama marching from Selma to Montgomery with Martin Luther King Jr. when his son was born. Jackson Sr. went on to start two political organizations, PUSH (People United to Save Humanity) and the Rainbow Coalition; he also ran for president in 1984 and 1988. When Jesse Jackson Jr. was a boy, his family moved to Chicago so his father could attend the Chicago Theological Seminary. He grew up in the city and attended Le Mans Academy, a private military preparatory school in Indiana, before graduating from St. Albans School, an elite boarding school in Washington, DC. Jackson turned down football scholarships from the University of Michigan, Notre Dame, and the University of Southern California, and enrolled at North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University, a historically Black school and his father's alma mater. Jackson graduated in 1987 with a bachelor's degree in business management. Two years later, he earned a master's degree in theology from the Chicago Theological Seminary. In 1993, he completed a law degree at the University of Illinois College of Law. Jackson accrued political experience as a student while campaigning for his father's presidential runs in the 1980s. After law school, he served as secretary of the Democratic National Committee's Black Caucus and as national field director for the Rainbow Coalition. Jackson's wife, Sandi, whom he married in 1991, represented Chicago's seventh ward on the city council. The couple has two children: Jessica Donatella and Jesse L. Jackson III. They filed for divorce in 2016.[2]

In September 1995, Jackson declared his intention to run for the U.S. House seat held by Representative Mel Reynolds of Illinois. The incumbent had been convicted on sexual abuse charges and announced his resignation effective October 1. The district, which included much of Chicago's South Side and a swath of suburbs toward the south, was 68 percent Black. It was economically diverse, with rich and poor neighborhoods, abandoned steel mills, and suburban tract housing. Jackson's most significant challenger in the Democratic primary was Emil Jones, minority leader of the Illinois state senate and a legislator for 22 years. Jones touted his lengthy political record and criticized Jackson's lack of experience. The primary, scheduled for November 29, was expected to draw low turnout due to voter apathy and the holiday season, prompting Jackson to focus his campaign efforts on mobilizing and registering young voters, his core supporters. Jackson won the highly contested race with 48 percent of the vote, despite a low turnout of 21 percent. In the special election on December 12, 1995, Jackson defeated his Republican opponent, former Chicago Heights police officer Thomas Somer, by a nearly three-to-one margin. Jackson was sworn in two days later, as Representative Sidney Richard Yates—the dean of the Illinois delegation from a North Side Chicago district—introduced him on the floor. Jackson easily won re-election nine times.[3]

Jackson received assignments to the Banking and Financial Services Committee and the Small Business Committee during the 104th Congress (1995–1997). In the 106th Congress (1999–2001), he left both panels after securing an exclusive post on the Appropriations Committee, where he served for the rest of his House career.[4]

From the 106th to the 112th Congresses (1999–2013), Jackson introduced a total of 56 constitutional amendments, including proposals designed to abolish the Electoral College and guarantee voting rights, high-quality education, health care, and employment. Jackson believed that the Tenth Amendment—which reserved powers not explicitly written in the Constitution to state governments—hampered the federal government's ability to pursue major quality of life improvements on a national scale. "Human rights must be advanced by this Congress in order to broaden the definition of what it means to be an American," he declared on the House Floor.[5]

Jackson supported projects in the Capitol complex that memorialized Black Americans and the civil rights movement. He drafted the bill that placed a statue of civil rights pioneer Rosa Parks in the Capitol's Statuary Hall. He also co-wrote legislation with Zachary Paul Wamp of Tennessee to designate the large entrance hall of the new Capitol Visitor Center as Emancipation Hall, in recognition of the enslaved workers who constructed the Capitol.[6]

During Jackson's brief service on the Banking Committee, Democratic leaders considered replacing the panel's top Democrat, Henry B. González—the committee's former chair and the longest-serving Hispanic Representative at the time—with a younger Member. Jackson came to González's defense, delivering an impassioned speech in which he declared that seniority-based leadership—in which committee members are ranked based on their length of service on the panel—empowered women and lawmakers of color.[7]

From his seat on the Appropriations Committee, Jackson led efforts to increase funding for the Minority HIV/AIDS Initiative from $166 million in 1998 to more than $400 million by 2007. In 1999, he introduced a bill to create a research center within the National Institutes of Health to study racial inequalities in healthcare. It also boosted funding for historically Black schools for medical and health professions. The bill was incorporated into the Minority Health and Health Disparities Research and Education Act, which President William J. Clinton signed into law in 2001.[8]

Jackson also succeeded in obtaining humanitarian aid for sub-Saharan African countries. A year after he joined a congressional delegation on a 2004 trip to refugee camps in the Darfur region of Sudan, Jackson amended an emergency defense appropriations bill to boost emergency famine relief and refugee assistance for Sudan and surrounding countries by $100 million. "Most of Africa's urgent humanitarian needs are shockingly affordable," he said on the House Floor.[9]

For his district, Jackson regularly secured millions of dollars in earmarks for job training, health care, education, and transportation and infrastructure projects. To galvanize support for federal aid, Jackson frequently took politicians and journalists on "The Tour," a four-hour ride across his district that went through struggling neighborhoods and revealed dilapidated infrastructure. "I represent political, financial and economic interests," Jackson once said. "Interests that are different from many that people in this room represent. … I have chosen to describe the divide not in racial terms, which has historically been the

history of Chicago, but in economic terms. What have I discovered? That when I do that, people can hear me." He also worked to funnel nearly $150 million in federal money to the Deep Tunnel system, a Chicago flood protection system. Jackson championed the construction of a third Chicago-area airport south of his district to foster economic development, although political opposition prevented the project from moving forward.[10]

Known as a charismatic speaker, Jackson had an active media following early in his career and was not afraid to criticize the Clinton Administration over policy differences. He expressed disappointment when President Clinton signed the Republican-led 1996 welfare reform bill and was one of only 85 Members to vote against the 1997 Balanced Budget Act, which he believed would exacerbate economic inequality. In the wake of the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, Jackson voted against the 2001 USA PATRIOT Act, claiming it would allow the government to "invade our privacy, imprison us without due process and ultimately punish dissent." He criticized the George W. Bush administration and opposed military intervention in Iraq, preferring to resolve the conflict with Saddam Hussein's regime through peaceful means. Jackson was a strong proponent of President Barack Obama's first-term agenda. He backed the nearly $800 billion stimulus package in 2009, the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act of 2010, and the repeal of the military's "don't ask, don't tell" policy that prevented gay servicemen and women from serving openly.[11]

Toward the end of 2008, federal investigators looked into allegations that Jackson's supporters had offered Illinois Governor Rod Blagojevich money in exchange for Jackson's appointment to the U.S. Senate seat vacated by Obama following his election as President. Blagojevich was ultimately convicted in the scheme to sell the Senate seat, but Jackson claimed no wrongdoing and was never charged. In June 2012, Jackson's office announced that the Congressman was on a medical leave. After his re-election that year, Jackson resigned from the House effective November 21, 2012, citing ongoing health issues. At the time, Jackson was under investigation over allegations that he spent campaign funds on personal electronics, furniture, vacations, and furs. Three months later, he pleaded guilty to a felony fraud charge. On August 14, 2013, a Washington judge sentenced Jackson and his wife to federal prison. He completed his sentence on September 20, 2015.[12]

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Juanita Millender-McDonald

1938–2007

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1996–2007

Democrat from California



Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

In 1996, Juanita Millender-McDonald of California won a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives just six years after capturing her first elected office at the local level. From her position on the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, Millender-McDonald shaped highway projects and federal programs that directly affected her Los Angeles district. In 2007, she made history by becoming one of the first African-American women to chair a standing committee in Congress, the House Administration Committee.

Juanita Millender-McDonald was born Juanita Millender on September 7, 1938, in Birmingham, Alabama, one of five children raised by Shelly and Everlina Millender. After her mother Everlina died, Shelly Millender, a minister, moved his family to California. Juanita Millender married James McDonald Jr. on July 26, 1955, and by the time she was 26, the couple had five children. A homemaker for 15 years, Millender-McDonald returned to college and earned a bachelor's degree in business administration from California's University of Redlands in 1981. Millender-McDonald earned a master's degree in educational administration from California State University in Los Angeles in 1988. After teaching math and English in a public high school, she worked as an administrator in the Los Angeles school district—eventually directing its gender equality programs.[1]

Millender-McDonald first entered politics at the local level in Los Angeles and served as a delegate to the Democratic National Conventions in 1984, 1988, and 1992. In 1982, she worked on behalf of the unsuccessful gubernatorial campaign of longtime Los Angeles mayor Tom Bradley. Afterward she worked on several local campaigns before entering and winning election for a seat on the Carson city council in 1990. She excelled at building networks of political support during the race. The first time she asked for the backing of Representative Mervyn M. Dymally of California, he declined, telling Millender-McDonald, "Local politics is too divisive." But she persisted. Dymally said, "She came back, this time with a delegation of friends and supporters. I said, 'What do you want?' She said, 'I need your endorsement.' I said, 'You have it.'" Millender-McDonald became the first African-American woman elected to the council and in 1991 served as mayor pro tempore.[2]

In 1992, following the reapportionment of California state assembly districts, Millender-McDonald prevailed in the Democratic primary for a seat in the state legislature against two incumbent assemblymen whose Los Angeles-area districts

had been merged. She went on to serve in the California state assembly until 1996. Within her first year in the assembly, she chaired two panels: the insurance committee and the revenue and taxation committee. Millender-McDonald sponsored a major transportation bill to create the Alameda Corridor, a national transportation artery designed to improve railroad and highway access to the San Pedro Bay Ports, which constitute one of the nation's largest shipping complexes.[3]

In December 1995, Millender-McDonald announced her candidacy to fill a U.S. House seat left vacant by the resignation of Representative Walter R. Tucker III. Tucker's congressional district—which encompassed suburbs south of Los Angeles, including Carson and Compton—was predominantly Democratic and working-class. African Americans and Hispanic Americans composed roughly 75 percent of the population. Although no GOP challenger entered the March 26, 1996, special election to fill the remainder of the 104th Congress (1995–1997), Millender-McDonald faced eight other candidates, including fellow state lawmaker Willard H. Murray, and Robin Tucker, the wife of Walter Tucker. With support from former longtime speaker of the state assembly and San Francisco Mayor Willie Brown, Millender-McDonald won with 27 percent of the vote; her nearest competitor, Murray, received 20 percent. The Democratic primary for the full term in the 105th Congress (1997–1999) was held on the same day, and Millender-McDonald prevailed over Murray by an even narrower margin: 24 to 21 percent. In the fall 1996 general election for the 105th Congress, she defeated Republican Michael E. Voetee with 85 percent of the vote. Millender-McDonald won her subsequent five re-elections with majorities of at least 75 percent.[4]

After she was sworn into the House on April 16, 1996, Millender-McDonald served on the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee and the Small Business Committee. She kept both assignments throughout her congressional tenure. In the 106th Congress (1999–2001), she was appointed ranking member of the Small Business Subcommittee on Empowerment. Democratic leaders also named her a regional whip, and in the 107th Congress (2001–2003) she co-chaired the Democratic Caucus for Women's Issues. In the 108th Congress (2003–2005) she drew assignments on the House Administration Committee and the Joint Printing Committee, and she served as ranking member of the Small Business Subcommittee on Tax, Finance, and Exports.[5]

In the 109th Congress (2005–2007), Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi of California appointed Millender-McDonald ranking member of the House Administration Committee. After Democrats regained control of the House in the 2006 elections, Millender-McDonald was named chair, joining the new head of the Ethics Committee, Stephanie Tubbs Jones of Ohio, as the first African-American women to chair standing committees of the House. Millender-McDonald was also vice chair of the Joint Committee on the Library, whose membership roster was drawn from the House Administration Committee and the Senate Rules and Administration Committee.[6]

Many of Millender-McDonald's legislative initiatives came from her seat on the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee. In 2001, she authored the Terrorism Threat to Public Transportation Assessment Act to evaluate vulnerabilities in the nation's mass transit systems. She also was a lead sponsor of the Nuclear Waste Responsible Component and Protection Act, which sought to ensure that hazardous chemical material was transported and stored safely and environmentally outside of inner cities. The committee's jurisdiction also allowed Millender-McDonald to attend to transportation projects directly affecting her district. During her first months in the House, Millender-McDonald secured $400 million in federal loan guarantees necessary to complete her longtime work on the Alameda Corridor, a 20-mile railroad artery that connects the national rail system to the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach. In the 108th Congress, Millender-McDonald helped draft the six-year Transportation Equity Act—which brought in more than $87 million in federal money for highway projects in and around her district. Her addition to the bill, the Projects of National and Regional Significance program, allocated more than $6.6 billion toward major transportation projects nationally.[7]

In the House, Millender-McDonald continued to work on issues she first addressed in the California assembly: the Los Angeles public school system, job training, childcare, education, women's issues, and combating addiction. Millender-McDonald also worked to promote awareness of national health issues like cervical cancer, AIDS, asthma, and bone marrow registration. She introduced concurrent resolutions in the 106th and 107th Congress urging frequent testing and stressing the severity of cervical cancer. Millender-McDonald submitted the Asthma Awareness, Education, and Treatment Act four times between 1999 and 2005, hoping

to expand research, unify federal efforts to treat asthma, and incentivize climate and pest control businesses to assist with improving air quality in low-income and multi-family housing units.[8]

Millender-McDonald introduced the Freedmen's Bureau Records Preservation Act of 2000, which authorized funds and directed the National Archives to update and index the department's records and place them on microfilm to improve access. On the House Floor, Millender-McDonald spoke "as a descendant of slaves" to urge passage of the bill, which she called a significant genealogical resource for Black Americans. "African-Americans, like many other Americans, look to official records for their ancestors. As ship manifests are the vital link between European-Americans and their European ancestors, the Freedmen's Bureau records are the link for African-Americans to their slave and African ancestors." The bill passed both chambers without objection.[9]

Although she avoided the limelight, Millender-McDonald occasionally orchestrated dramatic political moments. In November 1996, shortly after taking office, she brought CIA director John Deutsch to a Watts town hall meeting, where Deutsch fielded questions about allegations that the CIA funneled proceeds from the sale of illegal drugs to purchase arms for the Nicaraguan Contras. Three years later, seeking to boost the stalled ambassadorial appointment to New Zealand of former U.S. Senator Carol Moseley Braun of Illinois, Millender-McDonald staged a sit-in at the office of Senator Jesse Helms of North Carolina, who was blocking the appointment. As ranking member of the House Administration Committee, she called for an election reform field hearing to collect testimony in Columbus, Ohio, regarding allegations of voting restrictions and poorly administered polling places in the state during the 2004 general election.[10]

In mid-April 2007, Millender-McDonald took a six-week leave of absence from her House duties to receive treatment for cancer. She passed away at her home in Compton on April 21. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi remembered Millender-McDonald as "a trailblazer, always advocating for the full participation of all Americans in the success and prosperity of our country."[11]

Manuscript Collection

California State University, Dominguez Hills, Donald R. and Beverly J. Gerth Archives and Special Collections (Carson, CA). *Papers*: ca. 1984–2007, 13.34 linear feet. The Juanita Millender-McDonald Collection includes correspondence, newsletters, press releases, speeches, reports, flyers, questionnaires, bills and amendments, greeting cards, newspaper clippings, and ephemera including photos, plaques, and videotapes. A large number of files are devoted to the Congressional Black Caucus, the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, the Congressional Caucus on Women's issues, the House Administration Committee, and the California assembly. Subjects include labor issues, HIV/AIDS, CIA Nicaraguan Contra scandal, education, minority issues, finance, health, the John Kerry presidential campaign, political practices and policies, transportation, and China. A finding aid is available in the repository and online.

Notes

1 *Politics in America, 2004* (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Inc., 2003): 138.

2 Nicole Gaouette, "Juanita Millender-McDonald, 68; Southland Congresswoman," 23 April 2007, *Los Angeles Times*: B9.

3 *Politics in America, 1998* (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Inc., 1997): 194; Greg Lucas, "Willie Brown Feels Good About Election Outcome," 4 June 1992, *San Francisco Chronicle*: 19; California secretary of state, "Primary Election – Statement of Vote, June 1992," 2 June 1992, https://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/prior-elections/statewide-election-results/primary-election-june-2-1992/statement-vote; *Politics in America, 2004*: 139.

4 James Bornemeier, "Broader Horizons; Seat in Congress Opens New Doors for Juanita Millender-McDonald," 21 April 1996, *Los Angeles Times*: A3; *Politics in America, 1998*: 193–194; Office of the Clerk, U.S. House of Representatives, "Election Statistics, 1920 to Present," https://history.house.gov/Institution/Election-Statistics/.

5 *Congressional Directory*, 106th Cong., 1st sess. (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1999): 422; *Congressional Directory*, 108th Cong., 1st sess. (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2003): 423.

6 *Almanac of American Politics, 2006* (Washington, DC: National Journal Group, 2005): 270.

7 *Politics in America, 2004*: 138; "Congresswoman Millender-McDonald," official website of Representative Juanita Millender-McDonald, 24 November 2004, https://web.archive.org/web/20041118042454/http://www.house.gov/millender-mcdonald/bio.htm; James Bornemeier, "Broader Horizons; Seat in Congress Opens New Doors for Juanita Millender-McDonald," 21 April 1996, *Los Angeles Times*: A3; SAFETEA-LU, Public Law 109-59, 119 Stat. 1144 (2005).

8 Recognizing the severity of the issue of cervical health, and for other purposes, H. Con. Res. 64, 106th Cong. (2000); Recognizing the importance of good cervical health and of detecting cervical cancer during its earliest stages, H. Con. Res. 309, 107th Cong. (2002); Asthma Awareness, Education and Treatment Act of 1999, H.R. 1966, 106th Cong. (1999); Asthma Awareness, Education and Treatment Act of 2001, H.R. 2228, 107th Cong. (2001); Asthma Awareness, Education and Treatment Act of 2003, H.R. 1149, 108th Cong. (2003); Asthma Awareness, Education and Treatment Act of 2005, H.R. 172, 109th Cong. (2005).

9 *Congressional Record*, House, 106th Cong., 2nd sess. (19 October 2000): 23683–23684; Freedmen's Bureau Records Preservation Act of 2000, Public Law 106-444, 114 Stat. 1929 (2000).

10 John L. Mitchell and Nora Zamichow, "CIA Head Speaks in L.A. to Counter Crack Claims," 16 November 1996, *Los Angeles Times*: A1; Gaouette, "Juanita Millender-McDonald, 68; Southland Congresswoman"; "Congresswoman Millender-McDonald to Hold Field Hearing in Ohio on 2004 Elections," 17 March 2005, *Los Angeles Sentinel*: A4; Lyn Jensen, "Juanita Millender-McDonald Assumes Administration Chair," 8 February 2007, *Random Lengths* (Los Angeles, CA): 5; Hearings Before the Committee on House Administration, *2004 Election and the Implementation of the Help America Vote Act*, 109th Cong., 1st sess. (2005).

11 Gaouette, "Juanita Millender-McDonald, 68; Southland Congresswoman"; Kelly McCormack and Sam Youngman, "Millender-McDonald Remembered for 'Dignity,' 'Determination,'" 24 April 2007, *The Hill*: 13.

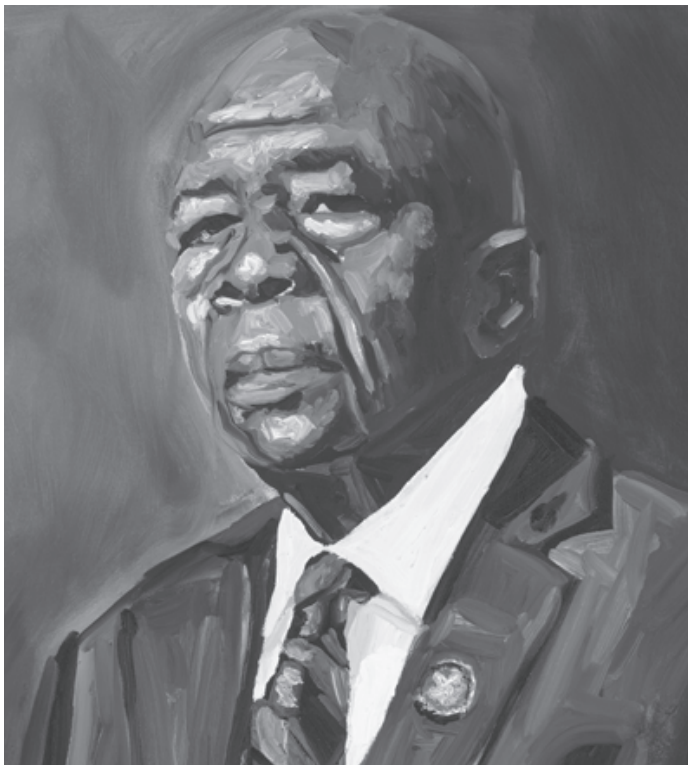
Elijah E. Cummings

1951–2019

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1996–2019

Democrat from Maryland



Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives; photography by Mitro Hood, courtesy of the Baltimore Museum of Art

Elijah E. Cummings, the son of South Carolina sharecroppers who moved to Baltimore for a better life for their children, won election to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1996, beginning what would become a celebrated 23-year career in Congress. Cummings, an influential and well-respected Representative who rose to become chair of the Oversight and Reform Committee in 2019, spent his career advocating for policies to help poor and working-class Americans. "The true measure of our union," he once proclaimed from the House Floor, "is the state of the least among us." Cummings believed the government should play a vital role in helping people. "We, as leaders," he explained in an interview toward the end of his life, "have a duty and a responsibility to keep our promise to them when we ran for office and won—and that is to make their lives better. While we're all on this earth, that's my message."[1]

Elijah Eugene Cummings was born on January 18, 1951, in Baltimore, Maryland. He was one of seven children born to Robert, a chemical plant worker, and Ruth Cummings, a domestic worker and preacher. Cummings's parents had left their home in South Carolina for the opportunities found in the booming economy of post-World War II Baltimore. Religion and education were paramount in the Cummings household. "My father … he told us, 'If you miss one day of school that meant you died the night before.' And he meant that. I did not miss one second of school between kindergarten and graduating from high school." His mother, meanwhile, held prayer meetings in the basement of their house that she soon expanded into her own church.[2]

In 1962, at age 11, Elijah Cummings participated in a demonstration to desegregate a local Whites-only public pool. The protest was led by Juanita Jackson Mitchell, an accomplished civil rights activist, lawyer, and sister-in-law of future Representative Parren J. Mitchell, the first Black Representative from Maryland. As Cummings and two-dozen peers jumped into the pool, a large crowd of angry White counter protesters spouted insults and hurled rocks and bottles at the children. The experience had a profound effect on Cummings and combined with the inspiration of Jackson Mitchell's leadership, Cummings remembered that "at 11 years old, I declared in that moment that I was going to be become a lawyer."[3]

Cummings graduated from Baltimore City College, a selective Baltimore high school, in 1969 and went to Howard University, where he graduated Phi Beta Kappa

with a bachelor's degree in political science in 1972. At Howard, Cummings served as sophomore class president and as the student government president. In 1976, Cummings earned a law degree from the University of Maryland School of Law and founded a law firm in Baltimore. He worked at his practice for two decades until his election to Congress. Cummings first entered public office when he won election to the Maryland house of delegates in 1982. For 14 years, he represented a predominantly Black district in southwestern Baltimore. He served as vice chairman of both the constitutional and administrative law committee, and the economic matters committee. Cummings was twice married and had three children.[4]

In the state legislature, Cummings chaired the Black caucus and eventually became the first African American in Maryland history to be named speaker pro tempore—the house of delegates' second-highest position. Cummings was an advocate for Black Marylanders and for investments in Baltimore. He helped establish and then served as chairman of the Governor's Commission on Black Males, which focused on ways the state of Maryland could help alleviate high rates of "unemployment, arrest, AIDS infection and school failure among young black men." Cummings also worked to improve affirmative action programs in state agencies and private companies. "We are not asking anything that business does not already do for other communities," Cummings said of one venture between the Maryland assembly's Black caucus and private businesses. "We are just asking them to spread the wealth into our constituencies." During his time in the assembly, Cummings also supported needle-exchange programs in Baltimore, passed tax reforms to assist Marylanders living in poverty, and was a strong supporter of gun-control laws.[5]

When five-term Representative Kweisi Mfume of Maryland resigned his seat in the House to become chief executive officer of NAACP in February 1996, Cummings entered the race to succeed him. Mfume's crescent-shaped Baltimore district encompassed poor and affluent areas in the city center, Black communities on the west side, and the working and middle-class towns of Catonsville and Randallstown. The district was overwhelmingly Democratic and about 70 percent of its voters were African American. Cummings's status in the house of delegates, his ties to the community, key endorsements from local politicians, and the support of the *Baltimore Sun* and the city's Black newspaper, the *Afro-American*, made Cummings the favorite in the crowded 26-candidate field. He won the primary with 37 percent of the vote, defeating his closest competitor by 13 points. He easily defeated Republican Kenneth Kondner in the April 16 special election, garnering 81 percent of the vote. Cummings later said that he hoped "to be the voice of those people who put their faith and trust in me. Hopefully, I will build a record … that reflects that goal." Even after redistricting twice expanded Cummings districts into Whiter, more middle-class Howard and Baltimore counties, to account for the declining population of Baltimore City, Cummings maintained a firm grip on his largely Democratic district, consistently winning more than 70 percent of the vote.[6]

After Cummings was sworn into office in April 1996, he was assigned to the Government Reform and Oversight Committee and the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee. He remained on both panels for his entire career. Cummings also served on the Committee on Armed Services during the 110th Congress (2007–2009) and on the Joint Economic Committee from the 109th through the 113th Congresses (2005–2015). During the 110th and 111th Congresses (2007–2011), Cummings served as the chair of Transportation and Infrastructure's Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation. From 2014 to 2016, he served as the ranking minority member on the Select Committee on the Events Surrounding the 2012 Attack in Benghazi. In the 116th Congress (2019–2021), Cummings became the chair of the Oversight and Reform Committee. He also served as the chair of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) during the 108th Congress (2003–2005).

From his seat on the Subcommittee on the Civil Service of the Government Reform and Oversight Committee, Cummings pushed for legislation that would aid federal workers, a significant constituency in his district, many of whom commuted to work in Washington, DC. "Public service work can sometimes be difficult," he said, "but regardless of the circumstances, these hardworking individuals are committed to doing excellent work and to making a major difference." Two of Cummings's most significant legislative victories early in his career were bills that expanded federal employees' healthcare coverage and provided more leave time for federal employees who were organ donors.[7]

Cummings also sought to protect and expand policies that supported the employment of minorities in the federal

government and with federal contractors. Early in his career on the Subcommittee on the Civil Service, Cummings convinced subcommittee chair Republican John L. Mica of Florida to hold a hearing on discrimination in the federal workplace. As Cummings explained in his opening remarks during the hearing: "[T]here appears to be abundant evidence that people of color and other minorities are being subjected to verbal and psychological abuse, unfairly evaluated and denied opportunities for advancement throughout the Federal work force." Cummings was especially concerned about a backlog of cases at the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. During his career, Cummings repeatedly introduced legislation to strengthen equal employment regulations and protect federal employees from discrimination. Three of his antidiscrimination bills passed the House but died in the Senate.[8]

Cummings's seat on the Government Reform and Oversight Committee enabled him to combat drug addiction and crime caused by the illegal drug trade in Baltimore. Cummings advocated for a drug policy that balanced criminal prosecution with effective counseling and rehabilitation programs. "We want to make sure that those people who find themselves in the clutches of drug addiction are able to depend upon treatment that can best help them." From his seat on the Subcommittee on Criminal Justice, Drug Policy and Human Resources, Cummings worked closely with the Republican subcommittee chair Mark Edward Souder of Indiana to pass the Office of National Drug Control Policy Reauthorization Act of 2006. Included in the legislation was the Dawson Family Act which Cummings had earlier sponsored as a stand-alone bill. Cummings proposed the Dawson Family Act after seven members of the Dawson family—including five children—were killed when their house was firebombed. The perpetrator targeted the Dawson family because a member of the family had informed the police about drug trafficking in their neighborhood. The Dawson Family Act directed High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area Program funds to support local programs that aimed to protect witnesses like Angela and Carnell Dawson.[9]

In the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, Cummings advocated for highway, harbor, and public transportation projects in Baltimore. Early in his career, Cummings steered more than $30 million in highway funds to his district. He also sought more funding for mass transit, including Amtrak and a light rail line planned for West Baltimore but which was never built. To promote the employment of African Americans and other minorities, Cummings worked to direct federal infrastructure contracts to Disadvantaged Business Enterprises which were owned by entrepreneurs of color, women, or other disadvantaged small businessowners. "As we rebuild America from the pavement up," Cummings said, "it is critical that every American has the opportunity to help in that effort."[10]

When he served as chair of the Subcommittee on Coastguard and Maritime Transportation during the 110th and 111th Congresses, Cummings led the passage of the Coast Guard Authorization Act of 2010. As subcommittee chair, Cummings also sought ways to increase the recruitment of minorities into the Coast Guard. He held hearings on the matter and cosponsored legislation to increase the diversity at the Coast Guard Academy. The act passed the House but was removed from a larger Coast Guard funding bill in the Senate. As chair, Cummings also successfully worked to modernize the Coast Guard's procurement practices after problems arose with the construction of new ships.[11]

As chair of the CBC during the 108th Congress (2003–2005), Cummings advocated for policies to help poor and working-class Americans and often confronted the George W. Bush administration over policies he opposed. In 2003, Cummings publicly turned down an invitation from President Bush to attend a meeting with the CBC. It was Cummings's response to the fact that Bush had earlier ignored several requests to meet with the caucus. "I would not necessarily call it a protest. It's a call for respect," he said. Later that year, Cummings led the CBC in opposition to new funding for the Iraq War. Eventually four members of the CBC voted in favor of the funding, but Cummings won plaudits for his efforts to keep the 39-member caucus unified. "This is the first time in our history when we've had such opposing opinions, but it reflects black Americans in general," Cummings said.[12]

During the financial crisis and the Great Recession in the late 2000s, Cummings, from his position on Oversight, was a vocal critic of companies that he believed had abused federal bailout funding. Cummings supported the passage of the Emergency Economic Stabilization Act of 2008, which included the Troubled Asset Relief Program (TARP), but he was critical of policies that he said favored the banking industry and did little to prevent foreclosures. In 2009, Cummings initiated a letter signed by 26 other

lawmakers demanding an audit of TARP payments made to an insurance and banking company at the center of the 2008 financial crisis amid suspicions the company had used federal rescue money to offer bonuses to executives. The letter resulted in an eight-month audit and the formation of an investigatory subcommittee in 2011 by the new Republican Oversight chair, Darrell Issa of California.[13]

Cummings sought to help ease the foreclosure crisis at the heart of the recession, calling it a "wrecking ball smashing through communities across the nation." Between 2008 and 2010, 11,000 mortgages in Baltimore went into foreclosure. Moreover, the U.S. Justice Department alleged that a mortgage lender participated in discriminatory lending practices with Black and Latino homeowners in the Washington, DC-Baltimore region. The bank eventually settled with the Justice Department for $175 million. In 2010, Cummings helped write legislation creating the Emergency Homeowner's Loan Program (EHLP) which was passed as part of the Dodd–Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act. The EHLP program provided "bridge loans" through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to homeowners struggling to pay their mortgage. And from his position on the Oversight Committee, Cummings pressured federal agencies to use TARP funds to reduce the principle on mortgage holders' outstanding debt. Cummings also frequently held foreclosure prevention seminars in his district that connected his constituents seeking mortgage help with advisors and lenders.[14]

Baltimore and especially its poor and working-class Black residents were always at the forefront of Cummings's congressional work**.** "I don't live in the inner city," he said. "I live in the *inner-inner* city and there are not a lot of congressmen who grew up in the inner city, let alone still live there. It is an important voice to bring to Congress that needs to be heard." In April 2015, Freddie Gray, a 25-year-old Black man from Baltimore, died from injuries he suffered while in police custody. Demonstrations and protests followed, and on multiple occasions civil unrest, arson, and looting broke out in the city. Cummings was ever present in Baltimore during the crisis, working to bring peace; he walked the streets with a bullhorn reassuring residents and calling for people to return to their homes. At Gray's funeral, Cummings put words to the pain felt by mourners across the city. "I've often said that our children are the living messages we send to the future we will never see, but now, our children are sending us to a future they will never see. There is something wrong with that picture."[15]

In 2011, House Democrats promoted Elijah Cummings to ranking minority member of the Oversight and Government Reform Committee. Cummings had been third in line in Democratic seniority behind New York Representatives Edolphus Towns, the chair of the committee during the previous Congress, and Carolyn Bosher Maloney. But Democratic House leadership believed Cummings was better suited to defend the Barack Obama administration against investigations pursued by the new Republican House majority. "I come from a tough place," Cummings reportedly told his fellow Democrats, and promised not to be outworked. While ranking minority member, Cummings led Democratic opposition to high-profile investigations into the Internal Revenue Service, the Justice Department, and the 2012 Benghazi, Libya, terrorist attack that killed four Americans. When Republicans created the Select Committee on the Events Surrounding the 2012 Attack in Benghazi in 2014, Cummings served as its ranking minority member as well.[16]

Oversight hearings during this period were often combative. At one point, Republicans cut off Cummings's microphone mid-statement. With his booming voice, Cummings continued his remarks, shouting to the committee chair Darrell Issa and other Republicans a variation of one of his oft-used quotes: "We're better than that as a country. We're better than that as a committee." Cummings was also willing to push back. On one occasion, his office authored a report that compared Republican investigations into the IRS to the anticommunist hearings held by Senator Joseph Raymond McCarthy in the 1950s.[17]

Despite the rancor found in the committee room, Cummings was often able to work with leading Republicans on the committee. Shortly before Jason Chaffetz of Utah became Oversight chair in 2015, he and Cummings scheduled trips to visit each other's districts in hopes of better understanding the issues their constituents faced. "I always try to concentrate on not so much on who I'm fighting against, but what I'm fighting for," Cummings explained after Chaffetz visited Baltimore. "If I can help somebody understand what I'm fighting for, maybe compromise becomes a little easier." Other Republicans on the committee respected Cummings for the sincerity of his convictions. As Trey Gowdy of South Carolina, the Oversight chair for the 115th Congress (2017–2019), said about Cummings:

"It's not about politics to him; he says what he believes … you can tell the ones who it's coming from their soul. And with Mr. Cummings, its coming from his soul."[18]

After Democrats regained control of the House in January 2019, Cummings was elected chair of the Committee on Oversight and Reform. It was an especially high-profile position as Democrats expected the committee to investigate various aspects of President Donald J. Trump's administration. Cummings's Oversight Committee held hearings on the Trump administration's immigration policy, the U.S. Commerce Department's development of the 2020 Census, the political activities of federal employees, and President Trump's alleged financial improprieties. Cummings argued the committee had a "duty to serve as an independent check on the executive branch."[19]

As Oversight chair, Cummings led investigations into issues he had spent his career working on, including the pharmaceutical industry and the cost of prescription medicine. "We have seen time after time that drug companies make money hand over fist by raising the prices of their drugs, often without justification, and sometimes overnight, while patients are left holding the bill," he said. The committee eventually released a report that included the recommendation that the House pass the Elijah E. Cummings Lower Drug Costs Now Act, which the House did in December 2019.[20]

Cummings also led the Oversight Committee in support of strengthening voting rights. "I believe that we should be doing everything in our power to make it easier for eligible American citizens to exercise their constitutional right to vote," Cummings explained at an Oversight hearing for H.R. 1, a voting rights bill, that was one of the top priorities for House Democrats in the 116th Congress. Under his leadership the committee also began investigations into alleged voter suppression in at least three states.[21]

Cummings had been sick for several years by the time he became Oversight chair. In 2017, he spent two months in the hospital recovering from heart surgery, then soon after he contracted an infection from a knee surgery that led to three more months of recovery. Despite his difficult ailments he continued to work, signing paperwork for the first impeachment of President Donald J. Trump just days before he passed away. Elijah Cummings died on October 17, 2019, from "complications concerning longstanding health challenges." On October 24, 2019, Cummings lay in state in the Capitol's National Statuary Hall; he was the first Black Member to receive that honor. In February 2020, House Democratic leadership honored Cummings by renaming the Oversight and Reform Committee hearing room in the Rayburn House Office Building, the Elijah E. Cummings Room.[22]

Notes

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2 "Elijah E. Cummings," *Contemporary Black Biography*, vol. 24 (Detroit, MI: Gale Research Group, Inc., 2000); Stolberg and Stout, "Elijah Cummings, 'North Star' for House Democrats"; "Elijah Cummings: The 2019 60 Minutes Interview," 17 October 2019, *60 Minutes*, CBS, https://www.cbsnews.com/news/elijah-cummings-the-2019-60-minutes-interview-2019-10-17/; Frederick N. Rasmussen, "Ruth Cummings Mother of U.S. Rep. Elijah Cummings and Founder of Victory Prayer Chapel Dies," 7 February 2018, *Baltimore Sun*, https://www.baltimoresun.com/obituaries/bs-md-ob-20180207-story.html.

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Julia May Carson

1938–2007

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1997–2007

Democrat from Indiana



Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

Julia May Carson overcame poverty and racism to serve nearly two decades in state and local government—including 17 years in the Indiana state legislature—before winning election to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1996. Carson, the first African American and first woman to represent Indianapolis in Congress, focused on issues that affected working class Americans, many of which she knew firsthand. "I'm the kind of individual that politicians talk negatively about," she said upon her election to Congress. "I was born to a teenage mother out of wedlock when she had just turned 16. … And for someone like me to be able to walk life's journey into the halls of the United States Congress as an elected member of that body is most overwhelming."[1]

Julia Carson was born Julia May Porter in Louisville, Kentucky, on July 8, 1938. Her single mother, Velma Porter, moved to Indianapolis, Indiana, to find work as a housekeeper. At one point during her childhood, Carson's mother got sick and was unable to work. Carson went to a local government office to ask about food assistance, and later remembered being humiliated by the staff. "They looked at me something awful," Carson recalled. "I had tears in my eyes. I said 'I need some food for my mom. She's very ill and can't work.' They gave me lard and cornmeal." The staff told her to never return. Carson attended the local public schools, and worked part-time waiting tables, delivering newspapers, and harvesting crops, among other jobs. In 1955, she graduated from Crispus Attucks High School in Indianapolis. A short while later she married and had two children: Sam and Tanya. She divorced while her children were still young. Carson studied at Martin University in Indianapolis and Indiana University in Bloomington. In 1965, she was working as a secretary at a local chapter of United Auto Workers when she met newly elected U.S. Representative Andrew Jacobs Jr., who hired her as a caseworker and district aide. Carson worked for Jacobs for seven years until 1972, when he encouraged her to run for office in the Indiana legislature. He recalled sitting in Carson's living room for an hour, trying to convince her to run. "I liked working for a candidate rather than being a candidate myself," Carson later reflected. But Jacobs's words changed her mind. "Come on, kid," he encouraged. "This is the time to step up."[2]

Carson won election and served in the state house of representatives from 1973 to 1977, holding the post of assistant minority caucus chair, before winning election to the Indiana state senate. There, she worked alongside Katie

Hall, who would become the first Black woman to represent Indiana in Congress. Carson was a state senator until 1990, sitting on the finance committee and eventually holding the minority whip position. In the state legislature, Carson earned a reputation for defending low-income residents that lasted throughout her career. One of her bills would have pinned the responsibility for distributing aid to homeless residents onto county—not municipal—governments. "If you spread out the tax base so that poor relief funding would come from the county rather than from the township, then it makes it more equitable," she reasoned. She also authored a bill that would have authorized state-funded compensation for victims of violent crime. While in the legislature, Carson worked as the human resources director at an engine manufacturing company—a job she held until 1985, when she opened her own retail clothing store. In 1990, Carson won election as a Center Township trustee. As trustee, she administered government aid payments in central Indianapolis. Carson successfully erased the agency's $20 million deficit, leaving a $6 million surplus prior to winning a seat in Congress. "Julia Carson," observed the county's Republican auditor, "wrestled that monster to the ground."[3]

When Jacobs retired from the House in 1996 after 15 terms representing a district encompassing greater Indianapolis, Carson entered the race to fill his seat. The district, which in 1996 was described as "marginally Democratic," was 68 percent White and 30 percent Black. With Jacobs's endorsement, Carson defeated the former district party chair, Ann DeLaney, in the Democratic primary with 49 percent of the vote. In the general Carson faced Republican Virginia Blankenbaker. Both candidates supported abortion rights and opposed the death penalty. When Blankenbaker mailed campaign advertisements with Carson's picture on them, Carson and others criticized the decision as an attempt to make her race a campaign issue. "I am not your African American candidate," Carson said. "I am the Democratic candidate for Congress. I don't allow my opponents to stereotype me and confine me to a certain segment of the population." On Election Day, Carson won with 53 percent of the vote to Blankenbaker's 45 percent.[4]

Carson underwent heart surgery shortly after her election and was sworn into office from her hospital bed on January 9, 1997. She was unable to travel to Washington, DC, until early March. Her health problems led to speculation she would not seek re-election in 1998, but Carson quickly quieted the rumors. Carson won re-election four times by slightly larger margins in her competitive district. Reapportionment in 2001 added more than 100,000 new constituents—many of them Republican. Nevertheless, Carson was re-elected in 2004 and 2006, both times with 54 percent of the vote.[5]

When Carson claimed her seat in the 105th Congress (1997–1999), she served on the Banking and Financial Services Committee and the Veterans' Affairs Committee. In the 108th Congress (2003–2005), she left Veterans' Affairs to accept an assignment on the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee.

Carson's legislative interests in the House ranged from national issues affecting children and working-class Americans to local programs of interest to her Indianapolis constituency. From her seat on Financial Services, Carson authored legislation to reform the debt consolidation industry. Boosting America's "financial literacy" was one of her chief goals. To that end, she helped create the Indiana Mortgage and Foreclosure Hotline to counsel homeowners and potential buyers about the mortgage process. Carson noted that Indiana residents had one of the country's highest rates of homeownership in 2001, only to see a record number of foreclosures in 2004. "Homeownership," Carson declared, "is the cornerstone of a healthy thriving city." Carson was a regular sponsor of children's safety, health, and nutrition legislation. In 1999, she submitted comprehensive gun safety legislation, including a provision requiring safety locks on handguns. "Kids and guns are a deadly combination," she noted. "It makes no sense that it is easier for kids to operate a handgun than it is for kids to open an aspirin lid." Having grown up in a single parent household, Carson introduced several pieces of legislation calling attention to the importance of fatherhood in children's lives, including a bill that sought to establish a nationwide media campaign promoting responsible fatherhood. "My experience growing up fatherless is what has stirred my passion to become a leader in this movement," she said on the House Floor.[6]

Carson's work on Transportation and Infrastructure also allowed her to support local infrastructure development in her home city. She inserted over $45 million worth of earmarks in the 2005 surface transportation bill for various projects around Indianapolis, including the construction of the city's downtown transit center, which would bear her name when it opened in 2016. In 2002 and 2003, she

sponsored a large-scale Amtrak reauthorization bill—the National Defense Rail Act. The $40 billion bill would have provided for the development of new high-speed rail corridors and enhanced security measures in response to the terrorist attacks on September 11. Amtrak was a major employer in Indiana and housed its largest repair facility near Indianapolis.[7]

In 2000, Carson was one of the last House Members to support the extension of permanent normal trade relations with China. The William J. Clinton administration had intensely lobbied Carson to support the bill, but she hesitated because of China's questionable human rights record and because organized labor in the United States opposed the measure. "I feel like I have been put in a Maytag washer and put on the spin cycle," she noted before the vote. She reluctantly voted in favor of the legislation, believing that increased foreign trade would benefit Indianapolis businesses. Carson later opposed the George W. Bush administration's invasion of Iraq, which she claimed would draw too much attention and resources away from America's domestic issues. "A preemptive war is a war nonetheless," she declared.[8]

One of Carson's crowning legislative achievements was the bill she authored and introduced during the 106th Congress (1999–2001) to award the Congressional Gold Medal to civil rights activist Rosa Parks. It was while reading Parks's autobiography, *Quiet Strength*, in early 1998, that Carson decided that Parks—whose refusal to move to the back of a segregated bus in 1955 galvanized the modern civil rights movement—should be awarded the highest civilian honor bestowed by Congress. "I had a lingering kind of adoration in my own soul for Rosa," Carson noted. "I always believed in my heart that it was Rosa who paved the way for me to go to Congress and to other places. I felt like it then became my purpose to give her some honor, to repay her." Carson introduced a resolution to honor Parks with the medal on February 4, 1999—Parks's 86th birthday. Initially, the bill attracted 88 cosponsors—including most Members of the Congressional Black Caucus. Carson began a media campaign on nationally syndicated radio and television programs, eventually netting 328 cosponsors. On April 20, the House passed the bill, 424 to 1. Knowing the civil rights icon was watching House proceedings on her television, Carson ignored a House rule requiring Members to address only the Speaker pro tempore. "Mrs. Parks … I am grateful for your steadfastness," she declared. Carson's bill was supplanted by a Senate version that was sponsored by Senator Spencer Abraham of Michigan. President Clinton signed the bill into law on May 6, 1999. "This is one of the best days of my life," declared a tearful Carson. "Not for anything I have done to honor her, but the honor Rosa Parks brought to this whole nation." On June 15, 1999, visitors packed the Capitol Rotunda to attend the Congressional Gold Medal ceremony. Carson was among the dignitaries who spoke at the ceremony, along with President Clinton, who presented the medal to Parks. Carson later helped pass legislation allowing Parks to lie in honor in the Capitol Rotunda when she died in October 2005. Parks was the first woman to be given this honor.[9]

In late 2007, Carson's health once again became a concern. The Representative expressed frustration with her regular battle with asthma and diabetes. After missing an important vote due to health problems, Carson noted, "I understand how an athlete feels when they sit one out to recover from an injury. The minutes move slowly, and you want nothing more than to be in for the big game." In October, Carson took a two-week leave of absence to recover from a leg infection that had required her to traverse the Capitol in a wheelchair. One month later, Carson announced that she had been diagnosed with terminal lung cancer during a follow-up examination of her leg. Carson died on December 15, 2007, in her Indianapolis home. She lay in state in the statehouse in Indianapolis on December 21. "Let's remember Congresswoman Carson by doing the people's work and fighting for those who don't have a voice," said her grandson, André Carson, who later succeeded her in the House. "When you talk about Julia Carson, you're talking about an American icon. The people's champ."[10]

Manuscript Collection

Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis University Library, Ruth Lilly Special Collections & Archives (Indianapolis, IN). *Papers*: 1978–2007, 34.6 cubic feet. The collection is composed primarily of Julia May Carson's records from her years in Congress, including biographical materials, committee records, legislative records, subject files, caucus records, meetings and events records, speeches, correspondence, press releases, newsletters, office administration records, and audiovisual materials. A finding aid is available in the repository and online.

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Donna M. Christensen

1945–

DELEGATE

1997–2015

Democrat from the U.S. Virgin Islands



Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

In 1996, Delegate Donna M. Christensen won election to the U.S. House of Representatives, the first woman to represent the U.S. Virgin Islands, a multi-island territory in the Caribbean. During her tenure, Christensen, who was also the first female medical doctor to serve in Congress, focused on improving the living conditions and economic opportunities on the Islands, especially where they intersected with federal issues. Christensen noted that working as a doctor and serving in Congress were not that different. "In my practice you always find that there are a lot of social and other issues that impact the health of your patients," Christensen noted. "Many times people would come in just to talk about whatever problems they were having, so I kind of looked at it as bringing my office work from a local level to a larger, national level."[1]

Donna Christensen was born Donna Christian on September 19, 1945, in Teaneck, New Jersey, to Almeric L. Christian and Virginia Sterling Christian. Her mother was from New York, and her father, who served in the U.S. Army in World War II, returned to his native Virgin Islands with his young family after earning a law degree at Columbia University. Almeric became a U.S. attorney and then a chief judge of the Virgin Islands district court. Growing up, Christensen said she "lived in the library" and later attended boarding schools in Puerto Rico and New York. She earned a bachelor's degree from St. Mary's College at Notre Dame in South Bend, Indiana, in 1966, and a medical degree from the George Washington University School of Medicine in 1970.[2]

Christensen completed her residency at Howard University in Washington, DC, in 1974 and returned to the Virgin Islands. "I began working in a small emergency room in 1975, and after being home and hearing some of the issues that were of concern to the community, I decided to become active in the community," she recalled decades later. "It is home and there were things that were happening that I thought individuals needed to be more proactive about, so I decided to involve myself in different issues like the appointment of local judges, sale of land that was important to my community and the private industry. But I was doing it as an organizer myself, organizing different coalitions and different groups to advocate or oppose an issue." In addition to running an active family practice, she also worked as a health administrator, rising to the position of assistant commissioner of health for the Virgin Islands. In 1974, Christensen married Carl Green, and the couple had

two daughters, Rabiah and Karida, before they divorced in 1980. In 1998, she married Christian O. Christensen who had four children from a previous marriage.[3]

Christensen began her political career in the 1980s as part of the Coalition to Appoint a Native Judge, which emphasized judicial appointments from within the community and later as part of the Save Fountain Valley Coalition, which called for the protection of St. Croix's north side from overdevelopment. She served as vice chair of the territorial committee of the Democratic Party of the Virgin Islands and on the platform committee of the Democratic National Committee. From 1984 to 1986, she served as a member of the Virgin Islands board of education and was named to the Virgin Islands status commission from 1988 to 1992.[4]

Christensen lost her first bid for Delegate to Congress in 1994, failing to win the Democratic primary. But two years later, she ran again and won the party's nomination. On November 5, 1996, she challenged the one-term incumbent, Independent Victor O. Frazer, in a three-way general election. When no candidate earned more than 50 percent of the vote, a runoff election was scheduled for two weeks later. Frazer and Christensen captured the largest shares of the vote, and in the head-to-head contest Christensen prevailed with a slim majority, 52 to 48 percent. In her subsequent eight general election campaigns, Christensen won with comfortable majorities that ranged as high as 80 percent; she ran unopposed in 2008. Her narrowest margin of victory—a 56.6 percent majority—came in the crowded 2012 general election, when three independent candidates captured a combined third of the overall vote.[5]

In 1997, as a first-term Member of the 105th Congress (1997–1999), Christensen won a seat on the Resources Committee—renamed the Natural Resources Committee when Democrats controlled the chamber in the 110th and 111th Congress (2007–2011)—which had oversight of America's territories. She remained on that committee through the 111th Congress, serving as chair of the Insular Affairs Subcommittee in the 110th Congress. In the 111th Congress, Christensen earned a seat on the Energy and Commerce Committee, which had jurisdiction over much of the U.S. health care system. She served on that panel until she left the House in 2015. Additionally, Christensen served on the Small Business Committee from the 106th through the 109th Congress (1999–2007). In the 108th Congress (2003–2005), she gained a seat on the newly created Select Committee on Homeland Security, primarily because of her expertise in public health. Christensen remained on the panel when it became a permanent standing committee in the following Congress and kept her seat until 2009.

Christensen spent much of her time on the Resources Committee trying to stabilize and strengthen the Virgin Islands' ailing economy. High energy costs slowed economic growth and an aging electric grid added to the rising expenses. The Great Recession of 2008 also led to new hardships, culminating in the closure of a major oil refinery and resulting in government layoffs.[6]

As part of the effort to help the Virgin Islands' economy, Christensen worked to expand key tax incentives (protecting and expanding the rebate on excise taxes of rum sales), boost tourism, and target spending. On several occasions the House passed Christensen's bill to create a chief financial officer to oversee the budgeting process in the Virgin Islands. "This bill is neither colonial or paternal, as has been claimed, but an attempt to bring greater transparency and accountability to the financial management and fiscal practices of the government of the Virgin Islands," Christensen said. Her proposal, however, had strong opposition from Virgin Islands governors, and it repeatedly died in the Senate.[7]

Christensen also played a leading role in expanding representation for the Northern Mariana Islands, another U.S. territory, during her tenure as chair of the Natural Resources Committee's Subcommittee on Insular Affairs. She sponsored a bill in the 110th Congress that established the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) and granted the territory, the only one without a voice in Congress, a nonvoting Delegate in the U.S. House. While managing the House Floor debate on the bill, she noted that it "would provide a stable immigration policy to rebuild the CNMI economy, augment current efforts to diversify and strengthen the future economy, increase the opportunities and skills of local residents to fill private sector employment needs, safeguard the existing foreign guest worker population from employer abuse, and secure the region in the interest of national security and give the CNMI representation in Congress." On December 11, 2007, her bill passed the House with broad bipartisan support on a voice vote. The Senate later folded it into another measure, and President George W. Bush signed it into law on May 8, 2008.[8]

As chair of the Subcommittee on Insular Affairs in the 110th Congress, Christensen also held hearings on a proposal for a constitutional convention in Puerto Rico to consider greater autonomy for the island and conducted numerous oversight hearings including the examination of budget requests for the Interior Department's Office of Insular Affairs.[9]

Health care remained one of Christensen's top priorities. As a longtime member of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC), she chaired the CBC's Health Braintrust from 1999 to 2015. Her medical career made her a natural fit for the position, but her role in the CBC gave her vital experience and a powerful megaphone for someone from a small territory. "I don't know where I would be without the Congressional Black Caucus," Christensen remarked late in her career. The Health Braintrust platform put her at the forefront of congressional efforts to end health care disparities for minority communities and women, to fight HIV/AIDS both nationally and internationally, and to extend health insurance coverage.[10]

From her seat on the Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Health, Christensen weighed in on significant pieces of the Affordable Care Act which was signed into law by President Barack Obama in 2010. For years, she had advocated universal access to health care, telling a reporter in 2001, "It is way past time for this country to make sure that healthcare is a right and not a privilege." Early in the discussion about a comprehensive reform bill in the 110th Congress, Christensen emphasized the need to shrink inequities in the health care system, particularly for African-American communities, in areas ranging from maternal and infant health care to preventative medicine. "Closing these and other gaps will improve healthcare for everyone in the country, improve our world standing and reduce the cost of healthcare," she said in testimony before the House Ways and Means Committee. "We therefore owe it to our fellow Americans, all of them, to eliminate the racial, ethnic, rural and gender health disparities that have plagued our country for too long."[11]

In the years after passage of the Affordable Care Act, Christensen—who often spoke on health issues on behalf of the Tri-Caucus of African American, Hispanic American, and Asian Pacific American Members of Congress—remained a stalwart defender of the bill in the face of Republican-led efforts to repeal it. She described the bill as "historic" and credited it for creating a "dramatic change in the lives of people who live in this country. Not only will we be healthier, we will be more productive. That means our country will be stronger [and] more competitive."[12]

In 2014, Christensen announced that she would not seek re-election to a tenth House term and would instead run for governor of the Virgin Islands. Her 18-year career in the House made her the Virgin Islands' second-longest serving Delegate, behind only Ron de Lugo, the territory's first Delegate in Congress. She admitted that she had been planning to return to private life before recommitting herself to public service to address the economic and social problems that had buffeted the islands in the wake of the Great Recession. Though initially favored to win, Christensen finished second with 39 percent of the vote in the November 4, 2014, general election behind Kenneth Mapp who led the field of five candidates with 47 percent. In a runoff on November 18, Mapp prevailed against Christensen, 63 to 37 percent. In 2019, Christensen became a member of a medical nonprofit board and remained an advocate for health care equity.[13]

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Harold E. Ford Jr.

1970–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1997–2007

Democrat from Tennessee



Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

Elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1996, Harold E. Ford Jr. succeeded his father, Harold E. Ford, who had held the Memphis-based seat since 1975. In contrast to his father's generation of Black lawmakers in Congress who maintained the legislative legacies of the New Deal and the civil rights movement, Ford Jr. largely preferred to focus on broad policy items aimed at the middle class. "I vote what I believe is right. I challenge my leadership when I believe they are wrong," Ford stated early in his career. "I don't give them my vote because it's the partisan and political thing to do."[1]

The eldest son of Harold Eugene and Dorothy Bowles Ford, Harold Eugene Ford Jr. was born on May 11, 1970, in Memphis, Tennessee. His father was a member of the Tennessee state legislature who won election to the U.S. House when Ford was four years old and went on to serve for more than two decades. At his father's first swearing-in ceremony on Capitol Hill, Ford raised his hand and, according to his mother, declared, "This is what I want to be when I grow up." His mother was a longtime employee of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. After his family moved to Washington, DC, in the late 1970s, Ford attended the elite St. Albans School for Boys. Ford believed that his time at the school helped shape his political philosophy. "For me, and for the other kids who were not white, it was a very heterogeneous place. … I had to get along with everybody. That helped me later on when I was in situations where you had to say, 'Hey, let's all get together and try to figure this out.'" In 1992, he graduated with a bachelor's degree in history from the University of Pennsylvania and worked on William J. Clinton's presidential campaign. Following graduation, he served briefly as a staff aide for the U.S. Senate Committee on the Budget and as a special assistant at the U.S. Department of Commerce. In 1996, Ford earned a law degree from the University of Michigan School of Law. Ford also worked on his father's congressional campaigns in 1992 and 1994.[2]

After his father announced his retirement from the House in 1996, Ford ran to succeed him in the district encompassing the bulk of Memphis, Tennessee. The district was 60 percent African American and one of the most liberal in the state; more Black residents lived in Memphis than any southern city outside Texas. Ford's father served as his chief campaign strategist. With his prominent family name, Ford distributed campaign buttons and T-shirts that simply read "Jr." Ford ran on three issues: increased federal

funding for education and job training; opposition to Medicare price hikes; and crime prevention. In the primary, Ford defeated Stephen Cohen, a state senator, and Rufus Jones, a state representative, with 61 percent of the vote. His Republican opponent in the general election was Rod DeBerry, a local politician who had run against Harold Ford Sr. for the seat in 1992 and 1994. During the campaign, Ford emphasized improvements to the educational system in a city with a high dropout rate, including the creation of summer programs for city youth. In the general election, Ford prevailed with 61 percent of the vote, making him the first African-American lawmaker to succeed a parent in Congress. In his subsequent four re-elections, Ford won with 79 percent or more. He ran unopposed in 2000.[3]

Shortly after he entered Congress in January 1997, Ford was chosen by his Democratic colleagues as freshman class president, making him the spokesperson for the newly elected Members and an intermediary with House leaders. In his first term, Ford received committee assignments on Education and the Workforce and Government Reform and Oversight. He left the latter committee in the 107th Congress (2001–2003) to accept a seat on the Financial Services Committee (his father had served on the predecessor to that committee). In the following Congress, Ford won a seat on the influential Budget Committee. Pegged as a rising star in the Democratic Party, Ford received widespread media attention when he delivered the keynote address at the 2000 Democratic National Convention.[4]

From the start, Ford insisted that his legislative agenda would be distinct from his father's, who, like many Black lawmakers in the earlier generation, sought to protect and expand government-funded social programs and often prioritized issues affecting Black Americans. "I represent this entire district," Ford said. "I respect my dad and … admire him a great deal," he continued. "But I don't think he would respect me if I didn't have the fortitude to disagree with him if I felt he was wrong." Ford worked to direct federal resources to Americans living in poverty, but he also emphasized different policies to fight poverty, such as expanding educational opportunities. Ford also reached out to some of his father's political rivals, such as Willie Herenton, the mayor of Memphis, with whom the younger Ford had developed a good relationship. Ford stressed political pragmatism. Memphis city hall, he observed, is "the principal contracting agency with the federal government. I have a responsibility to secure what funds and resources I can for my state and city."[5]

During his career, Ford sponsored measures to reform the country's campaign finance system, equitably fund education, and support troops and veterans. Ford supported balancing the federal budget and frequently denounced spending that raised the national debt, particularly during the presidency of George W. Bush. In 2005, he bemoaned the Republican budget resolution and criticized its proposed spending. "I would be embarrassed if I had to vote for this budget," he said. "Thankfully I do not, and frankly I do not even know if I am going to vote for all the things we are going to present on our side, for one reason. It is not balanced."[6]

Ford often carved out independent positions and took policy stances different from those of the Congressional Black Caucus and House Democrats. "Ideology," he once lamented, "makes it easier to resist good ideas." Ford supported Democratic causes such as environmental protection and affirmative action, but he also backed measures that many in his party opposed, including private school vouchers, prayer in schools, and federal funding for faith-based charities. Ford made it a point to work with Republicans and supported GOP initiatives, including a constitutional amendment to ban same-sex marriage and an effort to privatize Social Security. He voted for the USA PATRIOT Act in 2001, which vastly expanded the national security state following the terrorist attacks of September 11, and the 2003 Partial-Birth Abortion Act. He also supported the authorization to use military force in Iraq.[7]

In the House, Ford joined several caucuses that aligned with his efforts to limit federal spending and other policy interests, including the New Democrat Coalition and the Blue Dog Coalition. In 2002, Ford orchestrated what he described as an "underdog campaign" against Nancy Pelosi of California for the position of Democratic Leader that had been vacated by Richard Andrew Gephardt of Missouri. Ford joined the race late and publicized his candidacy through media outlets rather than using the traditional method of intense behind-the-scenes campaigning within the party caucus. The main issue separating the two contenders was the Iraq War resolution that Ford voted for in October 2002. The war separated Ford from many rank-and-file House Democrats who believed their constituents demanded a more aggressive opposition to the administration's stance on Iraq. Ultimately, Pelosi prevailed,

177 to 29, in her historic run to become the first woman to lead a party in Congress.[8]

Throughout his time in the House, Ford made no secret of his ambition to serve in the Senate. "I absolutely look forward to serving the entire state of Tennessee one day," he said in early 2000. That year, he proposed challenging Republican Tennessee Senator William H. Frist, but ultimately passed on the race to support the presidential campaign of fellow Tennessean Vice President Albert Gore Jr. In May 2005, Ford announced his candidacy for the seat that Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist said he would vacate in 2007. "With five good terms in the House behind me … I believe I'm ready to meet the challenges ahead of us in a way that will make Tennesseans as proud of me as I am of Tennessee," Ford said. In the Senate, Ford said he would have a larger role shaping the country's future.[9]

In his quest for the Senate, Ford worked to attract voters from across the political spectrum, campaigning on everyday issues including "health care, education, and economic development." He emphasized his independence, once observing that "if I was doing the textbook thing that Democrats do … I'd say 'Republicans want to short Social Security, they want to rob poor children of their college education, they want to deny families the education system.' Don't get me wrong, there's some truth to that. But that's not me. Just let me be myself." Ford faced minimal opposition in the Democratic primary, and entered the general election amid widespread voter dissatisfaction with the George W. Bush administration. In the general, Ford faced Robert "Bob" Corker, a former Chattanooga mayor. Although Ford performed well in Tennessee's major cities, including Memphis, Nashville, and Chattanooga, Corker received support in suburban counties around Nashville and East Tennessee. Ultimately, Corker prevailed in a narrow win with 51 percent of the vote to Ford's 48 percent.[10]

After leaving the U.S. House in January 2007, Ford served as a visiting professor at Vanderbilt University and the Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs at the University of Texas–Austin. He also succeeded Iowa Governor Tom Vilsack as chair of the Democratic Leadership Council, an organization that fostered a centrist approach to economic policy and politics. In 2008, he married Emily Threlkeld; the couple have two children: Georgia and Harold III. Ford moved to New York City where he worked in the financial services industry and as a political commentator on television. In 2010, he wrote a memoir of his time in politics. In late 2020, Ford was named vice chair at a large banking firm.[11]

Manuscript Collection

University of Tennessee Libraries, Modern Political Archives (Knoxville, TN). *Papers*: 1982–2006, 100 linear feet. This collection contains primarily materials from Harold E. Ford Jr.'s five terms as a U.S. Representative and his 2006 Senate campaign. It includes files related to his committee appointments, campaigns, speeches and events, Memphis politics, and community development, in addition to news clippings and media pieces about Ford. It also contains numerous audiovisual materials, including ads and news appearances. An inventory is available in the repository and online.

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Carolyn C. Kilpatrick

1945–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1997–2011

Democrat from Michigan



Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

A 30-year veteran of state politics, Carolyn C. Kilpatrick became the second Black woman to serve in the House from Michigan following her election in 1996. In only her second term, Kilpatrick was assigned to the prestigious Appropriations Committee, where she worked to direct federal resources towards her Detroit district. Her initial career as a schoolteacher inspired her to pursue public office. "For many of my students, the school lunch is the only meal they will eat in a day. That is what made me really want to fight," she declared on the campaign trail in 1996. An active member of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC), Kilpatrick was unanimously elected its chair for the 110th Congress (2007–2009).[1]

Carolyn Cheeks Kilpatrick was born Carolyn Jean Cheeks on June 25, 1945, in Detroit, Michigan, to Marvell Jr., an autoworker and handyman, and Willa Mae Cheeks, a beautician. In 1963, she graduated from the High School of Commerce in Detroit as president of her class and attended Ferris State University in Big Rapids. She earned a bachelor's degree in education from Western Michigan University in 1972 and a master's degree in education from the University of Michigan in 1977. In 1968, she married Bernard Kilpatrick, who would later win election as a Wayne County commissioner. They raised two children, Ayanna and Kwame, and divorced in 1981. Kwame Kilpatrick served as mayor of Detroit from 2002 to 2008.[2]

In 1967, Kilpatrick joined the Shrine of the Black Madonna of the Pan African Orthodox Christian Church, a politically active congregation in Detroit that helped elect Detroit's first Black mayor, Coleman A. Young, in 1973. Kilpatrick worked as a Detroit public school teacher for several years, until members of her church encouraged her to run for a vacant seat in the Michigan state house of representatives. In 1978, she won election to the first of nine consecutive terms in the Michigan house. Kilpatrick became the first African-American woman to sit on the appropriations committee in the state house, chairing both the corrections budget and the transportation budget subcommittees during 14 years on the committee. Kilpatrick was also a house Democratic whip, a role in which she worked to build consensus on legislation.[3]

In 1996, Kilpatrick challenged three-term incumbent Representative Barbara-Rose Collins for a Detroit-area seat in the U.S. House. Collins had faced scrutiny for her high rate of absenteeism and was also under investigation by the House Ethics Committee for alleged campaign finance

violations. The primary challenge ended a longtime alliance between the two politicians, both of whom were members of the Shrine of the Black Madonna church. "The bottom line is she has not represented the district," Kilpatrick said. In her campaign, Kilpatrick pledged to work with business leaders in the community to reduce unemployment and direct resources to Detroit's underserved neighborhoods. In the August primary, Kilpatrick bested Collins by 20 points. In the general election, the overwhelmingly Democratic district elected Kilpatrick with 88 percent of the vote. In her six re-elections, she won by similarly large margins.[4]

When Kilpatrick took her seat in the 105th Congress (1997–1999), she received assignments to three committees: Banking and Financial Services; House Oversight; and the Joint Committee on the Library of Congress. In the 106th Congress (1999–2001), Kilpatrick was required to relinquish these assignments when she obtained a seat on the House Appropriations Committee, where she served for the rest of her career. During this time she was the sole Michigan Democrat to serve on the committee, and when Republican Joseph Knollenberg failed to win re-election in 2010, she was the only Michigan lawmaker on the panel.[5]

From her seat on the Appropriations Committee, Kilpatrick worked to bring federally-funded projects to Michigan. From 2008 through 2010, she successfully requested more than $70 million in earmarks for her district, including $1.5 million for the purchase of alternative-fuel buses and $500,000 for Detroit's summer youth services program. She garnered funding for pre-college engineering instruction, children's television programming, and enhanced rehabilitation services at the Detroit Medical Center. Kilpatrick supported the development of a southeast Michigan commuter rail system connecting downtown Detroit to Ann Arbor, and the 2005 transportation appropriations bill allocated $5 million towards the project's development. Kilpatrick's efforts brought additional funding for many programs at Wayne State University in Detroit, including NASA's Science, Engineering, Mathematics and Aerospace Academy for secondary school students, a prisoner rehabilitation program, and a business clinic for the university's law school.[6]

Kilpatrick's district included a significant portion of Detroit, and she allied herself with the city's auto industry. She spoke out against attempts to mandate increased fuel economy requirements by adjusting the Corporate Average Fuel Economy (CAFE) standards, which automakers opposed, even though many of her Democratic colleagues backed the measure. In 2001, Kilpatrick voted against a floor amendment to raise vehicle fuel economy standards because she believed that it would force automakers to close production plants. "Don't mess with Michigan; don't mess with auto-making centers such as Detroit, and don't mess with auto workers and their families," she wrote. During the 2008 financial crisis, she backed legislation to provide General Motors and Chrysler with federal aid.[7]

On the Appropriations Committee, Kilpatrick used her seat on the Subcommittee on Foreign Operations, Export Financing, and Related Programs to bring attention to health and economic concerns in sub-Saharan Africa. Kilpatrick favored funding to support AIDS research and prevention programs on the continent, and to provide military assistance for peacekeeping missions. In the 106th Congress, she offered an amendment to boost disaster-assistance funding for flood relief in Mozambique by $60 million; two subsequent appropriations bills included $25 million and $135 million in international disaster assistance for Mozambique and the surrounding region.[8]

As chair of the CBC in the 110th Congress, Kilpatrick continued the organization's focus on foreign affairs and pushed for monetary aid for the impoverished nation of Haiti. She hoped to fund domestic programs on education, health care, and disaster relief by pulling troops out of costly military conflicts in the Middle East. "Will there be money? No, not if we don't come out of Iraq and Afghanistan, and that has to be No. 1," she insisted. Under Kilpatrick's leadership, the CBC was a significant force in the Democratic Party's push to raise the minimum wage to $7.25 an hour. Kilpatrick also sought to encourage American businesses and the federal government to invest more money into minority- and women-owned media outlets and advertising agencies.[9]

In 2010, Kilpatrick voted for the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, believing that it was a first step towards universal coverage. "I am a strong supporter of the single payer health care plan," she wrote. Kilpatrick repeatedly proposed legislation to provide up to $1,000 per month in tax credits for medical doctors who practice in underserved areas.

In 2008, Kilpatrick faced her first serious electoral challenge. In the months leading up to the August primary, her son, Detroit Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick, faced eight felony charges for misconduct in office. Mary Waters

and Martha Scott, both members of the Michigan house of representatives, ran against her, citing the need for new leadership in the district. Despite the close contest, Kilpatrick received a 39-percent plurality and secured the nomination before winning re-election in November. In the 2010 Democratic primary, voters consolidated their support behind Detroit native and Michigan state senator Hansen Clarke. Kilpatrick touted her status as the only Michigan member of the Appropriations Committee and worked to distance herself from her son and his legal issues. Clarke's grassroots campaign, meanwhile, mustered support in Detroit and attracted enough support in the surrounding suburbs to defeat Kilpatrick in the primary with 47 percent of the vote; Kilpatrick took 41 percent.[10]

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Stephanie Tubbs Jones

1949–2008

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1999–2008

Democrat from Ohio



Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

Stephanie Tubbs Jones won election to the United States House of Representatives in 1998, becoming the first African-American woman to represent Ohio in Congress. During her time in the House, Jones became the first Black woman to serve on the Ways and Means Committee and was one of the first African-American women to chair a standing congressional committee—the Committee on Standards of Official Conduct, commonly known as the Ethics Committee. In the House, Jones focused on a range of policies important to her district, including homeownership, women's health, and voting rights. "All my life I had wanted to help others, and I had been active in helping others," she said. "I was always interested in service."[1]

Stephanie Tubbs Jones was born Stephanie Tubbs in Cleveland, Ohio, on September 10, 1949, to Mary Tubbs, a factory worker and cook, and Andrew Tubbs, an airline skycap. The youngest of three daughters, Jones was raised in Cleveland's Glenville neighborhood and graduated from Collinwood High School. At Case Western Reserve University, Jones founded the African American Students Association and, in 1971, graduated with a bachelor's degree in sociology and a minor in psychology. She completed her law degree at Case Western University Law School in 1974. Jones then served as the assistant general counsel and the equal opportunity administrator of the northeast Ohio regional sewer district. She married Mervyn Jones and raised a son, Mervyn.[2]

Jones eventually became an assistant Cuyahoga County prosecutor and trial attorney for the Cleveland district Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. When she and several friends worked on a successful political campaign in 1979, the group began promoting Jones for public office. Noting a lack of people of color on the bench, Jones ran for a local judgeship and won election to the Cleveland municipal court. Ohio Governor Richard Celeste then appointed Jones to the Cuyahoga County court of common pleas, where she served from 1983 to 1991. In 1992, she was elected the Cuyahoga County prosecutor, making her the state's first African-American prosecutor and the only Black woman prosecutor in a major urban area in the country.[3]

When Cleveland's Representative of 30 years, Louis Stokes, retired in 1998, Jones entered the Democratic primary to succeed him. Jones told voters that she loved her job as county prosecutor but that she wanted to do more for the city. "I got to thinking what could I do for

seniors and children of the 11th District; and not just here, what could I do to see that every child in this country has the opportunity to do well," she said. She ran on her long record in public office in Cuyahoga County and on her well-established connection with voters in the district. Her campaign slogan was simply "You know me." Jones quickly became a frontrunner in the race, as did two other well-known community members: state senator Jeffrey D. Johnson and Reverend Marvin McMickle. During the primary, Jones's opponents told voters that losing her as prosecutor would be a detriment to the Black community. But she countered, saying, "With my background as a criminal justice practitioner, I believe that the Congress will at least listen to me because I've had the experience and I will be able to speak out on issues that affect criminal justice in our city and on the national level." Jones captured the nomination with 51 percent of the vote and then dominated the general election with 80 percent. Jones faced no serious challenges in her four re-elections; she usually won with 75 percent or more of the vote, and ran unopposed in 2004.[4]

When Jones took her seat in the 106th Congress (1999–2001), she received assignments on the Banking and Financial Services Committee (later renamed Financial Services) and the Small Business Committee. In the 107th Congress (2001–2003), she picked up a third assignment to the Committee on Standards of Official Conduct, which oversees House ethics guidelines for Members and staff. In the 108th Congress (2003–2005), Jones left the Financial Services and Small Business Committees to become the first African-American woman to hold a seat on the prestigious Ways and Means Committee, which writes and oversees America's tax laws.[5]

Jones's Ohio district encompassed some of Cleveland's wealthiest suburbs as well as neighborhoods struggling with poverty. On Capitol Hill, she worked to control predatory mortgages and lending practices. As chair of the Congressional Black Caucus Housing Task Force, she facilitated a panel on homeownership at the Congressional Black Caucus Weekend in 2000. In the 107th Congress, she introduced the Predatory Mortgage Lending Practice Reduction Act to abolish certain fees and prevent lenders from targeting low-income and minority communities with subprime mortgages, which carried high interest rates. She routinely re-introduced the bill, and Congress eventually passed similar legislation amid the financial crisis in 2009 that curbed subprime lending.[6]

For four straight Congresses—the 107th through 110th Congresses (2001–2009)—Jones joined Maryland Senator Barbara Ann Mikulski in introducing the Uterine Fibroids Research and Education Act. The proposal included funding for research by the National Institutes of Health and for raising public awareness about the condition, which statistically affects African-American women more than others. "Research is needed to find out what causes uterine fibroids, why African American women are disproportionately affected, and what can be done to prevent and treat the condition," Jones told her colleagues on the House Floor in 2007. Although the bill never became law, Jones believed more people learned about the disease through her legislative efforts.[7]

Jones also focused on fire safety on college campuses. Citing a number of deadly fires in the previous decade, Jones introduced the Campus Fire Prevention Act in the 107th Congress to create a grant program for sprinkler systems in student housing. She re-introduced it in the following three Congresses. The bill would have provided colleges and universities $100 million a year for four years and directed 10 percent of the funds to "historically Black colleges and universities, Hispanic-serving institutions, and Tribally Controlled Colleges and Universities," as well as another 10 percent to fraternity and sorority housing. In 2009, Ohio Representative Marcia L. Fudge introduced the Honorable Stephanie Tubbs Jones College Fire Prevention Act—the same bill Jones introduced—which passed the House in May 2010.[8]

In the lead up to the 2004 presidential election, the Democratic Party chose Jones to serve as co-chair for the Democratic National Committee. She told a local newspaper she was chosen for the role because of her judicial background and Ohio's status as a swing state but mainly because she was "not afraid to speak out" for what she felt was right. She co-chaired the platform committee, which held party meetings across the country in order to fine-tune the Democratic Party's message. On July 26, 2004, she addressed a crowd at the Democratic National Convention in Boston touting Senator John Forbes Kerry of Massachusetts as the nominee.[9]

After President George W. Bush won re-election in 2004, Jones and a number of her Democratic colleagues suspected that irregular voting procedures in Ohio—including registration errors, long lines, malfunctioning machines, and high ballot rejection rates—had swayed

the state's results. Jones and a group of Democratic Members, including John Conyers Jr. of Michigan, the ranking Democrat on the Judiciary Committee, held unofficial hearings in Washington, DC, and Columbus, Ohio, in December to gather testimony about Election Day in Ohio. In 2005, the group published their findings and recommendations in *What Went Wrong in Ohio: The Conyers Report on the 2004 Presidential Election*.[10]

At the Joint Session of Congress convened on January 6, 2005, to count electoral votes, Jones needed a Senate colleague to join her in making a formal objection to Ohio's electoral vote count. California Senator Barbara Boxer agreed to pair with Jones to challenge the count—only the second time since 1887 that a successful objection by a Representative and a Senator forced an extended debate in the House and the Senate. At the time of the electoral count, two lawsuits concerning provisional ballots were pending in Ohio courts. Jones argued that the state's election results should not be certified until those lawsuits were resolved and that all the voting irregularities should be addressed by the House in the upcoming Congress. As the first to speak in the House debate, Jones said, "This objection does not have at its root the hope or even the hint of overturning the victory of the President; but it is a necessary, timely, and appropriate opportunity to review and remedy the most precious process in our democracy." She stressed that her goal was to draw attention to the problems in the 2004 election as well as voting practices across the nation. "We go across the world trying to ensure democracy," she added, "but there are some problems with the process in the United States." Both chambers debated the objection and ultimately voted to uphold the results: 74 to 1 in the Senate and 267 to 31 in the House.[11]

The following month, Jones joined Senators Boxer and Hillary Rodham Clinton of New York in introducing the Count Every Vote Act, which proposed wide-ranging electoral reform. The bill would have declared Election Day a national holiday, made the distribution of misleading election information a federal crime, and required a paper ballot back-up for every electronic vote to be used in the event of a recount.[12]

In the 110th Congress (2007–2009), Speaker Nancy Pelosi of California named Jones chair of the Committee on Standards of Official Conduct, more commonly known as the Ethics Committee, despite criticisms that Jones had used campaign funds for personal purchases and had taken free flights from special interest groups. With Jones as chair, the Ethics Committee initiated guidance for Members who earmarked federal funding—line items in appropriations bills for specific projects—to avoid conflict of interest issues, and for Members who flew on private planes. The committee also began a yearly requirement for all House staff to complete ethics training.[13]

Representative Jones died of a brain aneurysm on August 20, 2008. At the news of her sudden passing, then Senator and Democratic presidential nominee Barack Obama stated, "It wasn't enough for her just to break barriers in her own life. She was also determined to bring opportunity to all those who had been overlooked and left behind." Jones was succeeded by Marcia Fudge—one of her former aides and the mayor of Warrensville Heights, Ohio—in a special election on November 18, 2008.[14]

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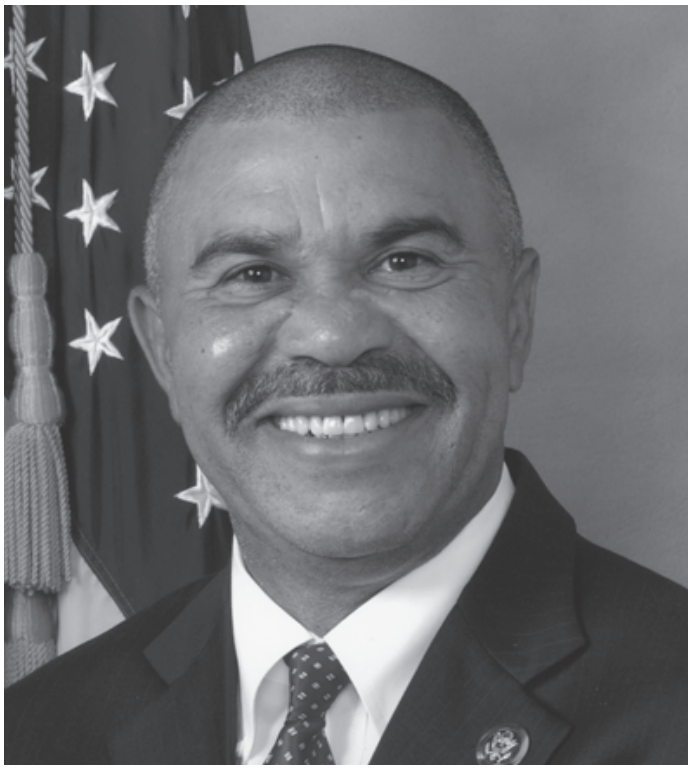
William Lacy Clay Jr.

1956–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

2001–2021

Democrat from Missouri



Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

In 2001, William Lacy Clay Jr. succeeded his father, longtime Missouri Representative William Lacy "Bill" Clay Sr., in Congress. In the U.S. House of Representatives, the younger Clay advocated for government transparency, affordable housing, and voting rights. And like his father before him, Clay worked to alleviate economic and racial disparities back home in St. Louis. "We need to get to a place where the playing field is more level, where racial divisions are not as far apart," Clay said. "We need to address the economic inequalities that persist in our region."[1]

William Lacy Clay Jr.—who goes by Lacy Clay—was born in St. Louis, Missouri, on July 27, 1956, one of three children raised by Bill and Carol Ann Clay. His father, a union representative and St. Louis alderman, won election to the House in 1968. He went on to serve on Capitol Hill for 32 years and was a founding member of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC). His uncle, Irving, held several executive positions in the St. Louis city government before being elected an alderman. Clay grew up in St. Louis and spent his teenage years in suburban Maryland while his father served in Congress. He graduated from Springbrook High School in Montgomery County in 1974. While studying at the University of Maryland, Clay worked as a doorkeeper on the House Floor. From his post in the chamber, Clay witnessed the legislative process and his father's work firsthand. "My door was the west door on the Republican side because [Speaker of the House] Tip O'Neill did not want me to congregate with my dad," Clay recalled. Outside work and school, Clay accompanied his father on the campaign trail and sat in on some of his meetings. "I didn't originally want to go into politics. I wanted to do something like own a business," Clay observed. "But I realized after working in Washington and the U.S. Congress that that was an option for me."[2]

Not long after Clay earned his bachelor's degree in government in 1983, a longtime member of the Missouri state house of representatives, Nathaniel Rivers, announced his resignation. Just months after graduating college, Clay returned to St. Louis where he campaigned for and won a special election for the vacant seat. He served in the state house until 1991, when he won election to the state senate. While in the Missouri legislature, Clay advocated for minority business owners, toughened the state's hate crime laws, and worked to divest state pension fund investments from firms that did business in apartheid South Africa. In 1992, he married Ivie Lewellen, a communications

executive, and had two children: Carol and William III. They divorced in 2011. Clay later married Patricia Beauchemin, a nonprofit executive.[3]

When Bill Clay announced his retirement from the U.S. House in 1999, Lacy Clay was an immediate favorite to succeed his father. The district had a slight Black majority and encompassed northern St. Louis and the city's northern and western suburbs in St. Louis County. His platform included increased funding for public schools, the protection of Social Security benefits, Medicare expansion, and tax breaks for working families. "Although I am not my father, I am my father's son, in that we share the same values and commitment to principles, such as fairness and justice," Clay announced at the start of his campaign.[4]

In the crowded Democratic primary in August 2000, Clay's main opponent was Charlie Dooley, a popular St. Louis County councilman. The contest between the two highlighted the divide between the predominantly Black city of St. Louis and predominately White St. Louis County. Dooley, who was also Black, accused Clay of trying to rally Black voters against him for having mostly White political allies. "I have never engaged in racially divisive politics, and I never will," Clay responded. On primary day, Clay easily won the nomination with 61 percent of the vote, capturing the majority in both St. Louis city and county. In November, Clay won the general election with 75 percent of the vote.[5]

Clay continued to win re-election by wide margins for most of his congressional career, never receiving less than 70 percent. He faced a significant primary challenge after the 2010 census, when Missouri lost a House seat during the reapportionment process. Two St. Louis-area districts were consolidated into one, pitting Clay against incumbent Representative and fellow Democrat Russ Carnahan. Clay, whose old district encompassed a larger share of the new seat, won the support of party leaders—including the mayor and the governor—and won with 63 percent of the vote.[6]

After Clay was sworn in at the start of the 107th Congress (2001–2003), he was assigned to the Committees on Financial Services and Government Reform (later renamed Oversight and Reform). In his first term, Clay was elected president of the House Democrats' freshman class. The class president serves as the spokesperson for first-term colleagues and communicates policy goals with House leaders. He sat on both Financial Services and Government Reform for his entire House career, while also joining the Natural Resources Committee in the 114th Congress (2015–2017). Clay chaired the Oversight Committee's Subcommittee on Information Policy, Census, and National Archives in the 110th and 111th Congresses (2007–2011), and he chaired the Financial Services Committee's Subcommittee on Housing, Community Development, and Insurance in the 116th Congress (2019–2021).

Representative Clay was a prominent advocate of electoral reform and voting rights. During his first election in November 2000, hundreds of voters were denied ballot access in St. Louis after the city had placed them on an inactive voter list. Clay sued to keep the polls open for three extra hours and later appeared before the Senate Governmental Affairs Committee to speak out against the use of inactive voter lists, which he said obstructed ballot access for Black voters. He convinced the Justice Department to send officials to monitor the city's 2001 primary elections while the city worked to reform its election procedures. In January 2005, Clay was one of the 31 Representatives who objected to counting Ohio's electoral votes from the 2004 Presidential election in a protest intended to highlight alleged voting irregularities. He also spoke out against the 2013 Supreme Court decision *Shelby County v. Holder*, which invalidated a portion of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, allowing several states to make changes to their election laws without first being approved by federal officials. "*Shelby County v. Holder* severely weakened the Voting Rights Act. Jurisdictions at all levels of government fear the diversity of the new American electorate," he declared.[7]

Clay collaborated with his colleagues in the Missouri congressional delegation to direct federal funding for several major projects in the state. He worked with fellow Representative Ann Wagner and Senators Roy Blunt and Claire McCaskill to introduce legislation to transfer authority over the West Lake Landfill near St. Louis to the Army Corps of Engineers. The site, which contained radioactive waste from the Manhattan Project, was under the jurisdiction of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), which made the unpopular decision to leave the waste in place instead of removing it. Facing mounting pressure from lawmakers and local activists, the EPA eventually agreed to a $205 million landfill cleanup project in 2018. Clay also co-wrote legislation with Senator Blunt to designate the Gateway Arch in downtown St. Louis as a National Park. When the National Geospatial-Intelligence

Agency (NGA) needed to move out of its aging St. Louis facility, Clay played a key role in preventing the agency from relocating to the suburbs. He told officials from the Barack Obama administration that building a centrally located NGA facility would yield a greater return than moving it to a rural area. "This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for the federal government to reverse urban blight," Clay wrote. When a north St. Louis site was chosen for the NGA's new $1.7 billion facility, Clay touted the plan as the largest single federal investment in the city's history and called it "the greatest economic victory" for the region.[8]

As chair of the Oversight Committee's Subcommittee on Information Policy, Census, and National Archives, Clay focused on improving government transparency. In February 2007, he held a hearing to assess the effectiveness of the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), which enables the public to request documents created and held by federal agencies. As the number of FOIA requests increased over the years, many executive agencies faced growing backlogs. The subcommittee heard testimony from journalists and researchers frustrated with having their FOIA requests delayed, ignored, or denied. A month later, Clay introduced a bill to strengthen public access to government records by implementing a tracking system for FOIA requests, reimbursing attorney's fees to requesters who successfully challenged a denied records request, and hiring a FOIA ombudsman to serve as a liaison between the public and federal agencies. His bill passed the House, and a Senate companion bill, known as the OPEN Government Act, became law at the end of 2007. "One of the cornerstones of our democracy is the ability of citizens to have timely access to Government information and records," Clay declared.[9]

Clay's seat on the Oversight Committee also allowed him to monitor the 2010 and 2020 Censuses. He questioned the Census Bureau's policy of counting incarcerated people as residents of their prison rather than their last known address. Clay argued that the policy artificially inflated the population of predominately White and rural areas where prisons were usually located, which enhanced those communities' political representation at the expense of the inmates' hometowns—areas that were predominately urban, Black, and Hispanic. In 2010, Clay asked the Census Bureau to report its data on prison populations early—allowing states to choose whether to count inmates at their last known address for redistricting purposes. He later introduced legislation ahead of the 2020 Census that would have mandated the Census Bureau to count prisoners as residents of their hometowns, but it died in committee.[10]

In recognition of the civil rights activism of his father's generation, Clay sought to enhance national awareness of the historic civil rights movement. From his seat on the Natural Resources Committee, he shepherded into law a bill authorizing the National Park Service to establish the African American Civil Rights Network, a collaborative effort between federal, state, and private facilities across the country to develop educational programming on the civil rights movement. "The historic civil rights network … will honestly tell the full and sometimes painful story of the struggle for civil rights, not just for African Americans, but to foster healing, tolerance and understanding among all Americans," Clay said.[11]

In 2014, a White police officer shot and killed Michael Brown, an 18-year-old Black man, in Ferguson, a northwest suburb of St. Louis, igniting large-scale protests over racism and brutality in law enforcement. In response, the CBC selected Clay to lead a new task force on police reform. Clay immediately called on the Justice Department to launch its own investigation into the case. "We have too many unarmed young black men who interact with police and wind up dead. The resolution of that problem will only come through a painful, honest, national discussion about race," he said on the House Floor. Clay introduced bills in 2015 to require racial bias and cultural sensitivity training for law enforcement officers, to provide funding for officer-worn body cameras, and to create a task force to track and restrict the use of military-grade equipment by police departments. Major police reform legislation failed to gain traction in the 114th Congress, however.[12]

As chair of the Subcommittee on Housing, Community Development, and Insurance of the Financial Services Committee during the 116th Congress, Clay focused on protecting access to affordable housing and raising homeownership rates among lower-income Americans. "Home ownership has proven to be one of the most consistent paths to obtaining wealth in America and narrowing the wealth gap," he declared. Clay pushed back against the Donald J. Trump administration's efforts to cut funding for public housing and held a hearing to highlight the country's affordable housing shortage and the enormous backlog of needed repairs for public housing infrastructure. When the 200-unit Wellston housing complex in St. Louis County faced demolition,

Clay appealed to the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) for an alternative solution. After his intervention, HUD altered its plans and selected a developer to renovate the facility. In 2020, the House passed his bill, the Improving FHA Support for Small Dollar Mortgages Act, which required the Federal Housing Administration to investigate why applications for mortgages costing less than $70,000 were denied at higher rates than larger mortgages. Clay also focused on preserving housing in rural areas. His subcommittee held a hearing to examine federal loan programs run by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) for housing for rural low-income Americans. His bill, the Strategy and Investment in Rural Housing Preservation Act, passed the House in 2019 and sought to provide rental assistance to tenants living in properties under the USDA's Rural Housing Service.[13]

A year into Clay's housing subcommittee chairmanship, the COVID-19 pandemic upended the economy and left many tenants and homeowners unable to make rent and mortgage payments. Clay introduced a bill to allow mortgage holders of single and multifamily homes to request loan forbearance for the duration of the public health emergency if they provided rent relief for their tenants. Parts of his legislation were included in the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, an economic stimulus package that also included eviction bans for homes financed under federally-backed mortgages.[14]

In the 2018 Democratic primary, Clay faced Cori Bush, a nurse, pastor, and community activist. Bush criticized the political establishment and argued that she was best suited to tackle issues such as homelessness, wage stagnation, and domestic violence because she experienced them herself. Clay defeated her with 57 percent of the vote, but Bush challenged him again in 2020. The rematch came amid the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as nationwide protests against police brutality and racism after the police killing of George Floyd, a Black man, in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Clay insisted that his years of political experience and House seniority were crucial for acquiring federal funding for the district and for resolving the economic crisis brought on by the pandemic. "Now is not a time for amateur hour," he said. Bush accused Clay of being slow to respond to community needs and criticized his absence from the 2014 Ferguson protests. Bush defeated Clay by three points for the Democratic nomination. Clay's final term ended on January 3, 2021.[15]

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Diane E. Watson

1933–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

2001–2011

Democrat from California



Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

As a former educator, state legislator, and United States ambassador, Diane E. Watson entered the U.S. House of Representatives in 2001 with a wealth of public service experience. Throughout her 35 years in public office, Watson worked to improve the lives of women and children—especially those living in poverty. Her diverse legislative interests included welfare reform, civil rights, foreign aid for African nations facing the crises of HIV and AIDS, and improved health care and education in the United States. "People have trusted me, and I have not let them down," Watson observed during her first congressional campaign. "People have read my name on the ballot for 25 years. They have been born, grown up and gotten married in that time. That means a great deal. When you work your base, you win."[1]

Diane Edith Watson was born on November 12, 1933, in Los Angeles, California, the daughter of William Allen Louis Watson, a Los Angeles police officer, and Dorothy Elizabeth O'Neal Watson, a postal worker. After graduating from Susan Miller Dorsey High School in Los Angeles, Watson received her associate degree from Los Angeles City College in 1954 and a bachelor's degree in education from the University of California, Los Angeles, in 1956. Watson later earned a master's degree in school psychology from California State University, Los Angeles, in 1967, and a Ph.D. in education administration from Claremont College in 1986. Watson worked as a teacher and school psychologist in the Los Angeles public schools, taught abroad in France and Japan, lectured at California State University campuses in Long Beach and Los Angeles, and worked in the California department of education.[2]

In 1975, Watson won election to the Los Angeles board of education and served until 1978. According to the *Los Angeles Times*, Watson became only the second Black woman to be elected to the school board. On the board, Watson worked to desegregate the city's public schools. She went on to win a spot in the California state senate in 1978, becoming the first African-American woman to serve in that chamber. "I think I bring another dimension being a black female," she said. "But I don't want to be judged here as a black or a woman but as a senator." During her two-decade career in the state senate, she chaired the health and human services committee where she worked to provide relief for Californians living in poverty and sought to rebuild central Los Angeles after the violence and property destruction that followed the 1992 acquittal of White police officers in the

beating of Rodney King, a Black man. In 1992, Watson ran for the Los Angeles county board of supervisors but lost to former California Representative Yvonne Brathwaite Burke in a close race. After state term limits forced Watson out of the California senate, President William J. Clinton nominated her as U.S. Ambassador to the Federated States of Micronesia in 1998.[3]

In December 2000, Representative Julian C. Dixon of California, Watson's friend and former high school classmate, died suddenly of a heart attack. A senior member on the powerful Appropriations Committee, Dixon had just won re-election to a twelfth term in Congress. Urged by colleagues to run, Watson declared her candidacy for the vacant seat in January 2001. Watson campaigned on her political experience, community activism, and local roots in the predominantly African-American and Hispanic district, which included West Los Angeles and Culver City. Watson earned a 33 percent plurality in the primary to defeat 10 opponents, including a state senator and a city councilman. In the June 5, 2001, special election, Watson easily carried the Democratic district with 75 percent of the vote against Republican businesswoman Noel Irwin Hentschel. In her four re-elections, Watson won with more than 80 percent of the vote.[4]

Watson took her seat in the House on June 7, 2001. "I never dreamed that this walk would direct me in the footsteps of my dear friend, the late esteemed Julian Dixon," she said. Watson received assignments on the Government Reform and the International Relations Committees and remained on both panels throughout her tenure in the House. As a former ambassador, she took a keen interest in American foreign policy, particularly relating to issues of racism and health care in the developing world. In the summer of 2001, Watson attended the United Nations Conference on Racism, Xenophobia, and Other Intolerance in Durban, South Africa. She later urged the United States to host its own conference on racism and called for reforms to American education, justice, and health care systems as possible means for reparations for the long and painful legacy of American slavery. Watson also supported the Local Law Enforcement Hate Crimes Prevention Act, noting that incidents of violence against people of Middle Eastern and North African descent, which had risen since the 2001 terrorist attacks, were "the tip of a proverbial iceberg."[5]

Watson worked to increase U.S. aid to sub-Saharan African nations fighting a pandemic of HIV and AIDS. She argued that the crisis was a humanitarian issue with repercussions that affected both regional stability and America's national security because of the strain it placed on so many developing economies. The disease, she observed, "in the very near term, if not more is done, may challenge the very notion of law-based nation states." Such instability, she also noted, could be taken advantage of by terrorist groups. Speaking in November 2001, Watson said "Let us not forget that Al-Qaeda terrorist leader Osama bin Laden has exploited the misery of another state where civil society has collapsed—Afghanistan—to serve as a base for his terror network."[6]

In addition to her humanitarian efforts, Watson sponsored reauthorization of the U.S. Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy, a bipartisan panel under the U.S. State Department overseeing both private and governmental efforts to promote American ideals abroad. Watson introduced bills proposing an expansion of the commission to include publicly available resource centers and libraries. Speaking in support of the bill on the House Floor, Watson suggested the program might "help redeem the status and prestige that the United States has lost around the world in recent years." She added, "An important point of regaining our rightful leadership role is to find more effective ways to let the world know who we are as Americans and what we stand for." The proposal passed the House by voice vote but stalled in the U.S. Senate.[7]

Watson used her seat in Congress to call attention to the needs of poor and underserved communities—particularly those in her district. Building on her work in the state legislature in support of "commonsense" welfare reform, Watson called on Congress to give the states leeway to manage their own need-based initiatives by reauthorizing the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program to provide education, childcare, job training, and employment opportunities to aid recipients. A consistent supporter of increased funding for Head Start, Watson also lobbied for federal assistance to combat gang violence and protect at-risk young people. Supporting President Barack Obama's agenda, Watson held town halls promoting aspects of the Affordable Care Act that would help seniors and families control the costs of health care. She regularly supported health care reform in House Floor speeches, specifically highlighting the benefits for maternity care.[8]

During her time in the House, Watson highlighted the achievements of important civil rights activists. In the 108th

Congress (2003–2005) she introduced a measure to award a Congressional Gold Medal to Dr. Dorothy Height, a longtime advocate for civil rights in Washington, DC. She also sponsored legislation to extend the construction deadline for a national memorial honoring Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. to allow the project more time to raise funding. Both bills were approved by the House and eventually became law.[9]

On February 11, 2010, Watson announced her decision to retire at the end of the 111th Congress (2009–2011) in order to spend more time with her 100-year-old mother. Reflecting upon her career, Watson said, "I have been really thrilled by the opportunity to help my constituents in whatever way I could."[10]

Manuscript Collection

University of California, Los Angeles, Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library (Los Angeles, CA). *Papers*: 1978–2011, 13.25 linear feet. The collection covers Diane E. Watson's time in the California state senate and the U.S. House of Representatives, as well as a limited amount of material related to her ambassadorship to Micronesia. The collection includes press clippings, numerous photographs from events throughout Watson's career, correspondence, and documents from various events, meetings, and conferences. The collection also contains materials related to specific areas of interest for Watson, including the controversy over Ebonics in the Oakland (CA) School District in the mid–1990s, the Sherrice Iverson Justice Committee, and the debate over the downsizing of the King/Drew Medical Center. Additionally, the collection includes mementos from Watson's trip to South Korea in August 2010, which was particularly significant since her congressional district included Los Angeles's Koreatown, home to the largest Korean population outside of Korea. Mementos from the trip include an honorary doctorate from Chung Ang University, Korean literature panels, and souvenir menus from banquets in Watson's honor. A finding aid is available in the repository and online.

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Frank W. Ballance Jr.

1942–2019

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

2003–2004

Democrat from North Carolina



Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

Frank W. Ballance Jr. served in the North Carolina state senate for 13 years before winning a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives to succeed Representative Eva M. Clayton, the first Black woman to represent North Carolina on Capitol Hill. Ballance's victory marked the first time an African-American candidate from North Carolina succeeded an African-American incumbent in Congress. Ballance, who had grown up on a tobacco farm, used his seat on the Agricultural Committee to advocate for farmers in his largely rural district during his single term.[1]

Frank Winston Ballance Jr. was born in Windsor, North Carolina, on February 15, 1942, to Frank Winston, a sharecropper, and Alice Eason Ballance. According to a political activist in eastern North Carolina, Ballance's mother was the "political wheel" of Bertie County, organizing voter registration drives and advocating greater representation for the area's Black voters. Ballance grew up in a segregated society. "Prior to the sit-ins, you just kind of accepted that way of life," he later reflected. "You didn't like it. When you got to the age of 14 or 15 you'd ask, 'Why are we treated this way?'" Ballance graduated in 1959 from W.S. Etheridge High School in Windsor and four years later earned a bachelor's degree from North Carolina Central University in Durham. In 1965, Ballance graduated with a law degree from the same institution. He was employed as a professor at another historically Black school, South Carolina State College (now South Carolina State University), from 1965 to 1966. Ballance served in the North Carolina National Guard in 1968 and continued as a reservist until 1971. He practiced law, establishing a firm with Theaoseus T. Clayton (the husband of future U.S. Representative Eva Clayton) in Warrenton, North Carolina. Ballance married Bernadine Smallwood, a lawyer, and they raised three children: Garey, Angela, and Valerie.[2]

As a college student, Ballance marched against segregation and, at age 24, served as a youth director of the local chapter of the NAACP. He eventually ran three unsuccessful campaigns for local office. In 1968, he ran for a seat as a judge on a district court in eastern North Carolina, and in 1970 he sought a seat on the Warren county commission. After switching to the Republican Party, Ballance tried again unsuccessfully for the commission in 1974. Ballance soon returned to the Democratic Party, "to my people, where my votes are."[3]

In 1982, Ballance won election to represent a newly redrawn district in the North Carolina state house—a

victory that a local newspaper had attributed to the record number of registered Black voters in Warren County, which had been steadily growing since the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. The 1982 election more than doubled the number of African-American lawmakers in the state legislature. Ballance recalled, "Among the black community, there was great excitement that a new day had dawned and things would be different." He served in the North Carolina state house of representatives from 1983 to 1986. Although he lost the Democratic primary for a seat in the North Carolina senate in 1986, he was later elected and served in the state senate from 1989 to 2002. As a state senator, Ballance was a leading critic of the death penalty, especially for people with intellectual disabilities. Ballance also spearheaded a four-year education plan that raised teachers' salaries statewide, led a measure to support state community colleges with local bonds, and helped establish a mental health fund.[4]

In November 2001, when six-term Representative Eva M. Clayton announced her retirement from the House, Ballance entered the race to succeed her. Ballance had managed Clayton's first successful run for the U.S. House in 1992. A decade later, Clayton encouraged Ballance to run for her seat. "Without Eva Clayton's support, I would not have run," Ballance recalled. The district encompassed much of northeastern North Carolina, arching southward from the Virginia border along the Albemarle and Pamlico Sounds and included areas encompassed by Ballance's state legislative district. The district was heavily Democratic and was just over 50 percent Black. In the party primary, Ballance faced Sam Davis, a Pasquotank County commissioner; former U.S. Attorney Janice Cole; and Christine Fitch, chair of the Wilson County school board. A lawsuit over state redistricting delayed the May primary until September. Ballance campaigned on his 18 years of experience in the state legislature and prevailed over his three competitors in the Democratic primary, taking 47 percent of the vote and capturing 17 of 23 counties in the district; the nearest runner up, Davis, tallied 26 percent. In the general election, Ballance defeated Republican nominee Greg Dority, a security consultant, by a margin of 64 to 35 percent.[5]

In late November 2002, only weeks after winning election to Congress, the incoming group of new Democratic lawmakers chose Ballance as freshman class president—a position Representative Clayton had held ten years earlier. The class president traditionally served as the spokesperson for first-term colleagues and as an intermediary with House leaders. When Ballance took his seat in the House in January 2003, he received assignments to the Agriculture Committee and the Small Business Committee.[6]

From his seat on the Agriculture Committee, Ballance worked on issues important to his rural district. Tobacco and cotton crops drove the region's economy alongside the textile and lumber industries. Ballance also called attention to the plight of thousands of textile workers in his district who had recently lost jobs due to the outsourcing of textile production to other countries. Without more funding for unemployment benefits, Ballance warned that his state would "face a crisis of chronic unemployment with shrinking safety nets to combat this crisis." As the House debated the U.S. Department of Agriculture's 2004 funding bill, Ballance offered a floor amendment to increase available resources for the department's civil rights office and its outreach programs for minority farmers by $8 million. To support his district's tobacco industry, Ballance cosponsored two bills that sought to eliminate the tobacco quota system, which limited tobacco cultivation to select farmers who held the rights to grow the crop. The Depression-era quota system sought to stabilize tobacco prices but made it difficult for growers to compete with foreign markets. "I have talked to many farmers in my district, tobacco farmers who are suffering," Ballance said at a committee hearing to review the policy.[7]

Ballance also worked to secure federal money for education and disaster relief programs as well as better access to health care for his district. In 2003, he opposed a Medicare prescription drug plan backed by the George W. Bush administration, arguing that it favored the insurance industry and drug companies over the interests of many of the elderly and poor constituents of his district. Additionally, Representative Ballance joined members of the North Carolina delegation in October 2003 to advocate for federal relief funding for portions of North Carolina that were devastated by Hurricane Isabel. Ballance criticized President Bush's 2005 education budget for slashing funding for education reform and after-school programs. He introduced a bill to waive the provision of the No Child Left Behind Act that punished underperforming schools until the schools received adequate funding for students with special needs.[8]

In fall 2003, Ballance faced state audits into a nonprofit substance abuse facility that he cofounded in 1985. The

John A. Hyman Memorial Youth Foundation, located in Ballance's hometown of Warrenton, North Carolina, was named after the state's first African-American Representative, who served what was then known as the "Black Second" district in Congress. As a state senator, Ballance had secured state funding for the nonprofit while continuing to serve as chair of the foundation's board of directors. Investigations by the Federal Bureau of Investigation and North Carolina state regulators uncovered "conflicts of interest"—including payments to Ballance's family members, political allies, and campaign staff. Additionally, the foundation had failed to file state and federal nonprofit taxes for years.[9]

Amid the investigations, several candidates entered the Democratic primary to challenge Ballance for the party nomination in 2004. Late in the filing period, Ballance formally entered the race, only to withdraw days later. On May 7, 2004, Representative Ballance announced his retirement from the House, citing myasthenia gravis, a chronic neuromuscular disease. "We expect that with time and medication that I'd be fine. It's just that it did not appear that I was going to have the energy and strength to run this vigorous campaign that I had to run," Ballance said. He resigned from the House on June 11, 2004, and retired to his hometown of Warrenton. Ballance was eventually succeeded by former North Carolina supreme court justice G.K. Butterfield in a special election held on July 20 to fill the vacant seat.[10]

In early September 2004, Ballance was indicted on federal corruption charges related to his management of the Hyman Foundation. In November 2004, he pled guilty to one count of conspiracy to commit mail fraud and launder money. In October 2005, he received a four-year jail sentence, which he completed in June 2009. Frank W. Ballance Jr. died on February 22, 2019, in Raleigh, North Carolina.[11]

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Artur Davis

1967–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

2003–2011

Democrat from Alabama



Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

After growing up in a struggling neighborhood in Montgomery, Alabama, Artur Davis earned two Harvard degrees and launched a political career that brought him to the U.S. House of Representatives. Elected in 2002, Davis advocated for economic opportunities for low-income Americans and was especially attuned to the needs of his constituents. "I think I've always been able to overcome obstacles, overcome odds," Davis said, shortly after winning his first election to the U.S. House. "That's why I refuse to accept [that] the Black Belt has to lag behind the rest of our state."[1]

Artur Davis was born on October 9, 1967, in Montgomery, Alabama. After his parents divorced, he was raised in the west end of Montgomery by his mother, Arthur-May Davis, a schoolteacher, and his grandmother. He attended the city public schools, graduating from Jefferson Davis High School. In 1990, Davis earned a bachelor's degree from Harvard University, earning magna cum laude honors. Three years later he earned a law degree from Harvard Law School. He clerked for Judge Myron Thompson of the United States district court for the middle district of Alabama—one of the first African-Americans appointed to a federal judgeship in that state. In 1994, Davis was appointed assistant U.S. attorney in Alabama's middle district and served in that capacity until 1998. On January 1, 2009, he married Tara Johnson.[2]

In 2000, Davis ran for a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives from a district that covered portions of Birmingham and Tuscaloosa as well as low-income agricultural counties in west-central Alabama that were part of the Black Belt, a region of the state known for its dark, fertile soils. In the Democratic primary he faced four-term incumbent Earl F. Hilliard. In his first foray into elected politics, Davis lost to Hilliard, who won with 58 percent of the vote. Davis challenged Hilliard again two years later, after the redistricting process following the 2000 Census changed the district's borders. The district maintained its Black majority, but some 40 percent of the population was newly added, which eroded Hilliard's electoral base. Hilliard faced criticism from pro-Israel groups for introducing legislation to end unilateral trade sanctions against rogue states like Libya and for voting against a 2002 resolution expressing solidarity with Israel against terrorism. Davis declared Hilliard to be "out of touch on the Middle East," and received substantial out-of-state financial support from members of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee.

Within the district, Davis won the support of the mayors of Birmingham and Selma. He accused Hilliard of failing to mitigate the high poverty and unemployment rates in the district. "We have a health care crisis, an economic development crisis and we have an education crisis," he said. "That is what this campaign has been about." In the Democratic primary, neither Hilliard nor Davis won a majority after a third candidate, Sam Wiggins, siphoned off 11 percent of the vote. The contest advanced to a runoff election, in which Davis captured the nomination with 56 percent of the vote. In the general election, Davis commanded 92 percent of the vote against Libertarian challenger Lauren McCay. In his re-elections, Davis won 75 percent of the vote in 2004 and faced no major party opposition in 2006 or 2008.[3]

When Davis took his seat in the 108th Congress (2003–2005), he lobbied for a spot on the Financial Services Committee, which he received, along with an assignment to the Budget Committee. "The banking industry is very critical in the 7th Congressional District in two areas, housing and rural development, and economic development in the low-income areas in Birmingham," Davis observed. In the 110th Congress (2007–2009), Davis left the Budget and Financial Services Committees and received a spot on the powerful Ways and Means Committee. While members of the tax-writing committee are not typically allowed to serve on additional panels, Davis successfully sought a waiver to join the Judiciary Committee, citing his experience as a federal prosecutor. That Congress, he also joined the Committee on House Administration, which oversaw federal elections and many of the day-to-day operations in the House.[4]

Davis quickly entered party leadership, and in only his second term he was named a chief deputy Whip for the Democratic Caucus. Hoping to bolster their presence in the South, Democrats also named Davis to the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, where he worked to recruit candidates. In the 110th Congress, party leaders placed him on the Democratic Steering and Policy Committee, which makes committee assignments and helps set the party's agenda in the House.[5]

Davis described his legislative agenda as one focused on the "fundamentals," including policies dealing with education, health care, and transportation infrastructure. Like many first-term Members, Davis committed himself to constituent services, assembling a professional staff that ran five district offices and was eight times larger than his predecessor's staff.[6]

In the House, Davis joined the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) as well as the moderate New Democrat Coalition. In the 110th Congress, he served as one of four vice-chairs of the New Democrats. On social and cultural issues, Davis gained a reputation for often voting with Republicans. "If I have to pick between representing the [Democratic] Caucus and representing the views and values of the people in my state and my district, it's an easy choice," he reflected. Davis voted with a minority of Democrats in support of the Partial-Birth Abortion Ban Act of 2003; he also supported a constitutional amendment to outlaw marriage for same-sex couples. In 2006, he voted with Republicans to allow oil and gas drilling in Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. After Democrats regained control of the House in the 110th Congress, Davis voted in favor of a reauthorization of the USA PATRIOT Act as well as an overhaul of the law permitting eavesdropping on foreign terrorists. In 2007, he voted against a bill that prohibited businesses from discriminating against employees on the basis of sexual orientation. "Non-discrimination principles are absolutely important and the right thing for public and government institutions," Davis said. "But I think the bill goes a little bit too far … sweeping into private organizations and small businesses."[7]

Much of Davis's agenda focused on improving and expanding economic and educational opportunities for his constituents. According to one analysis, Davis represented the fifth poorest district in the country. During his first term, Davis successfully amended an appropriations bill to restore funding for historically Black land grant colleges—including Tuskegee University—which faced cuts of more than 3 percent in the 2004 annual budget. "I think that all of us would recognize that we have some fundamental obligations to treat like institutions in the same manner. … While so many programs have had to bear the brunt of the budget ax, we ought to make sure that it is administered in a fair and evenhanded manner," he stated. When the steel and catfish industries in his district were threatened by a flood of cheap goods from China and Vietnam, Davis introduced a bipartisan bill to impose additional customs duties on foreign products that were subsidized by foreign governments. To help improve conditions in America's public housing, the House approved Davis's floor amendment to the 2006 Housing and Urban Development

appropriations bill to infuse $60 million into the HOPE VI program, which revitalizes distressed public housing.[8]

As a member of the Judiciary Committee, Davis joined with Chair John Conyers Jr. of Michigan in passing a bill toughening sentencing for hate crimes. "If you don't like people because of who they are, this bill says we are offended by that as a community," Davis stated in support of the measure.[9]

During the financial crisis on Wall Street in late 2008, Davis supported the George W. Bush administration's package meant to stabilize the country's biggest banks, the Troubled Asset Relief Program, but Davis did not support federal loans to struggling automobile companies. In the 111th Congress (2009–2011), he occasionally broke with his party on major legislation. While he used his seat on the Ways and Means Committee to aid passage of an expansion of the State Children's Health Insurance Program, Davis was the lone CBC member, and one of 34 Democrats, to vote against the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act. Explaining his vote to his constituents, Davis said, "I didn't vote against health care—I voted against the bill in Washington … we can't just keep throwing a trillion dollars toward the problem."[10]

After term limits prevented Alabama Governor Bob Riley from running for re-election, Davis quickly declared his intention not to seek another term in the House and instead run for governor. On February 6, 2009, he announced his candidacy. In the Democratic primary, Davis faced Alabama agricultural commissioner, Ron Sparks, who was White and had won endorsements from civil rights groups in the state. Davis also found himself at odds with Black leaders in Alabama, who criticized his vote against the Affordable Care Act, which was popular among Black Alabamians. When one Black Democratic state party leader accused Davis of voting against the Affordable Care Act to help his gubernatorial campaign rather than help his constituents, Davis replied, "I … vigorously reject the insinuation that there is a uniquely 'black' way of understanding an issue." On Election Day, Sparks defeated Davis in the primary with 62 percent of the vote; Davis captured 38 percent.[11]

In early 2011, Davis reflected on his loss and his effort to transcend criticisms that he did not do enough for Black voters back home. "There are some on both the right and the left politically who profit from race being a pervasive topic," he said in an interview with the *National Journal*. "There are some in the African-American community who want to use it as an excuse, and there are some in other communities who use it as a basis for stigmatization. I have certainly been disappointed that race continues to be a topic of conversation."[12]

After leaving public service, the rift between Davis and the Democratic Party that emerged during his House service widened. As a fiscal conservative, he continued to criticize the Affordable Care Act, believing it was too expensive for consumers. His support for voter-ID laws and opposition to affirmative action policies drew a swift rebuke from his former colleagues in the CBC, who wrote Davis an open letter in 2012 denouncing his views. That year, Davis temporarily left the Democratic Party. "Parties change," he wrote. "Wearing a Democratic label no longer matches what I know about my country and its possibilities." After living in Virginia for a brief period, he returned to Alabama in 2015 and waged three unsuccessful bids for local office as a Democratic candidate, for Montgomery mayor and for the Montgomery County commission in 2015, and again for Montgomery mayor in 2019.[13]

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Denise L. Majette

1955–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

2003–2005

Democrat from Georgia



Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

After defeating a veteran incumbent in the Democratic primary for a Georgia congressional seat, Denise L. Majette coasted to victory in the 2002 general election, earning a spot in the U.S. House of Representatives for the 108th Congress (2003–2005). During her single House term, Majette sought to boost funding for a variety of social services and to support small businesses. "Long-term success in this country depends on high quality education, on stable and high paying jobs, and access to quality health care," she declared.[1]

Denise L. Majette was born on May 18, 1955, in Brooklyn, New York, the daughter of Voyd, a real estate assessor, and Olivia, a teacher. As a teenager during the 1960s and 1970s, Majette said she looked up to pathbreaking Black Representatives Shirley Chisholm of New York and Barbara Jordan of Texas. Majette attended Yale University, graduating with a bachelor's degree in American history in 1976. After college she attended law school, following a decision she had made at the age of 13. "I was very inspired during the civil rights struggles at the way people used the law to effect social change," she later recalled. "And I wanted to do that, too." After earning a law degree in 1979 from Duke University Law School, Majette worked as a staff attorney at the Legal Aid Society in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, and later served as an adjunct law professor at Wake Forest University. In 1983, Majette moved to Stone Mountain, Georgia, with her husband Rogers J. Mitchell Jr. and their two sons from former marriages, and accepted a position as a law clerk for Judge R. Keegan Federal at the superior court of DeKalb County. Over the next decade, Majette served as a law assistant to Judge Robert Benham of the Georgia court of appeals, a special assistant attorney general for the state of Georgia, and a partner in an Atlanta law firm. In 1992, Majette became a judge of administrative law for the Georgia state board of workers' compensation. In 1993, Georgia Governor Zell Bryan Miller appointed Majette as a judge on the state court of DeKalb County, where she served for nearly nine years.[2]

On February 5, 2002, Majette announced her candidacy as a Democrat for a seat in the U.S. House from a suburban Atlanta district held by five-term Democratic incumbent Representative Cynthia A. McKinney. Majette said she decided to run for Congress because she felt McKinney had become disconnected from the issues affecting DeKalb County. The race garnered national attention

after McKinney implied that President George W. Bush deliberately ignored pre-September 11 intelligence reports suggesting an imminent terrorist attack and that his big-business supporters profited in the wake of the attacks. Majette criticized her opponent for the remarks and received a strong endorsement from Georgia Senator Zell Miller. Middle-class voters flocked to Majette in the August 20, 2002, primary, joined by Republicans who took advantage of Georgia state law, which allowed voters to switch parties during primaries. Majette captured the nomination with 58 percent of the vote. In the general election, she easily defeated her Republican opponent, Cynthia Van Auken, with 77 percent of the vote.[3]

Majette was sworn into in 108th Congress and immediately felt the weight of her responsibility. "I was just looking around the room and appreciating the kind of work the Congress will have to do and how that will impact the nation and the world," she said after taking the oath of office. Majette received assignments on the Budget; Education and the Workforce; and Small Business Committees. She also quickly won a seat in party leadership, serving as president of the class of first-term Democrats and as assistant Democratic whip. Majette also chaired the Democratic Caucus's Task Force on Jobs and the Economy.[4]

During her first year in Congress, Majette sponsored legislation to designate Arabia Mountain in southeast DeKalb County as a national heritage area, a classification that would make the metropolitan Atlanta region eligible for additional federal funding and likely increase tourism. Testifying before the House Resources Committee's Subcommittee on National Parks, Recreation, and Public Lands, Majette called the locale "a living history lesson" and urged the preservation of the "area's unique heritage for future generations." As a member of the Small Business Committee, she criticized President Bush's proposed budget for 2005, which sought to slash the Small Business Administration's (SBA) budget and lending authority by millions of dollars. She later voted for an amendment to restore funding to the SBA loan program.[5]

Majette fought to protect a variety of federally-funded programs during her term in the House. She believed the Bush administration had failed to adequately fund education initiatives and criticized the President's record on domestic violence against women. "It saddens me to think that millions of women continue to be abused each year, while this administration sits idly by, taking no initiative and, in some cases, decreasing resources available to battered women," Majette said. She voted against overhauling Medicare, labeling the Republican-sponsored Medicare Prescription Drug and Modernization Act of 2003 a "sham" that failed to include "adequate prescription drug coverage that our mothers and grandmothers absolutely deserve." In 2003, she joined Democrats Christopher Van Hollen of Maryland and John F. Tierney of Massachusetts in proposing an amendment to increase spending for Head Start. "The program doesn't just teach children to read," Majette argued. "It provides nutritional support, it makes sure that children are properly vaccinated at the appropriate time, that parents are also being supported and supportive of the efforts, that children are given the overall support they need. It's not just about teaching them their colors."[6]

On March 29, 2004, Majette surprised her House colleagues, and even some of her staff, when she announced her candidacy for the Georgia Senate seat that was being vacated by the retiring Zell Miller. Although Majette lacked the traditional benchmarks in a run for statewide office—a large fundraising network and widespread name recognition—she ran an effective grassroots campaign on a limited budget. Forced into a runoff after failing to win a majority in the primary, Majette went on to capture the Democratic nomination by defeating millionaire businessman Cliff Oxford. The first African-American candidate to earn a nomination for the U.S. Senate from the state of Georgia, Majette lost in the general election, receiving 40 percent of the vote against three-term Republican Representative Johnny Isakson.[7]

"It was a leap of faith for me, another step in my spiritual journey," Majette remarked after her loss. She expressed no regrets. In 2005, Majette began work as a judge in DeKalb County. A year later, she won the Democratic nomination for Georgia superintendent of schools, a position with oversight of the daily operations of the state's department of education. She lost in the general election and returned to private practice as a lawyer. In 2014, the Georgia supreme court disbarred Majette for overbilling her clients.[8]

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Kendrick B. Meek

1966–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

2003–2011

Democrat from Florida



Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

In 2003, Kendrick B. Meek's election in a Florida district formerly represented by his mother, Carrie P. Meek, made him the first African-American lawmaker to succeed his mother in Congress. He advocated for minority-owned business defense contracts, sought funding for freight rail infrastructure, and supported the large Haitian population in his district. "I am very respectful of the fact that the reason I am able to assume this high office today is because of the sacrifices and struggles and the battles for equal rights that were fought by the generations that preceded me," Meek stated as he began his House service.[1]

Kendrick B. Meek was born in Miami, Florida, on September 6, 1966, the youngest of three children raised by Carrie Meek. Carrie Meek divorced as a young mother and went on to build a political career in the Florida state legislature and, eventually, as a Member in the U.S. House of Representatives. Growing up, Meek watched his mother interact with constituents wherever they went, including the grocery store, and took inspiration from the example she set. "She always loved people. And she still loves people to this day. I learned an appreciation for loving people. When I talked to people about running for public office, I said, 'You can't just like people; you have to love people. And then you can be a better public servant if that's already in your mind, in your heart, as it relates to the work that you have to do.' That grew on me." Kendrick Meek graduated with a bachelor's degree in criminal science from Florida A&M University in 1989. After college, Meek worked for the Florida highway patrol, earning the rank of captain. For a time, he served on Democratic Lieutenant Governor Kenneth Hood "Buddy" McKay Jr.'s security detail. In 1994, Meek won election to the Florida state house of representatives and served four years before winning election to the state senate. In both instances, Meek defeated longtime Democratic incumbents. Meek has been married twice and has two children, Lauren and Kendrick Jr.[2]

As a state legislator, Meek focused on education and affirmative action, frequently coming into conflict with Florida Governor Jeb Bush. In response to Bush's proposal to end the state's preference for minorities in contracting and university admissions in 2000, Meek led a 25-hour sit-in, which sparked the largest protest march on the state capitol in Florida history. The same year, he led the "Arrive With Five" voting initiative, designed to bring women and minority voters to the polls. This effort helped register the greatest number of Black voters in state history. In 2002,

Meek set out to amend the state constitution to include a limit on the number of students in public school classes. He and his colleagues collected more than 500,000 signatures to get the issue on the ballot, which passed with 52.4 percent of the vote.[3]

When Carrie Meek announced her retirement in July 2002 after five terms in the U.S. House, Kendrick Meek became the immediate favorite to succeed her. His mother's popularity in the district, which was majority Black, heavily Democratic, and weaved through southeast Broward County and northeast Miami-Dade County, meant Meek faced little opposition securing the Democratic nomination. "Even though I was a policymaker and had a lot of legislative accomplishments, I enjoyed the shade of Carrie Meek," he recalled. In the fall general election, he faced no Republican opposition. In his 2004, 2006, and 2008 re-elections, he ran without Republican opposition.[4]

Meek was sworn into the 108th Congress (2003–2005) in January 2003 with his mother looking on. He became the second son, after James Kee of West Virginia, who followed Maude Elizabeth Kee in 1965, to directly succeed his mother in Congress. Throughout his tenure in the House, Representative Meek served on the Armed Services Committee, where he pushed to better equip troops fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan. He urged the Republican Congress and the George W. Bush administration to establish a deadline to begin withdrawing troops out of Iraq. In the 108th and 109th Congresses (2003–2007), he served on the Homeland Security Committee. In 2005, he became ranking member of the Subcommittee on Management, Integration, and Oversight. The subcommittee had jurisdiction over airport and seaport security, customs operations, aid to local and state governments, and immigration inspections, detention, and enforcement policies. Meek's position gave him a hand in revamping the Immigration and Naturalization Service, U.S. Customs Service, and the Coast Guard, reorganizations that affected some of the largest employers in his district.[5]

When Democrats captured the House majority for the 110th Congress (2007–2009), Meek retained his seat on the Armed Services Committee and received an appointment to the prestigious Ways and Means Committee. His new assignment gave him the opportunity to oversee Social Security, Medicare, and other tax and trade policy programs. In 2007, Meek introduced the Freight Rail Infrastructure Capacity Expansion Act to provide freight rail companies with a 25-percent tax credit for infrastructure improvements. He told his constituents he supported this effort because it would provide local jobs as well as decrease both highway traffic and oil use. The measure had support in the Senate but did not pass either chamber. Meek also introduced several bills extending tax credits to businesses that invested in reusable energy such as wind, solar, biomass, or soybean fuel. Building on his work in the Florida legislature, Meek introduced the High-Quality Education Act in his first term. The measure was designed to provide $200 million of grants to states with class-size reduction programs such as expanding school buildings and hiring teachers. He introduced the bill two more times, but the House never voted on it.[6]

In the House, Meek was involved in the party's campaign and policy initiatives and helped raise money for Democratic candidates. In the 2006 and 2008 election cycles, he gave more than $325,000 to the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee. He was selected to serve as co-chair of the Democrat's "30 Something" working group, charged with making connections with young voters. He was also selected by Speaker Nancy Pelosi in the 110th Congress to serve on the Democratic Steering and Policy Committee, which makes committee assignments and helps set the party's agenda. In January 2007, Meek was appointed to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Parliamentary Assembly, an inter-parliamentary organization of legislators representing NATO Members and associate countries. Meek also served as chair of the board of directors of the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation.[7]

Meek's congressional district contained the largest Haitian population in the United States, and many of his constituents had relatives on the island nation. Throughout his career in the House, Meek consistently advocated for Haitian immigration and trade. He frequently visited Haiti and sought to liberalize the U.S. government's policies towards Haitian refugees. In 2006, Meek secured passage of the Haitian Hemispheric Opportunity through Partnership Encouragement Act as part of the Tax Relief and Health Care Act. The bill aimed to stimulate Haiti's textile industry by allowing garments made with materials produced in a third country such as China to enter the United States duty-free. Meek successfully worked to extend the bill's trade provisions in 2008. After the devastating earthquake that shook the island on January 12, 2010, Meek worked to raise awareness and coordinate relief efforts. He supported

President Barack Obama's decision to grant Temporary Protected Status to all Haitians residing in the United States, a policy that he had supported since his arrival in the House.[8]

After Republican Senator Melquiades R. "Mel" Martinez of Florida announced his retirement, Meek quickly announced he would run for the open seat in the 2010 election, citing his public service career as a trooper, state legislator, and Representative. Instead of paying the $10,000 fee to have his name automatically placed on the Democratic primary ballot, Meek used a different option and toured the state to meet voters and collect the 112,476 petition signatures—1 percent of the total number of voters registered in the previous general election—required to appear on the ballot. "Not only will we make history by qualifying by petition statewide," he told the press, "but it will tell Florida I am interested in representing the entire state of Florida." Meek was successful both in getting his name on the ballot and in winning the primary, beating businessman Jeff Greene with 54 percent of the vote. He lost, however, in November with only 20 percent of the vote in a heated three-way race between former governor Charlie Crist—who ran as an Independent—and the eventual winner, former Florida house speaker, Marco Rubio. In 2011, President Obama nominated Meek as a United States representative to the United Nations General Assembly. The Senate confirmed his appointment in September. In 2018, he joined a law firm as a senior advisor.[9]

Notes

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Barack Obama

1961–

UNITED STATES SENATOR

2005–2008

Democrat from Illinois



Image courtesy of the Library of Congress

In 2004, Barack Obama won election to the U.S. Senate from Illinois, making him only the fifth Black Senator in American history. Four years later, Obama was elected President of the United States, becoming the first African American to hold the nation's highest office. Over the course of his career, Obama challenged Americans to participate in what he called "the audacity of hope." "I'm not talking about blind optimism here," he said during a primetime speech at the 2004 Democratic National Convention. "I'm talking about something more substantial. … Hope in the face of difficulty. Hope in the face of uncertainty. … A belief that there are better days ahead."[1]

Barack Obama was born in Honolulu, Hawaii, on August 4, 1961, the son of Barack Obama Sr., an economist, and Ann Dunham Obama, an anthropologist. Obama's parents divorced when he was young, and his mother later married Lolo Soetoro, who worked for an oil company. Obama lived in Jakarta, Indonesia, with his mother and stepfather before returning to live with his grandparents in Hawaii, where he attended high school at the Punahou Academy. From 1979 to 1981, Obama attended Occidental College in Los Angeles, California, before completing a bachelor's degree in political science and international relations at Columbia University in New York City in 1983. Two years later, Obama moved to Chicago to work for a grassroots community organizing group that sought to improve housing conditions in impoverished neighborhoods. He attended Harvard Law School, where he served as the first African-American president of the *Harvard Law Review* before earning a law degree in 1991. In 1992, he married Michelle Robinson, who was an attorney at a Chicago law firm; the couple have two daughters: Malia and Sasha.[2]

After law school, Obama moved back to Chicago and entered local politics as a community activist on the city's South Side. He practiced civil rights law and lectured at the University of Chicago Law School. In 1996, he won a seat in the Illinois state senate, where he pushed through a state earned income tax credit and an expansion of child care funding. In 2000, he unsuccessfully challenged four-term incumbent U.S. Representative Bobby L. Rush in the Democratic primary for a seat in the House representing most of the South Side of Chicago.[3]

In January 2003, Obama declared his candidacy for the U.S. Senate seat held by Republican Peter G. Fitzgerald of Illinois. Only months later, in April, Fitzgerald announced

that he planned to retire at the end of the Congress and would not stand for re-election in 2004. Obama subsequently faced a crowded field of candidates seeking the Democratic nomination for the open Senate seat. Obama won the primary with 53 percent of the vote, topping two frontrunners—state comptroller Daniel Hynes and wealthy securities trader Blair Hull. After securing the nomination, Obama emerged as a national figure in the summer of 2004, delivering a rousing keynote address on the second night of the Democratic National Convention in which he celebrated America's diversity and championed the country's founding principle "E pluribus unum. Out of many, one." "It is that fundamental belief," he said, "I am my brother's keeper, I am my sister's keeper that makes this country work. It's what allows us to pursue our individual dreams and yet still come together as one American family." On Election Day, Obama defeated Republican Alan Keyes with 70 percent of the vote.[4]

When Obama took his seat at the start of the 109th Congress (2005–2007), he received assignments to three committees: Foreign Relations; Environment and Public Works; and Veterans' Affairs. In the 110th Congress (2007–2009), Obama left Environment and Public Works and gained two additional committee posts: Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs; and Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions. During the 110th Congress he chaired the Foreign Relations Committee's Subcommittee on European Affairs and oversaw confirmation hearings of United States ambassadors to European countries.[5]

In the 109th Congress, Obama teamed up with Senator Richard Green Lugar of Indiana, the chair of the Foreign Relations Committee, on a new nonproliferation effort. During a congressional visit to Ukraine, the pair documented weapons caches—including land mines, artillery shells, and shoulder-launch missiles—stored in industrial complexes. "Loose stocks of small arms and other weapons also help fuel civil wars in Africa and elsewhere," Obama and Lugar wrote in the *Washington Post*, "and, as we have seen repeatedly, provide ammunition for those who attack peacekeepers and aid workers seeking to stabilize and rebuild war-torn societies." Their joint measure, the Cooperative Proliferation Detection, Interdiction Assistance, and Conventional Threat Reduction Act—known as the Lugar–Obama initiative—designated annual State Department funds to countries that decreased stockpiles of those types of weapons. The initiative was included in the Department of State Authorities Act and signed into law on January 11, 2007.[6]

Obama also sought federal aid to address deadly conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Beginning in 1998, more than 4 million people had died as the nation endured violence among warring militia groups. In late 2005, Obama introduced the Democratic Republic of the Congo Relief, Security, and Democracy Promotion Act, which designated $52 million in 2006 and 2007 for humanitarian relief, security, and support for democratic elections. After being approved by the Senate and House, President George W. Bush signed it into law on December 22, 2006. The bill identified "the high prevalence of sexual abuse and violence" as an immediate threat to women and children in the country, and Obama urged Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice to investigate and hold accountable those responsible for systematic rape and torture during the conflict.[7]

In 2007, Obama introduced legislation to prohibit federal agencies from selling government reserves of mercury. The Department of Energy possessed large quantities of the toxic heavy metal, leftover from hydrogen bomb manufacturing techniques that had been obsolete since the 1960s. Mercury was frequently used to mine gold in other parts of the world, and U.S. officials considered selling the stockpiles to countries that lacked environmental regulations governing its use. Prohibiting such sales and limiting the potential for pollution "means less microscopic mercury on one's dinner plate, less mercury in our kids' tuna fish sandwiches, and less mercury in the air we breathe," Obama said when he introduced the bill. "A small act of international leadership by the United States government could have far reaching benefits for the health of our kids, as well as millions of low-income hardworking artisanal gold miners whom we will never meet." President Bush signed the bill into law on October 14, 2008.[8]

In 2008, Obama won the Democratic presidential nomination. On November 4, 2008, he was elected President of the United States, defeating the Republican nominee, Arizona Senator John Sidney McCain III, with 53 percent of the popular vote and with 365 electoral college votes. He became the nation's first Black President. Obama resigned from the Senate on November 16, 2008. In 2012, he was re-elected to a second term as President over Republican challenger Willard Mitt Romney with 51 percent of the popular vote and 332 Electoral College votes.[9]

Obama's presidency opened amid the worst financial crisis in a generation. For much of his first term, Obama focused on the nation's economic recovery, while also working to promote equality and initiate a major health care reform. The first piece of legislation Obama signed into law was the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act. Lilly Ledbetter, a manager at a tire manufacturing company, had been paid less than her male colleagues in the same position. After winning a lawsuit against her employer, an appeals court determined that the statute of limitations had passed. Ledbetter challenged the decision all the way to the Supreme Court. The Court ruled that employees could not challenge pay discrimination 180 days after the employer made the original pay adjustment. The Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act, signed into law on January 29, 2009, amended the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and allowed the 180-day period to reset after each paycheck rather than the initial decision.[10]

The next month, on February 17, 2009, Obama signed the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act to address the economic damage caused by the 2008 Great Recession. The law designated nearly $800 billion in funding to government and private agencies, states, and individuals. The bill passed Congress largely on party lines: no Republicans in the House voted for it and only three Republicans supported it in the Senate.[11]

On March 23, 2010, Obama enacted the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, also known as the ACA or Obamacare, one of the administration's major legislative efforts. The act reformed the United States health care system and required all citizens to have health insurance. It created new tax policies for medical and pharmaceutical companies and provided federal funding for states to expand Medicaid coverage.[12]

In December 2010, Obama repealed the military's "don't ask, don't tell" policy enacted by the William J. Clinton administration in 1994. The policy barred openly gay and bisexual men and women from serving in the military, claiming they would present an "unacceptable risk" to the efficiency of the armed services, and prohibited service members from discussing their sexuality and military officials from asking. The repeal of the discriminatory policy opened access to veterans benefits to thousands of troops who had been dismissed under the law with an "other than honorable discharge" classification. After the policy's repeal, sexuality was no longer a legal barrier to serving in the military.[13]

On national security and foreign policy, Obama supervised the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, directing a troop surge in Afghanistan in 2009, and also oversaw the operation that resulted in the death of Osama bin Laden, the leader of the extremist group responsible for the terrorist attacks against the United States on September 11, 2001. In 2015, Obama forged a nuclear agreement with Iran, which lifted some global sanctions in exchange for restrictions on Iran's nuclear program.[14]

Obama led the nation in grieving after several mass shootings during his presidency. In an effort to reform the nation's gun laws, the administration proposed expanding background checks, banning military-grade assault weapons, and funding for both gun violence research and mental health training. All major measures brought before Congress failed in the U.S. Senate.[15]

Obama nominated two Justices to the Supreme Court of the United States. Justice Sonia Sotomayor took her seat on August 8, 2009, followed by Justice Elena Kagan on August 7, 2010. The President attempted to nominate Merrick Garland to the Court to fill the vacancy caused by the death of Justice Antonin Scalia in 2016, but the Republican-led Senate blocked his efforts. The seat remained vacant until 2017.[16]

Obama's presidency ended on January 20, 2017, with the inauguration of President Donald J. Trump. He continued to support the Democratic Party in his post-presidential career by campaigning for candidates in the 2018 mid-term elections, endorsing voting rights legislation in Congress, and calling for statehood for Washington, DC, and Puerto Rico.[17]

Manuscript Collection

Barack Obama Presidential Library (Hoffman Estates, IL). *Papers*: 1958–2021 (bulk 2007–2017), amount unspecified. The collection includes Barack Obama's presidential records including textual records, web pages, data files, moving images, artifacts, graphic materials, and sound recordings. Collections include: Electronic Records of the Office of the President; Council of Economic Advisers; White House Counsel's Office; Office of Presidential Personnel; National Economic Council; Domestic Policy Council; Office of Public Engagement and Intergovernmental Affairs; Office of Presidential Correspondence; Office of Records Management; Office of Legislative Affairs; National Security Council; Office of Scheduling and Advance; and archived White House websites and social media. The collection also includes Obama's Senate records, 2004–2008.

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Keith Ellison

1963–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

2007–2019

Democrat from Minnesota



Image courtesy of the U.S. House of Representatives Photography Office

In 2007, Keith Ellison became the first African-American lawmaker elected to Congress from Minnesota and the first Muslim to serve in either the U.S. House of Representatives or the U.S. Senate. During his time on Capitol Hill, Ellison routinely had to combat Islamophobia and anti-Muslim sentiment and emerged as a national spokesman for progressive causes. He used his seat on the Financial Services Committee to extend protections and greater opportunity to working-class and minority Americans in the aftermath of the Great Recession. In a speech on the House Floor, Ellison explained that his progressive message was "about a lot of important things to help the quality of life for Americans, Americans of all colors, all cultures, and all faiths, Americans who serve in our Nation's military, who serve us as public employees, Americans who are looking out for us every day to live a high quality of life, to send their kids to school and have a chance at education, to have a decent, respectable retirement, to have some health care, to be able to earn a decent living."[1]

Keith Ellison was born in Detroit, Michigan, on August 4, 1963, the middle of five boys; four, including Ellison, became lawyers and one became a doctor. His parents were Leonard, a psychiatrist, and Clida Martinez Ellison, who managed the family's psychiatry practice and later earned a master's degree in social work.[2]

Ellison's family had long been active in the civil rights movement. In the segregated South, his maternal grandfather, Frank Martinez, braved death threats and cross burnings by the Ku Klux Klan to organize voters as head of the NAACP in Natchitoches, Louisiana. That civil rights legacy inspired Ellison, who graduated from the University of Detroit Jesuit High School and Academy in 1981. During Ellison's years at Wayne State University in the mid-1980s, he converted from Catholicism to Islam. Years later he recalled, "It was Islam's message of social justice and equality that affected me the most and satisfied my spiritual yearning and wondering about God, man, nature, and humanity." Ellison became a leading campus advocate for divestment from the South African apartheid regime. He graduated from Wayne State in 1986 with a bachelor's degree in economics and, four years later, earned a law degree from the University of Minnesota Law School in Minneapolis. He married Kim Dore, and they raised four children. The couple divorced in 2012.[3]

After law school, Ellison remained in Minneapolis and entered private practice. He later joined a nonprofit law firm that provided legal aid to low-income families

and served as the group's executive director. In 1998, he unsuccessfully sought the Democratic-Farmer-Labor Party (DFL) nomination for a seat in the Minnesota state house of representatives. Four years later, he ran again and won. He served in the state house from 2003 to 2006 and emerged as a sharp critic of the war in Iraq and an advocate for progressive causes.[4]

In 2006, Democratic U.S. Representative Martin Olav Sabo unexpectedly announced his retirement after 28 years in the House. Ellison joined a crowded race to succeed Sabo. The district encompassed Minneapolis, including affluent suburbs along the city's southwest and working-class neighborhoods on the north end. The district was diverse, with sizeable Somali, Hmong, and Latino populations as well as a growing community of Russian Jews. It was the most liberal district in the state with an ethos that one political almanac described as merging "the Yankee tradition of clean government, the Scandinavian tradition of cooperative enterprise and the industrial-labor tradition of economic redistribution."

During the primary, Ellison put forth a progressive agenda—backing proposals for universal health care, environmental justice, and the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq. He attracted allies of the late Minnesota Senator Paul David Wellstone, a national liberal leader who died in a 2002 plane crash. "I have the passion of a Wellstone and the practicality of a Sabo," Ellison said. During the primary, Ellison was questioned about his ties to the Nation of Islam and its controversial leader, Louis Farrakhan. Opposition researchers discovered comments Ellison had made in law school about Farrakhan, raising concerns among Democrats about his defense of the Nation of Islam. He was also asked about his role organizing a group of Minnesotans to attend the "Million Man March" that Farrakhan led alongside other groups in 1995. Ellison responded that he had never been a member of Farrakhan's organization and that he rejected Farrakhan's many anti-Semitic statements.

Ellison secured the DFL nomination in September, and in the general election faced Republican Alan Fine, a business consultant and lecturer at the University of Minnesota. Ellison kept the focus of his campaign on progressive issues, but Fine, who is Jewish, continued to question his association with the Nation of Islam; at one point, Ellison sent a letter to the Jewish Community Relations Council in Minneapolis rejecting Farrakhan and his followers, calling them anti-Semitic.[5]

On Election Day, Ellison prevailed with almost 56 percent of the vote. "I feel a tremendous sense of responsibility," Ellison said. "I feel like I've got a lot of work to do. I feel like I've got to pull people together and keep them together." Ellison won re-election to the House five times, taking between 67 and 75 percent of the vote.[6]

Ellison's election garnered international media attention; many Muslims viewed it as a counterbalance to negative portrayals of their faith. "I think a lot of Muslims feel highly vulnerable and feel that they are under a tremendous amount of scrutiny," Ellison told the *New York Times* shortly after his victory. When asked if he intended to be a spokesman for the larger Muslim community in the United States, Ellison replied "I'm not qualified to be that. I'm not a religious leader and I'm not a scholar." Ellison promised to focus on the needs of his district and work to solve issues in Congress "from a standpoint of improving the quality of civil and human rights for all people in America."[7]

Following Ellison's victory, conservative media attacked him with bigoted criticism over his faith. One radio host declared that Ellison threatened to "undermine American civilization." In a similar vein, Republican Representative Virgil H. Goode Jr. of Virginia wrote in a letter to his constituents that without restrictive immigration laws more Muslims would be elected to Congress and that they would demand to take the oath of office on the Quran. Neither attack acknowledged that Ellison had been born in the United States (on his mother's side he could trace his Louisiana roots back more than 200 years) and that Members of the House do not take the official oath of office on any text whatsoever—religious or secular. Instead, they raise their right hands and recite the oath *en masse* as it is administered by the Speaker of the House in the chamber on Opening Day. After taking the official oath Members often do use religious texts or a copy of the Constitution for optional ceremonial photographs in which they, along with family and friends, pose with the Speaker outside the chamber. For his ceremonial swearing-in, Ellison borrowed Thomas Jefferson's 1764 copy of the Quran from the Library of Congress.[8]

Ellison entered Congress as part of a large class of first-term Democrats who, collectively, flipped the majority for the 110th Congress (2007–2009). Democrats assigned Ellison to seats on the Financial Services Committee and the Judiciary Committee. He left the Judiciary Committee in the following Congress and picked up a seat on the Foreign

Affairs Committee, where he served a single term. After Democrats returned to the minority in the 112th Congress (2011–2013), Ellison lost his Foreign Affairs seat. For the remainder of his House career, his sole assignment was on Financial Services.[9]

Ellison often appeared in the media and spoke nationally on topics including environmental protection, universal health care, U.S. policy in the Middle East, and the need to create a federal department of peace. In the 112th Congress, he was co-chair of the Congressional Progressive Caucus. By the end of his second term in the House, Ellison served on the Democratic Steering and Policy Committee, which makes committee assignments, and was named a national chair of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee.[10]

In his 12 years in the House, Ellison introduced more than 200 bills and resolutions. His primary contributions came from his work on the Financial Services Committee, where he sought to counteract predatory lending and foreclosure practices, especially those that disproportionately affected people of color. Ellison noted that even before the Great Recession hit in 2008, working-class families struggled and fell further into debt from which lenders profited. "From unfair high-interest credit cards, to payday loans and tax-refund anticipation loans, a whole industry has spawned to take advantage of working families trying to make ends meet," he wrote in an op-ed. "Ensuring that working families are protected from credit abuse will help Americans have more money in their monthly budgets to afford healthcare, college for their children and food for their table."[11]

At the height of the Great Recession, Ellison supported legislation designed to reform the banking and financial services industry. He authored a bill to prevent credit card companies from raising interest rates based on a consumer's late payment history on other loans. The bill was included as a provision in the 2009 Credit Cardholders' Bill of Rights that President Barack Obama signed into law in May 2009. As many home rental properties fell into foreclosure and changed ownership, Ellison introduced the Protecting Tenants at Foreclosure Act of 2009 to prevent new landlords from terminating renters' existing leases without giving sufficient notice. Much of the bill was incorporated in the Helping Families Save Their Homes Act, which became law in May 2009.[12]

In August 2014, Ellison's Money Remittances Improvement Act also became law. The bill streamlined the regulation of money transfers and brought federal regulatory practices in line with state banking agencies. The law eased the transfer of money between the United States and other countries, particularly for immigrants in America who sent money to support families overseas. The legislation was important to Ellison's constituents, including the large Somali population in the Minneapolis area.[13]

During the 115th Congress (2017–2019), Ellison's Credit Access and Inclusion Act passed the House unanimously. The measure, which provided expanded access to affordable credit to millions of low-income and minority households, would have amended the Fair Credit Reporting Act to allow people to report certain positive consumer credit data—including rent or utility payment history—to consumer reporting agencies. The bill passed the House on a voice vote but failed to clear committee in the Senate.[14]

From his seat on Foreign Affairs—and even before his service on the committee—Ellison addressed the conflict between Israel and Palestine. In a March 2008 floor speech, he condemned rocket attacks from inside the Gaza Strip that hit Israeli towns, noting that "if we want to be morally consistent, we must … also condemn the humanitarian crisis in Gaza too." In January 2009, Ellison was one of a group of about two dozen Democrats who voted "present" on a resolution that stated that Israel had the right to defend itself from Palestinian attacks that originated in the Gaza Strip. Later that year he became one of the first high-level U.S. officials to enter the Gaza Strip after Israel had sealed it off to conduct recurring military strikes to expose Hamas militants. Ellison also visited Israeli towns hit by rockets fired from within Gaza. Taken aback by the destruction he saw during his trip, he later told a reporter, "I've always believed we need to resolve this thing by diplomacy. I'm even more convinced of that now." In 2011, Ellison joined a number of prominent American Muslims to demand that Hamas release an Israeli prisoner who had been held for five years; Hamas later included the man in a prisoner swap.[15]

Following the 2010 elections, conservatives with the Tea Party movement targeted Ellison's religious background and, once again, former and current House colleagues joined the anti-Muslim chorus. Republican Allen West of Florida described Ellison in 2011 as "the antithesis of the principles upon which this country was established." Ellison also dealt with personal attacks from Republican Representative Michele Bachmann—a member of his home state's congressional delegation. In 2012, Bachmann accused

Ellison of being tied to the Muslim Brotherhood, an international Sunni Islamist organization linked to terrorist groups and influential in some Middle Eastern countries.[16]

During his career, Ellison regularly rebutted the false and discriminatory allegations that American Muslims were being radicalized. When the House Committee on Homeland Security held hearings into "the extent of radicalization in the American Muslim community" in 2011, Ellison was one of the first witnesses to appear before the panel. Fighting back tears during part of his testimony, Ellison told the committee that such an inquiry threatened to isolate American Muslims and stoke unjustified fears about their allegiance. "The best defense against extreme ideologies is social inclusion and civic engagement," he said. Ellison told the story of Mohammad Salman Hamdani, a 23-year-old New York City police cadet and paramedic, who was one of hundreds of first responders killed on September 11, 2001. Until Hamdani's remains were located, conspiracy theorists speculated that he had been in league with the attackers. Hamdani, Ellison concluded, "was a fellow American who gave his life for other Americans, and his life should not be identified as just a member of an ethnic group or just a member of a religion, but as an American who gave everything for his fellow Americans."[17]

In November 2016, following Democrat Hillary Rodham Clinton's defeat in the presidential election, Ellison ran to lead the Democratic National Committee (DNC). He faced Tom Perez, who had served as Labor Secretary in President Obama's Cabinet, in a contest that many saw as a proxy battle between the progressive and establishment wings of the party. Ellison had backed Vermont Senator Bernard Sanders's bid for the presidential nomination in 2016, and Sanders backed him for the DNC chairmanship. Perez won but immediately moved to make Ellison the DNC's deputy chair.[18]

In 2018, Ellison jumped late into the race for Minnesota attorney general after the incumbent made an unsuccessful bid for governor. Just days before the primary, Ellison's former girlfriend accused him of abuse. Ellison forcefully denied the accusations, which came amid the #MeToo movement in which women across the country spoke out about their personal experiences with harassment and assault. The allegation sparked calls for Ellison to drop out of the race. A private investigative attorney later determined that Ellison's accuser lacked evidence, and Ellison went so far as to call for an investigation by the House Ethics Committee. In the end, Ellison prevailed over his opponent 49 to 45 percent. Ellison, whose term will expire in early 2023, became the first African American elected to statewide office in Minnesota and the first Muslim elected to statewide office anywhere in the country.[19]

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Laura Richardson

1962–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

2007–2013

Democrat from California



Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

In 2007, Laura Richardson won a special election to the U.S. House of Representatives to fill the seat held by her late boss, Representative Juanita Millender-McDonald of California. Richardson, who had served on the Long Beach city council and in the California state assembly, spent nearly three terms in the House working to improve infrastructure around the city of Los Angeles and bolster national security.

Laura Richardson was born on April 14, 1962, in Los Angeles, California, to Lawrence J. Richardson and Maryann Fritschler. Her father, Larry, worked as an educator, and her mother, Maryann, worked for a local trucking company. Her parents divorced when she was young, and Richardson and her sister, Leslie, were raised by their mother. The family's brief time on government assistance and encounters with racism sparked Richardson's interest in using the political system to improve living conditions in California. Richardson married police officer Anthony Batts in 1997. The couple later divorced.[1]

Richardson attended the University of California, Santa Barbara, before transferring to the University of California, Los Angeles, where she graduated in 1984 with a bachelor's degree in political science. Richardson received a master's in business administration from the University of Southern California in 1996. She worked a variety of private sector jobs—as a marketing director of a document managing company, the owner of a customized clothing company, and as a preschool teacher—before she became a senior staff member in Representative Juanita Millender-McDonald's Southern California district office.[2]

In 1996, Richardson sought the Democratic nomination for a seat in the California state assembly from the Long Beach area but lost in the primary. Four years later, in 2000, she won a spot on the Long Beach city council, narrowly defeating a popular local sports star by six votes. She served on the city council for six years while simultaneously working as an aide to California Lieutenant Governor Cruz Bustamante. In 2006 she was elected to the California state assembly.[3]

On April 21, 2007, Representative Millender-McDonald died after a long battle with cancer. Richardson was one of 18 candidates to run in the June 26 open primary election for the vacant House seat. The district covered low- and middle-income sections of Long Beach, Los Angeles, Compton, and Carson, including coastal areas known for shipping and manufacturing. The district was 43 percent Hispanic and 25 percent Black. In the primary, Richardson

competed with candidates from several political parties, but her main opponents were both Democrats: Millender-McDonald's daughter, Valerie McDonald; and Hispanic state senator Jenny Oropeza. On the day of the election Richardson received the most votes—37 percent—but since no candidate won a majority, a runoff between the top finishers from each party was scheduled for August 21. Richardson's support came primarily from the African-American community, organized labor, and the abortion rights group EMILY's List. In the heavily Democratic district, Richardson won the special election with 67 percent of the vote over Republican John Kanaley, a Long Beach police officer. Richardson was sworn into the 110th Congress (2007–2009) on September 4, 2007.[4]

Facing re-election to the full term only months later, Richardson won the 2008 Democratic primary easily with 74 percent of the vote. Richardson faced no Republican opposition in the general election and prevailed with 75 percent of the vote against several write-in candidates. In the 2010 general election, she defeated Republican Star Parker, a columnist and author, with 68 percent of the vote.[5]

In the House, Richardson inherited Millender-McDonald's assignment to the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, where she sat for the duration of her career. She was also appointed to a seat on the Science and Technology Committee but traded that post for a seat on the Homeland Security Committee in the 111th and 112th Congresses (2009–2013). In early 2010, Richardson was appointed chair of the Homeland Security Subcommittee on Emergency Communications, Preparedness, and Response. In late 2010, she was elected to the influential House Democratic Steering and Policy Committee, which helped make committee assignments and set party strategy.[6]

During her service on the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, Richardson focused on improving the roads and ports in her district, which handled a large portion of the nation's international shipping. In April 2010, Richardson testified at an Appropriations Committee hearing, where she implored her colleagues for more infrastructure funding. She pointed to a bridge in her district, over which 10 percent of cargo entering the United States traveled. "The Gerald Desmond Bridge is the de facto trade highway gateway to the Nation," she noted. "However, the bridge is now reduced to wearing a diaper … to catch the concrete and debris that falls daily from its underside." The bridge eventually received federal funding for a full replacement. Richardson introduced several bills seeking to raise taxes to pay for infrastructure projects. One bill would have increased the tax on diesel fuel by 12 cents a gallon and another would have raised harbor taxes on container ships. Tax revenues in both bills would have been deposited in a trust fund dedicated to projects to improve the flow of cargo. In 2008, she passed a law to name a half-mile stretch of California's Route 91 in Los Angeles County after Millender-McDonald. The highway had been part of the late Representative's California assembly district and her House district throughout her career.[7]

From her position on the Homeland Security Committee—especially as chair of the Subcommittee on Emergency Communications, Preparedness, and Response—Richardson focused on port security. In 2012, two of her bills to improve security at U.S. import/export centers were included in the bipartisan SMART Port Security Act. The first measure provided funding for local and state government agencies to administer security services in ports. The second gave administrators more flexibility to use funds to repair or replace security equipment. "Ports are the first line of defense at our sea borders and serve vital national interests," she observed. The bill passed 402 to 21 in the House but died in the Senate. Richardson's subcommittee also held jurisdiction over legislation pertaining to disaster preparedness. She presided over several oversight hearings on the overhaul of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. One of her hearings revealed that FEMA's Office of Disability Integration and Coordination, tasked with ensuring that the government's disaster response procedures were effective in helping those with disabilities, had only one full time staff member. Believing that FEMA was unprepared to help vulnerable populations after natural disasters, Richardson introduced a bill that would have enabled FEMA to hire new employees in its disability integration office.[8]

The California House delegation faced several changes going into in the 2012 election cycle. In 2010, state voters approved Proposition 14, modifying the open primary so that the top two candidates, regardless of party affiliation, would move on to the November general election. Additionally, an independent citizens' commission was tasked with redrawing California's congressional district boundaries irrespective of an incumbent lawmaker's home

address or party affiliation. In 2012, Richardson found herself facing off with Representative Janice Hahn—a first-term Democratic incumbent—in a primary to represent a new, primarily Hispanic district stretching from San Pedro north through Carson, Compton, north Long Beach, Lynwood, and South Gate.[9]

Richardson also faced investigations into her personal finances by the House Ethics Committee. Shortly after her first election, journalists uncovered financial struggles Richardson had faced in the past—a bank foreclosed on a home she owned in Sacramento and then sold it back to her shortly after. The Ethics Committee investigated whether Richardson knowingly received preferential treatment from the lender on account of her status as a Member of Congress. In July 2010, an Ethics Committee report cleared her of any wrongdoing. Two years later, however, the Ethics Committee investigated allegations that Richardson compelled her congressional staff to work on her 2010 campaign and that she obstructed the committee's investigation. In August 2012, the Ethics Committee recommended a reprimand and a fine, which the House approved.[10]

In the 2012 election, Hahn, who came from a storied Southern California political family, placed first in the open primary with a 20-point margin over Richardson, who placed second. In the general election, Hahn gained the official endorsement from the California Democratic Party; Richardson was backed by the Congressional Black Caucus. Hahn went on to win the general election with 60 percent of the vote.[11]

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Donna F. Edwards

1958–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

2008–2017

Democrat from Maryland



Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

In 2008, Donna F. Edwards won a special election to become the first African-American woman elected to Congress from Maryland. In her nine years in the U.S. House of Representatives, Edwards earned a reputation as a leading progressive who worked to raise the minimum wage, invest in scientific research, and protect women from domestic violence. "People do want change," she said during her primary campaign in 2008. "And the question is whether they have enough confidence and courage. Change is liberating, but it's hard."[1]

Donna Edwards was born in Yanceyville, North Carolina, on June 28, 1958, the second of six children. Her father, John Edwards, served in the United States Air Force, and her mother, Mary, was a homemaker. The family moved frequently with each new duty assignment. After attending high school in New Mexico, Edwards graduated from Thomas Stone High School in Waldorf, Maryland, and completed a bachelor's degree in English from North Carolina's Wake Forest University in 1980. After college, Edwards worked as an assistant director for the United Nations Development Program before moving into the private sector. She later worked as a project engineer for an aerospace company at NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center, in Greenbelt, Maryland. In 1989, she earned a law degree from Franklin Pierce Law Center in Concord, New Hampshire. Edwards married and had one son, Jared, before she divorced her husband. During the separation, Edwards and her son briefly experienced homelessness, relying on a food pantry for meals, before moving in with her mother.[2]

After law school, Edwards worked for a handful of nonprofit advocacy groups in the Washington, DC, area. "I have a passion for working in the nonprofit sector," she recalled. In 1992, she joined Public Citizen and Congress Watch to advocate on consumer issues. Two years later, she moved to the Center for a New Democracy, where she worked on campaign finance reform and rose to the position of executive director. In 1996, she helped found and led the National Network to End Domestic Violence—an issue she confronted in her own marriage. In 2000, Edwards became the executive director of the Arca Foundation, a social equity and justice advocacy group.[3]

In 2006, Edwards challenged seven-term incumbent Representative Albert Russell Wynn in the Democratic primary for a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives from Maryland's Fourth Congressional District. The district, which was 57 percent Black and had a large

population of federal workers, straddled Prince George's and Montgomery Counties and bordered Washington, DC. With her well-funded campaign, Edwards challenged Wynn's support for the Iraq War and the George W. Bush administration's energy policy as well as his ties with the business community. Her campaign gained momentum when bloggers online publicized her candidacy, drawing funds and celebrity endorsements from Barbra Streisand, Danny Glover, and Gloria Steinem. But Wynn narrowly staved off Edwards's challenge that year, winning with 50 percent to her 46 percent.[4]

Edwards filed her candidacy for a rematch against Wynn in May 2007. By the 2008 Democratic primary, Edwards had won the endorsement of MoveOn.org, the National Organization for Women, and EMILY's List. Edwards refused to accept contributions from political action committees and criticized Wynn for accepting campaign donations from special interests. Edwards won the 2008 primary, taking 59 percent of the vote to Wynn's 37 percent. When Wynn resigned at the end of May, Maryland officials set a special election for June 17. Edwards won the special election over Republican challenger Peter James, a technology developer, 81 percent to 18 percent. She went on to win the full term later that fall and easily won re-election in all her subsequent races, even after redistricting in 2012 cut out the Montgomery County portions of her district and expanded its boundaries eastward to include Republican areas in Anne Arundel County.[5]

Edwards's House committee assignments reflected her constituents' interests and concerns. Not only was she a former NASA employee, but her district sat adjacent to world-renowned Goddard Space Flight Center. Her district was also home to thousands of federal workers who commuted daily to the nation's capital, often through heavy traffic. With those considerations in mind, Edwards was appointed to the Science and Technology Committee (which was renamed Science, Space, and Technology in 2011) and to the Transportation and Infrastructure. She also served on the Ethics Committee during the 112th Congress (2011–2013).[6]

Edwards used her seat on the Science, Space, and Technology Committee to support NASA funding and boost measures encouraging minority education in science and mathematics. On Transportation and Infrastructure, Edwards took an interest in mass transit legislation, specifically rail projects in the Washington metropolitan area. She used her seat on the committee to question federal agencies about the lack of funding for projects in her district and Prince George's County, "making them answer questions about why there was this kind of disparity and pushing them to open up the doors of opportunity for this majority African-American county," she later said. She promoted the addition of rail service to connect the two northern ends of the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority system (commonly called Metro) with a new purple line and called on officials to investigate the possibility of rail service on the Woodrow Wilson Bridge connecting Maryland to Virginia south of the District.[7]

On national issues, Edwards supported a resolution to withdraw U.S. forces from Afghanistan and remained critical of the pace of the troop withdrawal from Iraq. In 2008, she only voted for the financial-services bailout after a direct appeal by Democratic presidential nominee Barack Obama. Edwards was a strong advocate for universal health care, having gone for nearly two years without health insurance before she started her nonprofit career. An illness during that period left her with medical debt. "It contributed greatly to the way I think about the health care system," she said of her experience. "If I had been able to [get help] early on and get $20 worth of antibiotics, it would have saved me thousands of dollars, and it would have saved the system thousands of dollars." She cosponsored several bills to provide Medicare for all Americans and authored a provision in the Affordable Care Act that empowers state insurance commissioners to review health insurance rate increases to prevent unjustified price hikes. Two of her recurring pieces of legislation included the WAGES Act—introduced in 2009, 2011, and 2013—which sought to raise the national minimum wage for tipped employees, and her 21st Century Investment Act—introduced in the 111th through the 114th Congress (2009–2017)—which would have improved the tax incentives for conducting research and development in the United States.[8]

Edwards assisted in candidate recruitment for the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee (DCCC) in 2012 before being tapped by Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi of California to lead the effort in 2014. Edwards later said she enjoyed "talking to prospective candidates to recruit them, but also identifying candidates that hadn't come through the traditional sources by calling my friends in organized labor and my friends in the nonprofit sector across the country saying, 'Who do you know?'" Alongside her campaign work, Edwards served as co-chair of the

Democratic Steering and Policy Committee, which determined committee assignments and helped drive the party's agenda in the House. "She's already achieved a status in the caucus, title or not, as a go-to person, a leader," Pelosi said of Edwards in 2014. Although she made significant inroads in her party's caucus, she failed to develop a similar rapport within the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC). "I defeated their guy," she reflected, referring to her predecessor Albert Wynn. "I think some people never really got over that."[9]

When Barbara Ann Mikulski announced her retirement from the U.S. Senate, Edwards declared her candidacy for the open seat in March 2015, pledging to champion "the middle-class American dream." She quickly won the endorsement of EMILY's List and other progressive groups, but the CBC refused to endorse either her or her Democratic challenger, fellow Maryland Representative Christopher Van Hollen. Edwards ended up losing to Van Hollen in the primary, 53 to 39 percent. In her concession speech, Edwards voiced a number of concerns about the future of her party, including issues she had faced in the House. "What I want to know from my Democratic Party is, when will the voices of people of color, when will the voices of women, when will the voices of labor, when will the voices of black women, when will our voices be effective, legitimate equal leaders in a big-tent party?"[10]

After finishing her term in the 114th Congress (2015–2017), Edwards got behind the wheel of an RV she christened "Lucille" and drove around the country, visiting national parks and spending time at historic sites, including the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama. She used the trip to connect to people and places "who are not centered around Washington," she said in an interview midway through her travels. Improving access and opportunities for underrepresented communities remained forefront during her cross-country trip. "There are 104 women who serve in the United States Congress, a very small percentage of them are Black and Brown women," she said in 2017. "We need many more women in every step of our elected office." Edwards also worked as a political commentator and newspaper columnist.[11]

Manuscript Collection

Wake Forest University, Special Collections and Archives, Z. Smith Reynolds Library (Winston-Salem, NC). *Papers*: ca. 2008–2016, 6.92 linear feet. The collection includes letters, information on congressional trips, photographs, budget documents, and information about committees on which Donna F. Edwards served. An inventory is available online. The collection is open for limited research.

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Marcia L. Fudge

1952–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

2008–2021

Democrat from Ohio



Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

In 2008, Marcia L. Fudge won election to the U.S. House of Representatives after a career as an administrator and local elected official. Representing one of the poorest districts in the country, Fudge's legislative agenda focused on improving nutrition, education, health care, agriculture, and voting rights, and sought to ensure that the federal government provided support and protection for poor and working-class Americans. Fudge implored her colleagues in Congress to "talk more about how we lift people out of poverty."[1]

Marcia L. Fudge was born in Cleveland, Ohio, on October 29, 1952. Fudge's parents were divorced, and she lived with her mother, Marian Saffold, a lab technician and union organizer. Fudge's first brush with politics came as a volunteer with the 1967 mayoral campaign for Carl Stokes, Cleveland's first African-American mayor and brother of U.S. Representative Louis Stokes of Ohio. "Even as a kid, I thought I was an organizer," Fudge said. She graduated from Shaker Heights High School in 1971 and earned a bachelor's degree from The Ohio State University in Columbus, Ohio, in 1975. She earned a law degree from the Cleveland Marshall School of Law at Cleveland State University in 1983. While studying law, Fudge clerked for municipal judge Stephanie Tubbs Jones whom she met through their membership in the same sorority.[2]

After law school, Fudge worked in the Cuyahoga County government as director of its budget commission and personal property tax department. In the 1990s, Fudge went back to work as finance director for Stephanie Tubbs Jones, who was serving as Cuyahoga County prosecutor at the time. When Jones was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1998, Fudge joined her in Washington as chief of staff. In 2000, Fudge returned to Ohio and was elected the first African American and the first woman to serve as mayor of Warrensville Heights. She held the mayor's office for two terms.[3]

Jones died suddenly in August 2008 during her fifth term in the House, and because she had already won the Democratic nomination for the election that fall, the district's Democratic executive committee was responsible for appointing a candidate to take her place in the general election. Fudge campaigned for the nomination, calling upon members of the committee to submit her name. On September 11, 2008, committee members selected Fudge as their candidate. Because Jones's death also created a vacancy in the final months of the 110th Congress (2007–2009),

Fudge also declared her candidacy for the special election to serve out the remainder of the term. In October 2008, Fudge won the nomination for the special election to the 110th Congress with 67 percent of the vote. Ohio's Eleventh District was majority Black and, at the time, encompassed downtown Cleveland and its eastern suburbs. Fudge won election to the 111th Congress (2009–2011) with 85 percent of the vote, and two weeks later, she won a special election to serve out the final six weeks of the 110th Congress. Fudge won her next five re-elections with no less than 79 percent of the vote, maintaining close relationships in her district and writing a regular "Congresswoman's Corner" column in the *Call & Post*, Cleveland's weekly African-American newspaper.[4]

Upon winning election, Fudge asked Speaker Nancy Pelosi of California for assignments to the Financial Services and Education and Labor Committees. Fudge was granted the latter request alongside a seat on the Science, Space, and Technology Committee in the 111th Congress. When Democrats entered the minority in the 112th Congress (2011–2013), Fudge moved to the Committee on Agriculture and remained on Science, Space, and Technology. Fudge left the Science, Space, and Technology committee mid-Congress to fill a vacancy on the newly renamed Education and the Workforce Committee in the 112th Congress. When Democrats regained the majority in 2019, Fudge joined the Committee on House Administration and chaired its Subcommittee on Elections, as well as the Agriculture Committee's Subcommittee on Nutrition, Oversight, and Department Operations.[5]

Throughout Fudge's congressional career, she prioritized access to quality education. In 2015, as a member of the conference committee for the first reauthorization in 13 years of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Fudge worked to protect federal funding for school districts with low-income students and advocated for "the equitable allocation of resources to schools." In the 116th Congress (2019–2021), she pushed to improve college affordability as Congress prepared to reauthorize the Higher Education Act. In 2018 and 2019, Fudge introduced the Strength in Diversity Act to distribute grants to fund local educational programs to increase diversity in schools. The first bill never received a floor vote, but a more receptive Democratic majority approved the bill in the 116th Congress, though the Republican-controlled Senate failed to vote for it.[6]

On the Agriculture Committee, Fudge worked to protect and expand nutrition programs and improve access to healthy foods. In the 111th Congress, she sponsored a successful resolution to designate September as Childhood Obesity Awareness Month. In 2014 and 2018, Fudge sat on the conference committee to finalize the massive farm bill. She advocated for provisions that avoided cuts to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program—which provides federal aid for food for those in need—and expanded access to healthy foods. "Programs that affect child nutrition," Fudge said, were "essential tools in the fight to end child hunger." She also pushed to allow disadvantaged farmers to access to grants and loans through the U.S. Department of Agriculture. In the 116th Congress, Fudge sponsored the Farm to School Act, which sought to supply America's schools with healthy foods grown locally by veteran and disadvantaged farmers. She also introduced the School MEALS Act to expand access to school nutrition programs. Neither bill made it out of committee.[7]

Fudge was elected chair of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) for the 113th Congress (2013–2015). "We call ourselves the conscience of the Congress. We focus on things that affect 'the least of these,' but as well, we focus on things that we think are going to move this country forward," said Fudge. As caucus chair, Fudge challenged President Barack Obama to nominate more African Americans to his Cabinet at the start of his second term in 2013. She also pressed for more input from Black lawmakers in shaping immigration policy, citing the number of immigrants to America of African or Caribbean descent. In 2014, Fudge introduced a concurrent resolution authorizing a celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 in the Capitol Rotunda. Speaking at the event, which included a posthumous presentation of Congressional Gold Medals to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Coretta Scott King, Fudge called the 1964 bill "one of the most significant pieces of legislation in our history." Congress had awarded the gold medals in 2004 and they were donated to the collection of the National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, DC.[8]

In August 2014, Fudge led the CBC response to the killing of Michael Brown, an unarmed Black man shot six times by a uniformed police officer in the St. Louis, Missouri, suburb of Ferguson. On the House Floor, CBC members criticized the local police for suppressing protests following the incident and discussed the importance of

community policing. "The startling images we saw of the police response to civil protest in Ferguson, Missouri, were in stark contrast to the citizens exercising their constitutional right to be heard," Fudge declared in early September. After the grand jury declined to indict Brown's assailant in late November, Fudge condemned the decision as a "miscarriage of justice" that failed to provide "some reassurance that Black and brown boys' lives do matter."[9]

In the summer of 2016, Fudge was selected to replace Representative Debbie Wasserman-Schultz as permanent chair of the Democratic National Convention following controversy that stemmed from a batch of leaked emails. Although she had a prominent national platform, Fudge at times found herself at odds with party leadership in the House. Later in 2016, she backed fellow Ohio Democrat Timothy J. Ryan in his failed attempt to replace Nancy Pelosi as Democratic Leader. When Democrats regained the majority in the House following the 2018 midterm elections, Fudge considered challenging Pelosi for the Speakership. Fudge's potential candidacy created concern within the CBC; many of its members felt a strong loyalty to Pelosi and Representative James E. Clyburn of South Carolina, who held the third position in House Democratic leadership. Following several meetings, Pelosi arranged for Fudge to chair the House Administration Committee's new Subcommittee on Elections. The move assured Fudge that Black women would "have a seat at the decision-making table" and led her to drop her challenge.[10]

As chair of the Subcommittee on Elections, Fudge held field hearings across the country to examine the state of voting rights in America. Findings from the hearings were used to develop a Committee on House Administration report on what it called "the array of tactics used to suppress the votes of targeted communities." Fudge dismissed claims of voter fraud as "a lie" and challenged the wave of voter identification laws passed around the country. "These laws are specifically designed to keep young people, the poor, the elderly and the disabled from voting," she explained.[11]

On December 10, 2020, President-elect Joseph R. Biden Jr. nominated Fudge to serve as Secretary of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) in his administration. Although Fudge had originally campaigned to lead the Department of Agriculture, she accepted the HUD nomination. "If I can help this president in any way possible, I am more than happy to do it," she said. "It's a great honor and a privilege to be a part of something so good." After being confirmed by the Senate, Fudge resigned from the House on March 10, 2021, and was sworn in as Secretary of Housing and Urban Development.[12]

Manuscript Collection

The Ohio State University, Ohio Public Policy Archives (Columbus, OH). *Papers*: ca. 2008–2021. The papers span Marcia L. Fudge's terms in the U.S. House of Representatives and include legislative files, correspondence, speeches, audiovisual materials, and artifacts. The papers are closed until processed.

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Roland Burris

1937–

UNITED STATES SENATOR

2009–2010

Democrat from Illinois

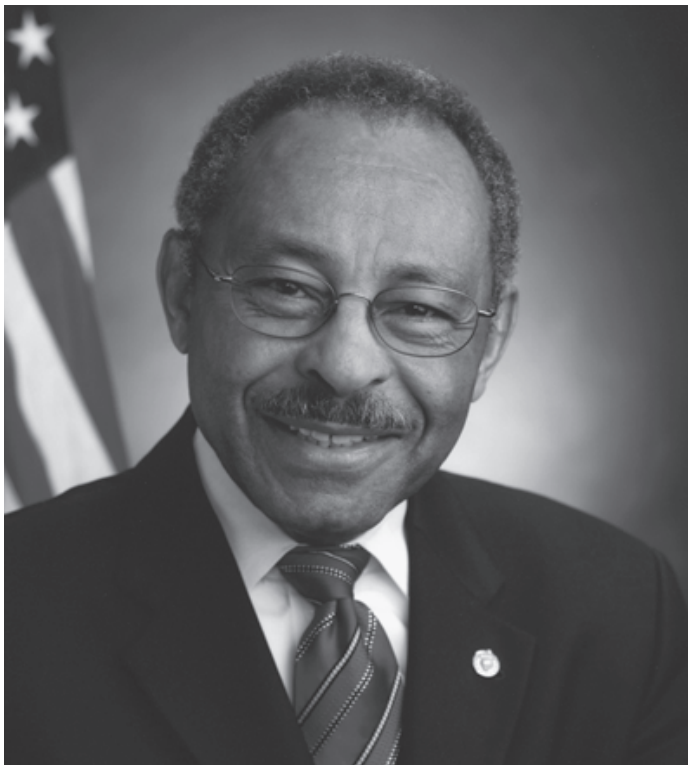

Image courtesy of the U.S. Senate Historical Office

Roland Burris, a longtime Illinois state official, was appointed to the U.S. Senate on December 31, 2008, to succeed President-elect Barack Obama, becoming the sixth African American to serve in the Senate. Before serving on Capitol Hill, Burris had spent his life focusing on law and politics. As a teenager, Burris, whose father was vice president of the local NAACP chapter near their home in Centralia, Illinois, had protested and integrated a local segregated swimming pool. That success motivated Burris to pursue public office and continue his focus on civil rights. "If we, as a race of people, are going to get anywhere in this society," he said in 2009, "we've got to have lawyers and elected officials who are responsible and responsive—that's what my dad said, and it resonated with me."[1]

Roland W. Burris was born on August 3, 1937, in Centralia, Illinois, the youngest of Earl L. and Emma M. Burris's three children. His father worked on the railroad. Burris graduated from Centralia High School and earned a bachelor's degree in political science from Southern Illinois University in Carbondale in 1959. In 1963, Burris earned a law degree from Howard University, a historically Black university in Washington, DC. Burris worked as a federal bank examiner after law school and then as a bank vice president. From 1973 to 1976, he was director of the Illinois state department of general services in the cabinet of Governor Daniel Walker. Burris married Berlean Miller in 1961; they raised two children: Rolanda and Roland II.[2]

Burris made his first bid to be Illinois's comptroller in 1976, losing in the Democratic primary to the eventual winner, Michael Bakalis. When Bakalis sought the Illinois governorship in 1978, Burris ran to succeed him as comptroller. Burris won 52 percent of the vote and defeated Republican John W. Castle—a former local government affairs official for the state—in the November 7, 1978, general election. Burris became the first African-American candidate elected to statewide office in Illinois. He was re-elected twice and served as comptroller from January 1979 to January 1991. In 1990, Burris was elected Illinois state attorney general and served until 1995.[3]

In 1994, 1998, and 2002, Burris unsuccessfully sought the Democratic nomination for Illinois governor. After placing third in the 2002 Democratic gubernatorial primary, he worked as a lawyer and political consultant. Six years later, on December 31, 2008, Illinois Governor Rod Blagojevich, who had defeated Burris in the 2002 primary, selected Burris to fill the unexpired term of former Senator

Obama, who had resigned after winning the presidency that fall. The appointment came just three weeks after federal law enforcement officers had arrested Blagojevich for attempting to sell the seat. Despite the controversy and heightened scrutiny, Burris denied any wrongdoing associated with Blagojevich and accepted the appointment.[4]

Multiple investigations at the state and federal levels followed, and Burris was never formally charged with misconduct. He arrived on Capitol Hill to be sworn in on January 6, 2009, but the Sergeant at Arms denied him access to the Senate Chamber. Because of Blagojevich's legal trouble, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid of Nevada and Assistant Majority Leader Richard Joseph Durbin of Illinois refused to seat Burris without the signature of the Illinois secretary of state, Jesse White. White initially refused to sign the necessary paperwork but approved the appointment three days later on January 9, 2009. The Senate then considered Burris's credentials to be in order, and Vice President Richard B. Cheney administered the oath of office to Burris in the Senate on January 15, 2009.[5]

In the Senate, Burris served on three committees: Armed Services; Veterans' Affairs; and Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs. He supported President Obama's legislative agenda, including economic stimulus legislation to combat the recession, and the repeal of "don't ask, don't tell," enabling gay military members to serve openly. He also supported representation for the District of Columbia in the Senate. At one point, Burris secured a meeting with President Obama after threatening to withhold his vote on the President's signature health care bill, the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, unless it included a public insurance option. When the final version of the bill did not include a public option, Burris clarified that the legislation accomplished what he wanted without it. "I got a compromise from him that there would be cost accountability and competition," he said about his dealings with the President. A full third of Burris's sponsored legislation consisted of a flurry of bills submitted on October 30, 2009, each of which proposed single-line edits to the tariff code either suspending or extending the duty provisions on various chemicals or other goods. He introduced each bill without comment on the Senate Floor.[6]

Much of Burris's other legislative work involved memorializing civil rights leaders and Black pioneers in various fields of study. His resolutions included commemorations of the first African-American Marine recruits, Senator Edward W. Brooke, abolitionist Elijah Parish Lovejoy, and scientist Benjamin Banneker. In 2009 and 2010, Burris authored resolutions, which the Senate adopted unanimously, recognizing the historical significance of Juneteenth. In one of his final floor speeches, Burris memorialized the work of recently deceased Chicago residents Margaret Burroughs, an artist and writer, and Arthur Brazier, a pastor and civil rights leader, praising them for their contributions to advancing humanitarian causes and urging his colleagues not to "forget to recognize those Americans who may not appear in our history books but whose contributions have helped write our American story."[7]

Blagojevich's legal issues and the circumstances of Burris's appointment to the Senate followed Burris to the Hill. The investigations into Burris and his appointment led to strained relationships with Democratic leaders. As federal officials continued to look into Blagojevich's conduct, Burris issued several contradictory statements about his knowledge and involvement. In February 2009, Senator Durbin advised Burris to resign, though Burris publicly declined. In November of that year, the Senate Ethics Committee publicly admonished him for actions that "reflected unfavorably on the Senate." Burris's office responded by claiming the committee's decision "cleared the senator of any legal wrongdoing."[8]

Although Burris had initially promised that he would not seek election to a full term, he filed a statement of candidacy with the Federal Election Commission soon after taking office. He struggled to raise support, however, and soon left the race. Burris was succeeded in the Senate on November 29, 2010, by Republican Representative Mark Steven Kirk of Illinois. After leaving Capitol Hill, Burris retired to his home in Chicago. When asked if he regretted taking Blagojevich's appointment, Burris said simply, "Not at all. I desired it, and I did a very good job for the people of Illinois and for America."[9]

Manuscript Collection

Southern Illinois University, Special Collections Research Center (Carbondale, IL). *Papers*: ca. 2009–2010, approximately 100 cubic feet. Roland Burris's senatorial papers including correspondence, speeches, research files, drafts of legislation, electronic records, photographs, and artifacts. Topics include the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act, Health Care reform bill, and the Wall Street and Consumer Protection Act.

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Hansen Clarke

1957–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

2011–2013

Democrat from Michigan



Image courtesy of the U.S. House of Representatives Photography Office

In 2010, Hansen Clarke unseated a seven-term incumbent in the Democratic primary before winning election to a single term in the U.S. House of Representatives from a Detroit district. His path to the House was as unique as it was unconventional, and in 2005 the *Detroit Free Press* called his life an "underdog story," an "up-from-the-east-side hard-luck tale." The struggle of Clarke's childhood shaped his political philosophy and oriented him toward policies that he hoped would help both Michigan's disadvantaged citizens and its businesses.[1]

Hansen Clarke was born Molik Hashim in Detroit, Michigan, on March 2, 1957, the son of an African-American mother and a Bangladeshi father. His father, Mozaffar Ali Hashim, worked at a Detroit automobile factory but died when Clarke was only eight years old, leaving his mother, Thelma Clarke, to raise him on a school crossing guard's salary. A gifted young artist, Clarke moved east to New Hampshire at age 14 to attend the elite Phillips Exeter Academy with the help of a nonprofit aimed at helping young students of color prepare for college. Surrounded by wealth and prestige, Clarke felt out of place and, after two years, returned home to Detroit. "All I knew was this block … I couldn't handle it," he recalled during a visit to his childhood home years later. Clarke earned a GED but sought a high school diploma before applying to college. Returning to the East Coast, he graduated from the Governor Dummer Academy in Massachusetts in 1976.[2]

Clarke accepted an art scholarship to Cornell University, but his studies were interrupted when his mother died during his freshman year. As he grieved, Clarke returned to Detroit and drove a taxi, eventually going on government assistance. In 1978, he changed his name to Hansen Clarke to honor his mother. Ultimately, he made it back to Cornell with the help of his godmother and graduated with a bachelor's degree in fine arts in 1984. Three years later, Clarke earned a law degree from Georgetown University in Washington, DC.[3]

After law school, Clarke served as the Michigan coordinator for Missouri Representative Richard Andrew Gephardt's unsuccessful presidential bid in 1988. Later that year, he helped organize a coordinated political campaign that ousted several incumbent members of the Detroit school board. His success in that effort led to a position on the staff of Wayne County executive Edward H. McNamara. From late 1989 to 1990, Clarke worked in Detroit as a legislative counsel and district office administrator for

Representative John Conyers Jr. of Michigan. Clarke made the jump to elective office in the early 1990s, serving in the Michigan state house of representatives from 1991 to 1992 and again from 1999 to 2002. In 2003, he began an eight-year stint in the state senate.[4]

In 2005, Clarke ran for mayor of Detroit, pledging to dismantle the patronage system in city hall, but finished fourth in the city primary. After the election, Clarke returned to the state senate and his seat on the appropriations committee, where he protected funding for his beleaguered city. In 2008, as Michigan reeled from the housing crisis, he introduced a popular bill to protect homeowners in foreclosure from being evicted. Later that year, he pushed the governor to overhaul the Detroit public schools as the city system struggled financially. While in the legislature, he met Choi Palms-Cohen, who worked at a legal education nonprofit. They married in 2007.[5]

By 2010, as term limits were about to force Clarke out of the state senate, he considered running for governor before deciding to challenge Representative Carolyn C. Kilpatrick, who had held a Detroit-area seat in the U.S. House since 1997. Kilpatrick's son had been mayor of Detroit from 2002 to 2008, when he resigned after being convicted of obstruction of justice.[6]

Clarke's campaign for the House harkened back to his earlier run for mayor, focusing on the emotion and power of his life story. At the heart of the Thirteenth District was his old neighborhood, which had been plagued by violence over the years. It was a struggle Clarke knew intimately. "All my life I've been afraid that I'm going to wind up on the streets," he said in 2010.[7]

Clarke's campaign stuck to grassroots methods to get out the vote. "I'm from the neighborhood," he reminded his local paper. "So I don't think we're going to need a lot of money for commercials." He also mobilized support in the surrounding suburbs that formed a significant part of his district. He promised to tackle Detroit's high unemployment and foreclosure rates, while also working to limit government spending. Clarke's focus on economic empowerment seemed to blur conventional party divisions, never more directly than when he described his brand of politics as equal parts "Newt Gingrich and Malcolm X."[8]

Clarke's House campaign received a boost shortly before the primary when the *Detroit Free Press*, the city's major newspaper, endorsed him. On August 3, Clarke won the nomination with 47 percent of the vote, which, in the heavily Democratic Thirteenth District, was tantamount to winning the general election. "This was bigger than an opponent and not about the incumbent or a family," Clarke said the night he won. "You must be mindful that elected officials come and go, but people, not politicians, always have the power." In the general election, Clarke easily defeated his Republican opponent, John Hauler, with 79 percent of the vote.[9]

In the House, Clarke was assigned to two committees: Homeland Security and Science, Space, and Technology. His legislative agenda, he said, promised to focus on people as well as businesses in his district. "I've got to work for the employers as well," he observed, "because that's the only way my folks are going to get employed."[10]

By the fall of his first term, Clarke had sketched out an ambitious plan using a similar principle to rescue his hometown: the federal government would return to the city every single tax dollar it collected from Detroit for five years. Clarke estimated his program would be worth $2 billion a year and believed it would balance the city's budget, cover many of Detroit's pension plans, and help pay down its debt. Detroit would also continue to receive the same Medicare and Social Security grants it had always received. To encourage people to move back into the city, Clarke wanted Detroit to slash its property taxes and abolish its personal income tax. Clarke figured Detroit could be the country's pilot program which, if it succeeded, Congress could apply to other cities.[11]

Having served only two years as a member of the minority party, Clarke failed to advance his rescue plan beyond the idea stage, but he was active on a number of legislative fronts. During the 112th Congress (2011–2013), he introduced 26 bills, four House Resolutions, and 12 floor amendments. Some were broad, ambitious pieces of legislation, like his Detroit Growth and Sustainability Act, which authorized $500 million in loans to his hometown. Others were more itemized efforts, like his push to suspend the import fees on products used by the auto industry. Clarke also introduced legislation to improve the lives of disadvantaged and low-income people. He submitted bills to forgive certain student loans and to prohibit auto insurance companies from using credit scores to determine a customer's rates. He successfully offered floor amendments to appropriations bills to boost funding for certain programs, including $5 million for the Women, Infants, and Children Farmers' Market Nutrition Program,

and $5 million for grants to aid veterans experiencing homelessness. Clarke spoke on the floor about reducing America's debt burden, improving the educational system, and protecting labor unions. In the summer of 2011, he and Republican Representative Dan Benishek of northern Michigan toured each other's district to encourage job creation across the state.[12]

Following the 2010 Census, Michigan lost a seat in the House. When the state redrew its district boundaries, the mapmakers split downtown Detroit and its eastern neighborhoods among two new districts, each of which included large swaths of the city's suburbs. In August 2011, Clarke announced he would seek the seat in the new Fourteenth District, which ran northwest from Detroit into Pontiac. Clarke faced multiple candidates in the primary, including another Democratic House incumbent, Gary C. Peters, who had formerly represented the Ninth District. During the campaign, Clarke refused to participate in any of the debates after reports surfaced claiming that his mother's death certificate recorded her race as White. Clarke's campaign released a statement in late June 2012 criticizing "the use of racist rhetoric and race-baiting" during the campaign and a short while later accused his opponents of going "after my dead parents" because "they can't attack my record." Ultimately, Clarke lost the Democratic nomination to Peters, whose margin in the Detroit suburbs propelled him to victory.[13]

After Congress, Clarke worked as an adjunct professor at the University of Detroit Mercy School of Law. Two years later, when Peters announced he would run for the Senate, Clarke announced his candidacy for Michigan's Fourteenth District and ran on a plan to lower America's student loan debt. On Election Day, Clarke lost the primary to Southfield mayor Brenda L. Lawrence.[14]

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Cedric L. Richmond

1973–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

2011–2021

Democrat from Louisiana



Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

After serving for a decade in the Louisiana state house, Cedric L. Richmond won election to the U.S. House of Representatives from a New Orleans district in 2010. During his 10-year congressional career, Richmond chaired both the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) and a Homeland Security subcommittee. Richmond credits his mother for instilling into him a dedication to public service. As he remembered years later, she taught him that "you have to work hard, you have to do everything twice as good as everyone else so you can make it; and two, once you make it, you have an obligation to give back."[1]

Cedric Richmond was born in New Orleans, Louisiana, on September 13, 1973. His father, Sidney Richmond Sr., died when he was seven and his mother, Maple Richmond Gaines, worked as a public school teacher and union leader. Richmond graduated from Benjamin Franklin High School in 1991. He went to the historically Black Morehouse College in Atlanta, Georgia, where he pitched and played centerfield on the school's baseball team. He graduated with a bachelor's degree in 1995 and then earned a law degree from Tulane University in New Orleans in 1998.[2]

In 1999, only a year removed from law school, Richmond won election to Louisiana's state house of representatives, becoming the body's youngest lawmaker at 26 years old. In the state legislature, Richmond advocated for tax incentives for businesses to contribute to recovery efforts in the wake of the 2005 hurricanes Katrina and Rita, pushed to ban assault weapons, and supported the city's recreation department. As a state legislator, he coached the city's youngest baseball players. Richmond is married to Raquel Greenup and has one son.[3]

In 2008, Richmond sought a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives, challenging the nine-term Democrat incumbent William J. Jefferson in a district that was 64 percent Black. Jefferson lost his seat on the House Ways and Means Committee and faced federal corruption charges after being indicted by a grand jury in 2007. "After weighing it, I decided we could no longer afford to have someone representing us who had no meaningful committee assignments," Richmond told the *Times-Picayune*. Jefferson defeated Richmond in the Democratic primary, but he lost the general election to Republican Anh "Joseph" Cao, who became the first Vietnamese American to serve in Congress. Two years later, Richmond again sought the seat and captured the Democratic nomination with 60 percent of the vote. Richmond and Cao agreed

on the need to end the drilling suspension placed in the Gulf Coast after the *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill earlier in the year. But while Cao bolstered his record as the only Republican to vote for the House version of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, Richmond reminded voters that Cao ultimately voted against the final version. Citing Jefferson's legal issues and Cao's party identification, Richmond claimed the heavily Democratic district "had to have the Congressional Black Caucus basically be our congressman by default" in the most recent Congresses. In the general election, Richmond beat Cao with 64.5 percent of the vote. Republicans gained over 60 seats in the House in that election, but Richmond was one of two Democrats nationwide that beat a Republican incumbent. Richmond won his five re-elections handily, earning between 55 and 80 percent of the vote each year.[4]

Upon entering the House, Democratic leadership placed Richmond on the Committee on Small Business and the Committee on Homeland Security. The following Congress, Richmond left Small Business for a seat on the Judiciary Committee. He remained on Judiciary and Homeland Security until September 2020, when he traded seats on both panels for a spot on the Ways and Means Committee.

As a member of the Homeland Security Committee, Richmond worked with the Honor Flight Network—a nonprofit organization that arranged travel plans for veterans to see war memorials in Washington, DC—and introduced the Honor Flight Act in the 113th Congress (2013–2015). The act authorized the Transportation Security Administration to expedite screenings for elderly veterans in similar programs, many of whom were wounded in combat, allowing them to avoid long security lines and metal detectors. President Barack Obama signed the bill into law on December 16, 2014. At the time of the signing, the Honor Flight Network had organized flights for more than 650 veterans.[5]

Throughout his tenure, Richmond focused on recovery from several disasters that directly affected his district. Years after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, Richmond sought aid for his constituents, including loan forgiveness for local universities that used federal money to rebuild their storm-damaged campuses and health monitoring for citizens that were placed in harmful temporary housing. In 2018, he worked with the Department of Homeland Security to ensure New Orleans kept $2 billion of grants from the Federal Emergency Management Agency for sewage repairs. To address the 2010 *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill, Richmond supported his Louisiana colleague Representative Steve Scalise in advancing the RESTORE Act in 2011. The measure, which passed as part of a larger transportation bill, directed 80 percent of the fines from the oil company to states impacted by the spill.[6]

In 2016, Richmond became chair of the CBC. During his time as chair, the CBC focused on expanding affordable housing and decriminalizing marijuana. The caucus also visited historically Black colleges and universities to encourage Black students to engage in politics. Throughout his career Richmond introduced a number of bills to recognize Black history and make federal policies more inclusive. Richmond recognized that his position in Congress was indebted to the centuries of struggle for freedom waged by Black Americans. "We walk in the footsteps of our ancestors and have not yet completed the journeys that they started when they were first forced off overcrowded slave ships onto the shores of this nation. This has been an imperfect union, but it is one that is worth fighting to preserve." In 2016, he introduced a resolution to recognize as official former Members the African-American lawmakers who were elected after the Civil War but were denied their seats in the House. In 2020, he introduced the Creating a Respective and Open World for Natural Hair—or CROWN—Act to bar discrimination in employment or federal assistance programs against people with natural hair texture or hairstyles.[7]

After Democrats captured the House majority for the 116th Congress (2019–2021), Richmond became chair of Homeland Security's Subcommittee on Cybersecurity, Infrastructure Protection, and Innovation. In February 2019, he held a joint hearing with the Subcommittee on Transportation and Maritime Security focused on protecting the nation's surface transportation systems—such as rail, road, and pipelines—from cyberattacks. In August 2020, Richmond led a hearing called "Secure, Safe, and Auditable: Protecting the Integrity of the 2020 Elections." The panel focused on voting security methods as states broadened access to mail-in ballot and early voting options amid the COVID-19 pandemic. "We must prepare Americans for the reality that elections will be administered differently this fall. We must educate voters about vote-by-mail, its related deadlines, and how expanded vote-by-mail might affect the timing of election results," Richmond said in his opening statement. As chair, Richmond introduced several homeland

security related bills, including the State and Local Cybersecurity Improvement Act, which aimed to create grants for states to assess and improve their cybersecurity. He also introduced the Protecting Critical Infrastructure Against Drones and Emerging Threats Act directing the Department of Homeland Security to evaluate the risk of drone attacks. The House passed both pieces of legislation, but the Senate did not report them out of committee.[8]

Around Capitol Hill, Richmond became known for his dominating performances in the Congressional Baseball Game—an annual charity event that pits Democrats and Republicans against each other on the baseball diamond. With his fastball, Richmond led Democrats to an 8 to 2 victory in his rookie game in 2011, finishing with 13 strikeouts. The Democratic team won eight of the nine games Richmond played.[9]

In 2020, Richmond accepted a position in President Joseph R. Biden Jr.'s administration as a senior advisor and director of the Office of Public Engagement. Richmond was an early supporter of Biden's presidential run and worked as co-chair of the campaign. He resigned from the House on January 15, 2021.[10]

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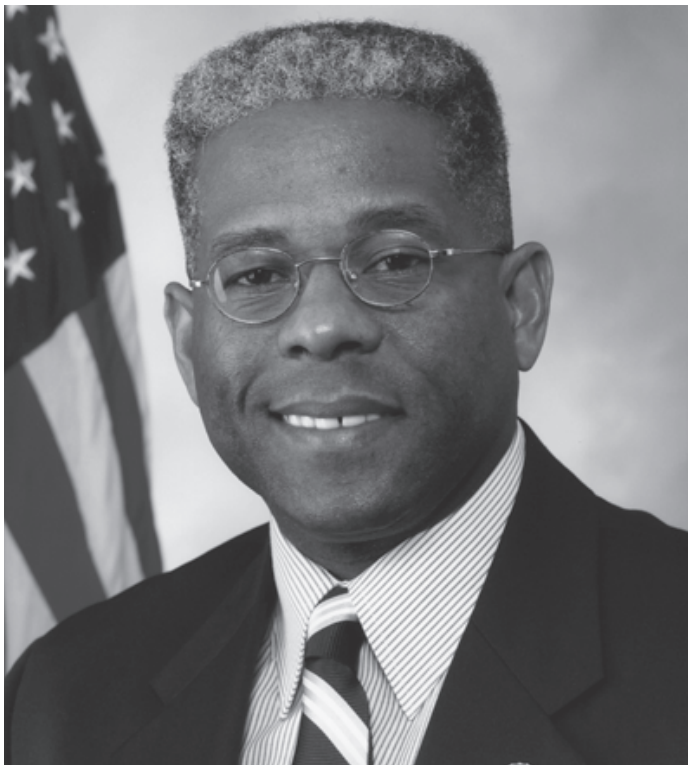
Allen West

1961–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

2011–2013

Republican from Florida



Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

A decorated military veteran, Allen West entered Congress as part of the wave of energized conservative Republicans elected in 2010. During one term in the U.S. House of Representatives, West demonstrated his commitment to cutting taxes and government spending while maintaining national security. "More taxation, regulation, and litigation will not create more jobs," he declared on the House Floor in 2011. Instead, West advocated for "free enterprise, innovation, and entrepreneurship," which he considered the "foundation for economic growth and job creation in America."[1]

Allen West was born on February 7, 1961, in Atlanta, Georgia, to Herman and Elizabeth West. West grew up in a culture of military service—his father and older brother served in combat in World War II and Vietnam, respectively. West's mother worked as a civilian employee for the U.S. Marine Corps. He joined the Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps in the tenth grade before graduating from Henry W. Grady High School in Atlanta. West joined the Reserve Offices' Training Corps (ROTC) while attending the University of Tennessee in Knoxville, where he graduated with a bachelor's degree in political science and a commission as an Army officer in 1983. West trained as an artillery officer and earned two master's degrees while on active duty: a master's in political science from Kansas State University in Manhattan, Kansas, and a master of military art and science from the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College in Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. After his first marriage ended in divorce, West married Angela M. Graham, a financial planner, with whom he had two daughters: Aubrey and Austen.[2]

Over the course of his two-decade Army career, West deployed to Italy, South Korea, and the Middle East—including service in the Gulf War in 1991. While stateside, he served as an ROTC instructor at Kansas State University and was assigned to various leadership roles at Army bases in North Carolina and Texas. West attained the rank of lieutenant colonel and commanded 650 soldiers and officers during his final overseas deployment to Iraq in 2003. During that mission, West investigated an intelligence report of a possible plot by insurgents to attack his battalion. He interrogated an Iraqi policeman and fired a pistol near his head, an intimidation tactic that violated Army policy. West received a fine and resigned from the military with an honorable discharge in 2004. The incident generated a flurry of media attention and West received the

support of many politicians who believed that his actions were necessary to protect his troops. Ninety-five Members of Congress penned a letter to the U.S. Secretary of the Army in support of West. After leaving the military, West moved with his wife to Broward County, Florida, where he worked as a high school teacher and coach for a year before taking a position as a U.S. Department of Defense contractor advising the Afghan military in Kandahar, Afghanistan. With a national profile following his exit from the military, West returned to Florida in 2007 to seek political office for the first time.[3]

In May 2007, West declared his candidacy for a House seat held by first-term Democratic Representative Ron Klein, in a district that stretched across the coastal regions of Broward and Palm Beach counties. The district had been represented by a 13-term Republican Representative before Klein's upset victory in 2006, and registered Republicans still outnumbered Democrats. As the Republican nominee, West ran the first five months of his campaign from Afghanistan, before returning to the United States late in the fundraising cycle. West eventually lost to Klein, taking 45 percent of the vote. West challenged Klein again two years later during the 2010 midterm elections. With the financial support of conservative Republicans aligned with the Tea Party movement, which opposed the Barack Obama administration, West garnered national attention. During the campaign, Klein and West attacked each other with fiery rhetoric and clashed over nearly every issue. West stoked public frustration with the economy and railed against the scope of federal programs. "If we sit complacent … we will find ourselves once again becoming slaves to a tyrannical government," he declared. Klein appealed to the districts' substantial elderly population by vowing to protect Medicare and Social Security benefits, while West rallied against the recently enacted Affordable Care Act, claiming that it would reduce Medicare funding. On Election Day, West defeated Klein in a near reverse of the 2008 results, winning by a margin of 54 to 46 percent. Along with Representative Tim Scott of South Carolina, West was one of the first African-American Republicans to serve in the House since J.C. Watts Jr. of Oklahoma left office in 2003. West was also the first Black Republican to represent Florida in Congress since 1876.[4]

In the 112th Congress (2011–2013), West served on the Armed Services and Small Business Committees. He reached out to groups with divergent beliefs on Capitol Hill, joining both the conservative Tea Party Caucus and the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC), which was composed of Democratic lawmakers. "I think you need to have competing voices in that body," West said of his decision to join the otherwise entirely Democratic CBC. As a Member of the CBC, West accused Black Democratic leaders of not focusing on what he considered to be the needs of Black communities. He threatened to leave the group after several caucus members criticized the Tea Party but ultimately remained a member for the rest of his term. Discussing his beliefs and bold speaking style, West said, "I think it's important to talk about conservative principles and values and not make it such a boogeyman thing." West insisted, "Character always prevails."[5]

Much of West's legislative agenda focused on reforming the tax code. He favored a simplified flat tax, claiming that high tax rates reduced economic growth and eliminated jobs. "You cannot help the job seeker by punishing the job creator with higher taxes," he said in a speech on the House Floor. West introduced a bill that would have allowed small businesses to earn a tax credit for hiring people receiving government unemployment benefits.[6]

From his seat on the Armed Services Committee, West worked to cut spending, introducing two bills to cut the Department of Defense's printing and reproduction budget. On the House Floor, West questioned the need for "expensive, high-gloss color briefing slides," adding that the information "can just as easily be conveyed using plain black-and-white copies." He served on the conference committee for the 2012 National Defense Authorization Act and ensured that his cost-cutting legislation was incorporated into the bill. When a looming January 2013 deadline threatened federal agencies with automatic across-the-board budget rescissions in the absence of congressional action on federal spending, West introduced the National Security and Job Protection Act, which would have required the President to submit an alternative plan to avoid defense cuts through sequestration. West hoped that the bill, which passed the House but faltered in the Senate, would redirect budget cuts toward discretionary spending and away from defense programs. West also submitted legislation that would have required the President to certify that any reduction in overseas military presence would not undermine national security.[7]

After Florida's redistricting took effect in early 2012, West's district in the Boca Raton area along the Atlantic

seaboard was drawn more favorably for Democrats. West decided to seek re-election in the neighboring coastal district to the north, which consisted of the northern tip of Palm Beach County, as well as St. Lucie and Martin counties. Local businessman and Democratic candidate Patrick Murphy had planned to challenge West in his original district, but like West, opted to run in the district to the north. On Election Day, Murphy defeated West with just more than 50 percent of the vote, a margin of less than 2,000 votes. Although the margin was not small enough to trigger an automatic recount, West's campaign filed an injunction to impound voting machines and paper ballots in Palm Beach and St. Lucie counties due to what it described as "disturbing irregularities" in the voting process. Following two weeks of legal action, West conceded on November 20, 2012.[8]

After leaving office in 2013, West worked as a political commentator for various media outlets and launched a political action committee dedicated to electing conservative officeholders. Two years later, he moved to Texas to lead a nonprofit think tank. On July 20, 2020, West won election as chair of the Texas Republican Party. He served in that position until July 2021.[9]

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William "Mo" Cowan

1969–

UNITED STATES SENATOR

2013

Democrat from Massachusetts



Image courtesy of the U.S. Senate Historical Office

William "Mo" Cowan was appointed to the U.S. Senate by Massachusetts Governor Deval Patrick on February 1, 2013, to succeed Senator John Forbes Kerry who had resigned to become U.S. Secretary of State in the Barack Obama administration. Cowan was the first African-American Senator to serve from the commonwealth of Massachusetts since Edward W. Brooke left office in 1979. With Tim Scott of South Carolina having been appointed to the Senate a month earlier, Cowan's appointment marked the first time in U.S. history that two African-American Senators served concurrently. Cowan reflected on his journey from North Carolina to a Senate seat representing Massachusetts, "My mother told me days like today were possible. If you work hard and treat people with respect, there is very little you cannot achieve in this great nation."[1]

William Maurice "Mo" Cowan was born on April 4, 1969, in Yadkinville, North Carolina, to William H. Cowan, a machinist, and Cynthia Cowan, a seamstress. Growing up in North Carolina's rolling foothills in the 1970s and 1980s, Cowan experienced overt acts of anti-Black racism. The Ku Klux Klan burned a cross and distributed literature in his hometown and marched on his local high school, Forbush High. In 1991, Cowan graduated from Duke University in North Carolina with a bachelor's degree in sociology. He moved to Boston, Massachusetts, to pursue a degree in law. "I felt I needed to get beyond North Carolina and see the rest of the world," he said. Cowan graduated with a law degree from Northeastern University in 1994. He remained in Boston where he worked as a litigation associate at several law firms before becoming partner. Cowan and his wife, Stacy, have two sons: Miles and Grant.[2]

In 2009, Governor Patrick asked Cowan to join his administration as his chief legal counsel. From 2009 to 2011, Cowan advised Patrick on a host of issues including public policy, appointment of judges, and general legal matters. In 2011, he became Patrick's chief of staff and in 2013 his senior advisor. When Senator Kerry resigned to become Secretary of State, Governor Patrick appointed Cowan to fill the vacancy on February 1, 2013. "The reason I am standing here is not because I am a person of color, an African-American," Cowan said just before taking office. "I believe the governor, as he has indicated, has the confidence I will do the job he is sending me to do."[3]

When he entered office during the 113th Congress (2013–2015), Cowan was assigned to three committees:

Agriculture; Commerce; and Small Business. He chaired the Agriculture Committee's Subcommittee on Nutrition, Specialty Crops, Food and Agricultural Research. He also co-chaired the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Military Asset and Security Strategy Task Force, a Massachusetts oversight board empaneled by Governor Patrick that included congressional members. Just two months into his Senate service, terrorists detonated two bombs at the finish line of the Boston Marathon, killing three spectators and injuring scores of others. Cowan noted the outpouring of support from his Senate colleagues: "In April I experienced the very best of this body's character … when Members from every corner of this Nation extended their sympathies, their prayers, and pledged their assistance and support for the city of Boston and to all those affected by that tragedy."[4]

During his tenure in the 113th Congress, Cowan worked on several pieces of legislation. He cosponsored the Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2013 which passed the Senate on February 12 and the House on February 28; the President signed it into law on March 7, 2013. Cowan sponsored several unsuccessful amendments to the Agriculture Reform, Food, and Jobs Act of 2013, as well as two other noteworthy bills. The first was a bill to amend the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 "to establish a market-driven inventory system." The amendment would allow growers the option of filing for recourse loans using specific crop yields produced from 2014 through 2018 as collateral and payment. The second was a resolution designating November 28, 2013, as "National Holoprosencephaly Awareness Day." Holoprosencephaly, or HPE, is a birth defect that occurs when the developing brain fails to form two hemispheres; the condition is often fatal. Senator Cowan left office before either bill was debated on the Senate Floor.[5]

On June 25, 2013, Massachusetts Representative Edward John Markey won the special election to fill the remainder of Kerry's term. Cowan, who never had any intention of running for the seat, left office on July 15, 2013. "I entered the Senate at a vexing time in this body's history," he said. "As we all know, congressional approval levels are dismally low." But "what I have encountered in the Senate is not a body defined by vitriol but one more defined by congeniality and common respect." After leaving office, Cowan returned to Boston to be with his family and continue his legal and consulting career.[6]

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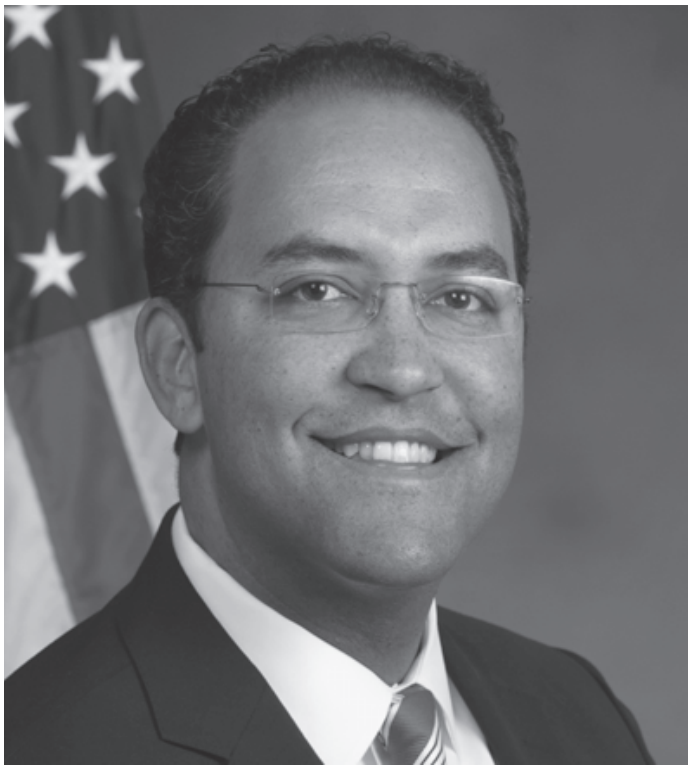
Will Hurd

1977–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

2015–2021

Republican from Texas



Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

After nearly a decade working for the CIA, Will Hurd won election to the U.S. House of Representatives in 2014 from a South Texas district that stretched along the largest expanse of the U.S. border with Mexico. During his three terms in the House, Hurd used his intelligence experience to work on immigration and national security issues. Touting a focus on policy over party, Hurd crafted an independent image. "The number one issue," he claimed, "is we need someone that represents this district that is able to work with both sides of the political divide, as well as stand up to both sides of the political divide."[1]

William Ballard Hurd was born on August 19, 1977, in San Antonio, Texas, to Robert and Mary Alice Hurd, the youngest of three siblings. Robert worked as a traveling textiles salesman in Los Angeles, California, where he met and married fabric buyer Mary Alice before returning to Texas. As an interracial couple, Hurd's father, who was Black, and his mother, who was White, faced discrimination after moving from California to Texas. "When my parents moved to San Antonio in 1970," Hurd recalled, "they couldn't buy a house in certain neighborhoods because of the color of their skin." Hurd attended public schools in San Antonio, graduating from John Marshall High School in 1995. Hurd's father once said he had been a Republican "since Lincoln freed us," and while in college at Texas A&M University, Hurd became active in politics.[2]

Hurd attended Texas A&M on a full scholarship and embraced the school's focus on public service. He majored in computer science, but classes in Mexico City led him to pursue a minor in international studies and pushed his graduation back a year so that he could finish the required coursework. In his senior year, Hurd won election as student body president in an upset. Shortly after he took office, a bonfire collapse killed 12 Texas A&M students in August 1999. Hurd's leadership as student body president was credited with helping the school process the tragedy.[3]

The CIA recruited Hurd straight out of college in 2000, and during his intelligence career he served undercover in India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. Hurd also held stateside positions in New York and Washington, DC. As part of his job, Hurd was tasked with briefing lawmakers on Capitol Hill. That experience proved frustrating and led to his decision to leave the CIA in 2009 to run for office himself. "I thought, 'Hey, I can do a better job,'" Hurd recalled. Hurd took a position as a cybersecurity consultant as he prepared for his first congressional campaign.[4]

In 2010, Hurd entered a field of five Republicans seeking the nomination to challenge the incumbent Democrat, Ciro D. Rodriguez. The massive district stretched from just outside El Paso in the west to parts of Hurd's hometown of San Antonio in the east. Hurd emphasized his national security background, and although he won the most votes in the March primary he did not secure a clear majority and advanced to a runoff against attorney Francisco "Quico" Canseco. Hurd dismissed concerns by party leaders who insisted that a Hispanic candidate stood a better chance in the general election, pointing to his strong showing in the primary. Canseco won the runoff against Hurd with nearly 53 percent of the vote and went on to defeat Rodriguez in the November general election.[5]

Hurd launched a second campaign in 2014, challenging the incumbent Democrat Pete P. Gallego, who had unseated Canseco in 2012. In the Republican primary, Hurd again faced Canseco, but this time he won the nomination after securing the endorsement of his hometown newspaper. The district was majority Hispanic and stretched across 820 miles of the nation's border with Mexico. Immigration emerged as the central issue in the 2014 campaign. In the months leading up to the election, large groups of unaccompanied minors from Mexico and other central American nations tried to cross the Texas border and local and federal authorities grappled with a burgeoning humanitarian crisis. Hurd compared the problems at the border with Mexico with his experience abroad working for the CIA. "We need to start treating the *narcotraficantes*, the coyotes … as an intelligence problem not just a law enforcement problem," Hurd insisted, emphasizing the need to understand the root causes of the drug trade and human trafficking crisis. Hurd and Gallego largely agreed that the nation needed to improve existing avenues for immigration. "If you're going to be a productive member of society, let's get you here," Hurd declared. Unlike Gallego, Hurd opposed amnesty for undocumented immigrants and vowed to empower law enforcement and the courts to deport individuals.[6]

On Election Day, Hurd defeated Gallego by fewer than 2,500 votes to become the first Black Republican elected from Texas. Hurd attributed his election to his interest in the issues voters cared about. "It's because I engage people where they are and talk about the topics they care about. That transcends race, it transcends gender. It transcends party."[7]

Upon taking his seat in the 114th Congress (2015–2017), Hurd was assigned to three committees: Homeland Security; Small Business; and Oversight and Government Reform. Hurd was selected to chair Oversight and Government Reform's Subcommittee on Information Technology, drawing on his years of intelligence work. Hurd left the Small Business Committee two months into his first term, preferring to focus on his other assignments. In the 115th Congress (2017–2019), he joined the Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence. In the 116th Congress (2019–2021), he dropped his assignments on Homeland Security and Oversight for a seat on the Appropriations Committee, which handles government spending issues.[8]

During his first term, Hurd passed more bills into law than any other freshman Representative. Three of the four laws Hurd sponsored in his first term directly benefited or celebrated the people of his district. Working with Democratic Representative Beto O'Rourke of El Paso, Hurd authored legislation amending the 2014 Border Patrol Agent Pay Reform Act to protect agents from overtime pay cuts. Additional legislation extended "availability pay"—compensation for tasks conducted by federal criminal investigators beyond the traditional workweek—to all law enforcement officers of the Air and Marine Operations branch of U.S. Customs and Border Protection. Hurd also proposed renaming the Tornillo border port of entry in honor of El Paso native Marcelino Serna, Texas's most decorated World War I veteran and the first Hispanic American to be awarded the Distinguished Service Cross.[9]

As chair of the Oversight Subcommittee on Information Technology, Hurd managed a July 15, 2015, hearing investigating the data breach at the Office of Personnel Management. In his opening statement, he remarked, "It is no secret that Federal agencies have a long way to go to improve their cybersecurity posture." In July 2016, he questioned FBI Director James Comey regarding presidential candidate Hillary Clinton's use of a private email server for public business while serving as U.S. Secretary of State. Hurd called the FBI's decision to not recommend prosecution "outrageous."[10]

In 2015, Hurd's bill directing the U.S. Department of Homeland Security to streamline its information technology (IT) systems was signed into law. Over the course of the next two years, he pushed for a major overhaul of the federal government's technological capabilities through his Modernizing Government Technology (MGT) Act. Folded

into the National Defense Authorization Act of 2018, the legislation established an IT modernization board and a $100 million fund, addressed vulnerabilities in federal systems, and banned Russian cybersecurity products in the wake of that nation's cyberattacks during the 2016 presidential election.[11]

Immigration also remained a priority for Hurd during his House career. But when other Republicans, including President Donald J. Trump, called for the construction of a wall along the 2,000-plus mile southern border, Hurd opposed the idea calling it "a third century solution to a 21st-century problem." Hurd favored what he termed a "smart wall" consisting of technological upgrades including fiber optic cable to detect and report threats remotely and provide high-speed internet in rural border regions. By 2019, Hurd was the only Republican representing a district along the southern border. He was one of 13 Republicans who joined the Democratic majority in their resolution rejecting President Trump's declaration of a national emergency to redirect funds towards construction of the wall.[12]

Hurd also worked to shape legislation granting permanent legal residency to immigrants brought into the country as minors. In 2018, Hurd sponsored the USA Act of 2018 in the House, pairing increased border security with new paths to citizenship. Despite bipartisan support, Republican leadership rejected the bill as lacking funding for physical wall construction along the southern border. Hurd signed a discharge petition to force a vote on a full range of immigration proposals, including his own, but the effort fell short by two votes. Hurd continued to push his compromise after Democrats regained the majority in the 116th Congress.[13]

Hurd occasionally broke with his party on certain issues. Although he had criticized the Affordable Care Act—the health care reform measure passed during the Barack Obama administration—and had voted for its repeal during the 114th Congress, Hurd voted against his party's alternative, the American Health Care Act, in May 2017, insisting the bill did "not address the concerns of … my constituents." "My boss is not the president," he observed later in his House career. "My boss is not the speaker. My boss is not the minority leader. My bosses are those 800,000 people that I represented and sent me up here."[14]

As one of two Black Republicans in the House, Hurd attracted considerable attention from his party and the press. Unlike his GOP colleague Mia B. Love of Utah, Hurd did not join the overwhelmingly Democratic Congressional Black Caucus. "They'd have to have a meeting with me in it and then have a meeting without me," he explained. And then I'd have to put out a dissenting opinion." Hurd routinely demurred when asked to comment on issues of race and the Republican Party, particularly during President Trump's administration. "Have people in my party said racist things? Yes," he said in a 2020 interview with the *New York Times*. "But that doesn't define the broader party." Hurd sought to transcend the actions of those he called "outliers," and worked to keep the focus on his message of empowerment. "If you do not think someone cares about your community, it's hard for you to evaluate whether they're doing something that's actually helping you."[15]

In 2019, amid revelations that President Trump had pressured the government of Ukraine to prosecute Hunter Biden, the son of former Vice President Joseph R. Biden Jr., at the time a potential 2020 Democratic presidential nominee, the House Democratic majority opened impeachment proceedings against the President. Hurd noted that the President's actions would lead to "long-term implications on our foreign policy." Ultimately, Hurd voted against impeaching President Trump, saying, "Throughout this process, Americans have learned of bungling foreign policy decisions. But we have not heard evidence beyond a reasonable doubt of bribery or extortion," the criteria for conviction in the Senate.[16]

Hurd routinely faced close re-elections. In 2016, more than $12 million was spent in the district during his rematch with former Representative Pete Gallego, making it the most expensive U.S. House contest in Texas's history. That year, in a presidential election year with double the previous voter turnout, Hurd won another narrow victory over Gallego with 48 percent of the vote and a 3,000-vote margin. During the 2018 midterm elections, Hurd faced Gina Ortiz Jones, a former intelligence officer and U.S. Air Force. Spending on the race nearly rivaled 2016. On election night, media organizations initially called the race for Hurd, but the margin ultimately proved too close to call. Jones conceded two weeks later; Hurd's final margin of victory was only 926 votes out of 210,069 cast.[17]

On August 1, 2019, Hurd announced that he would not seek re-election in 2020. After leaving office in 2021, he joined the board of an artificial intelligence research lab and began work on a book about his experience as a CIA agent and a Member of Congress.[18]

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Mia B. Love

1975–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

2015–2019

Republican from Utah



Image courtesy of the U.S. House of Representatives Photography Office

In 2014, Mia B. Love won election to the U.S. House of Representatives, becoming the first African-American Republican woman in Congress and the first Black lawmaker to represent the state of Utah. Love, the daughter of Haitian immigrants, was born in New York and studied theater in Connecticut before moving to Utah, where she entered local politics, eventually serving as mayor of Saratoga Springs, Utah, during the Great Recession as a proponent of small government. "I wasn't elected in Saratoga Springs because of my race or my gender or my heels," she said in 2013 about her time leading the city near Provo, Utah. "I was elected by the people there because I had a plan and a vision to get us financially stable."[1]

Mia Love was born Ludmya Bourdeau on December 6, 1975, in Brooklyn, New York. Her parents, Jean Maxime and Marie Bourdeau, had fled the hostile regime of Haitian dictator François "Papa Doc" Duvalier in late 1974. They did not bring their older children to America, but after Mia was born, the family applied for citizenship and brought her two siblings over from Haiti. The Bourdeaus moved to Norwalk, Connecticut, in 1981, where her mother worked as a nurse and her father took on several jobs to make ends meet. Later during her political career Love recounted her father's words, "Mia, your mother and I never took a handout. You will not be a burden to society. You will give back."[2]

Love got involved with the theater while attending Norwalk High School, where she graduated in 1993. She went to the University of Hartford in West Hartford, Connecticut, for its fine arts program and graduated with a bachelor of fine arts degree in 1997. While in college, she met her husband Jason Love, a software engineer then on a Latter-day Saints mission. Mia Love converted from Catholicism to the Church of Latter-day Saints and moved to Utah in 1998. The couple has three children: Alessa, Abigail, and Peyton.[3]

Love worked as a flight attendant and call center operator after college, leaving behind her acting plans when she turned down a part in a performance that had been offered the week of her marriage. She soon got involved with local issues and jumped into public service. Love's first involvement came at the community level, when she led an effort to pressure a local developer to treat lakefront properties in Saratoga Springs for a midge fly infestation. Shortly afterward, in 2003, Love ran for and won a seat on the Saratoga Springs city council. In November 2009, she

was elected mayor of Saratoga Springs, taking 59 percent of the vote and becoming the first African-American woman elected mayor in the state of Utah. As mayor, Love, who served during the crippling economic downturn of the Great Recession, kept the municipal government solvent and overcame a budget shortage of $3.5 million.[4]

In late 2011, Love announced her intention to challenge six-term incumbent House Democrat James David "Jim" Matheson in the suburban congressional district that stretched south of Salt Lake City. The district, which had been redrawn following the 2010 Census and had begun to lean more Republican, was home to a burgeoning tech sector, including several medical technology firms and a new data center for the National Security Agency. After easily winning her primary, Love was offered a high-profile speaking slot at the 2012 Republican National Convention where Willard Mitt Romney accepted the party's nomination for President. Love's campaign received considerable national attention, but she ultimately fell short of unseating Matheson by a mere 768 votes; Libertarian candidate Jim Vein pulled in 6,439 votes that year.[5]

Love announced in June 2013 that she would seek a rematch with Matheson. "I'm better prepared, I'm a better candidate. Having gone through this, I understand the issues so much better, how campaigns work," she said. In December, Matheson announced his retirement from Congress, and Democrats nominated Doug Owens, son of former Utah Representative Douglas Wayne Owens. Love downplayed the historic nature of her candidacy and instead focused her campaign's message on her family's story and her record as mayor. She opposed the medical device tax, an area of concern for tech companies in her district, and often spoke about the importance of decision-making at the local, rather than the federal, level. Love won the election with 50 percent of the vote to Owens's 46 percent. During an interview the day after the election, Love said that neither her race nor her gender was a central issue in the campaign. "Principles had everything to do with it." Love defeated Doug Owens again in the 2016 election with 54 percent of the vote.[6]

During her two terms in the House, Love served on the exclusive House Financial Services Committee, which meant that party rules prevented her from serving on any other standing committees simultaneously. In the 114th Congress (2015–2017), she sat on the Terrorism and Illicit Finance Subcommittee, and in the 115th Congress (2017–2019) she moved to the Monetary Policy and Trade Subcommittee, and the Financial Institutions and Consumer Credit Subcommittee. From her position on Financial Services, she pushed a bill which raised the lending limit for small banks, which passed as part of a broader Senate bill removing certain financial regulations. Love also served on the House Select Investigative Panel on Infant Lives under the auspices of the Energy and Commerce Committee.[7]

During her two campaigns for the House, Love had been highly critical of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC), accusing its members of "demagoguery" and insisting in 2012 she would "take that thing apart from the inside out." But her rhetoric softened after she joined the caucus. She was the only Black Republican in the CBC during her House service, and regularly attended caucus meetings, including sit downs with Presidents Barack Obama and Donald J. Trump. By 2018, she had developed strong relationships with her colleagues in the caucus, called them mentors, and insisted that "if my leadership asked me to go after a member of the Congressional Black Caucus, I won't do it." Love worked alongside fellow CBC members Emanuel Cleaver II of Missouri and Karen Bass of California to address poverty and add legal protections for incarcerated pregnant women. In 2018 former CBC chair Marcia L. Fudge of Ohio commended Love for her role in helping shape immigration reform legislation, and defended Love's work amid criticism from her Democratic opponent that year.[8]

During Love's two terms in the House, much of Congress's work revolved around large, last-minute legislative packages and short-term government funding deals. Although she occasionally lobbied to include her individual proposals in these omnibus bills, Love looked to pass legislation by different routes. "I tend to stay to myself—I do these things on my own," she said. "If I can do things on my own, I know that I can control the message and I can control everything." Love joined Democrats on certain issues, including the push for bipartisan legislation to reform how Congress handled sexual harassment, which was signed into law just before the end of the 115th Congress. Love added a provision ensuring taxpayers would no longer be liable for settlements paid by congressional offices.[9]

Love supported the Republican Party's major legislative initiatives during her time in the House: she voted for the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017 and to repeal the Affordable Care Act, and she backed the passage of the GOP's replacement legislation, the American Health Care Act of 2017, which

passed the House but failed in the Senate. Love fought to delay the implementation of the Affordable Care Act's medical-device tax by two years, which, she said, would affect several medical technology companies in her district. That proposal ultimately passed as part of the funding deal following a brief government shutdown in January 2018.[10]

Love also drew national attention for her work on behalf of Utah resident Josh Holt, a Latter-day Saints missionary who had been imprisoned in Venezuela on suspicion of weapons charges. In September 2016, Love cosponsored a House Resolution expressing concern about the "ongoing political, economic, social and humanitarian crisis in Venezuela" and urged the release of political prisoners, including Holt. Joining Utah Senators Orrin Grant Hatch and Mike Lee, Love lobbied the Trump administration to secure Holt's release in May 2018.[11]

During the 2018 midterm elections, Love faced Salt Lake County's Democratic mayor Ben McAdams. Following a close election and a prolonged count of mail-in ballots, Love conceded the election on November 26, 2018. After leaving the House, Love became a political commentator for a major broadcasting company and served as an elector for the state of Utah in the 2020 Electoral College. In the fall of 2020, Georgetown University appointed Love a fellow at the McCourt School of Public Policy.[12]

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Kamala D. Harris

1964–

UNITED STATES SENATOR

2017–2021

Democrat from California



Image courtesy of the U.S. Senate Historical Office

Kamala D. Harris won election to the U.S. Senate in 2016, after having served as attorney general of California. The daughter of Indian and Jamaican immigrants, Harris became the first Senator of South Asian descent and the second African-American woman to serve in the chamber. In 2020, she became the first woman elected Vice President of the United States.

Kamala Devi Harris was born on October 20, 1964, in Oakland, California. Her mother, Shyamala Gopalan, was a breast cancer researcher from southern India, and her father, Donald Harris, was an economics professor from Jamaica. After her parents divorced, Harris moved to Canada with her mother and graduated from Westmount High School in Westmount, Quebec, in 1981. As a student at Howard University, a historically Black university, in Washington, DC, she interned for California Senator Alan Cranston. She graduated with a bachelor's degree in political science and economics in 1986. Three years later, she earned a law degree from the University of California, Hastings College of the Law, in San Francisco. Harris is married to Douglas Emhoff and is the stepmother to his children, Ella and Cole.[1]

Harris was admitted to the California bar in 1990 and began her career as the deputy district attorney for Alameda County. She became managing attorney for the San Francisco district attorney's office in 1998 and then became chief of the San Francisco city attorney's division on children and families. In 2004, Harris was elected as the district attorney of San Francisco. Then in November 2010, Harris was elected attorney general of California. She was the first woman, first African American, and first Indian American to serve in that position. As attorney general, Harris secured a settlement worth more than $18 billion to provide relief to California homeowners as a result of the 2008 mortgage crisis.[2]

Harris declared her candidacy for the U.S. Senate a week after Senator Barbara Boxer announced her retirement in 2015. In the state's open primary in 2016, Harris's main opponent was 10-term Democratic U.S. Representative Loretta Sanchez from Orange County. Harris captured the nomination, but both she and Sanchez qualified for the general election under California's "top two" rule, which advances the first and second place candidates regardless of party. In the lead-up to the general election, Harris gained endorsements from Senator Boxer, California Governor Jerry Brown, Vice President Joseph R. Biden Jr., and President Barack Obama, who had carried the state

by large margins in 2008 and 2012. In a meeting with representatives from African-American publishers and radio stations, Harris encouraged Black voters to go to the polls. "When African Americans show up and vote, we absolutely make a difference but when we don't show up all of the gains we have made over the years are put into jeopardy," Harris said. In November, Harris won the general election with nearly 62 percent of the vote. She was one of a record four Indian-American candidates to win a seat in the 115th Congress (2017–2019).[3]

After Harris was sworn into office in January 2017, she was assigned to four committees: Budget; Environment and Public Works; Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs; and Intelligence. In the 116th Congress (2019–2021), Harris retained her committee assignments with the exception of Environment and Public Works, which she left for a seat on the Judiciary Committee.[4]

Early in her tenure, Harris garnered national attention for her prosecutor-style questioning during Senate Intelligence Committee hearings investigating Russian interference in the 2016 elections. "I don't just want to read a memo about threats, I want to be able to ask questions and dig down deeper," Harris said of her work on the committee. "I see part of my responsibility … as helping to make sure no one is above the law." Harris continued her incisive questioning during Supreme Court nomination hearings in 2018 and 2020.[5]

In the Senate, Harris's legislative agenda focused on homeland security, the criminal justice system, and health care. The first bill she introduced, the Access to Counsel Act, sought to provide legal counsel to individuals detained while entering the United States. In 2017, she and Republican Senator Rand Paul of Kentucky introduced the Pretrial Integrity and Safety Act to move America's courts away from the money bail system and toward a pretrial release policy based on risk assessments. She supported her California colleague Senator Dianne Feinstein in sponsoring a 2018 intelligence measure to require warrants to access citizens' phone and email data. In 2019, Harris joined Senator Bernard Sanders of Vermont and other colleagues in introducing the Medicare for All Act, which would establish a universal health care system in the United States.[6]

In 2018 and 2019, Harris introduced the Justice for Victims of Lynching Act, which, if signed into law, would classify lynching as a federal offense. "With this bill, we finally have a chance to speak the truth about our past and make clear that these hateful acts should never happen again," Harris said on the Senate Floor, adding "and, God forbid, they do, we are making clear there will be swift, serious, and severe consequences." The Senate passed the bill twice, but it stalled in the House. When the measure came back from the House under a different name in 2020, Senator Paul offered an amendment to narrow the definition of lynching. Harris strongly opposed the amendment and argued that her bill should pass without change, telling her colleagues, "Our country has waited too long for a reckoning on this issue of lynching, and I believe no Senator should stop the full weight of the law in its capacity to protect these human beings and human life." Ultimately, the measure failed to pass in the Senate.[7]

In January 2020, the House of Representatives delivered articles of impeachment against President Donald J. Trump to the Senate. On February 5, Harris joined 47 other Senators in voting to convict the President, but lacking the two-thirds vote required for conviction, the president was acquitted. For the remainder of 2020, Harris turned her focus to recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic by proposing legislation to provide economic assistance to renters, homeowners, small businesses, and restaurants.[8]

In January 2019, Harris announced her candidacy for the 2020 presidential election. Although she withdrew from the race in December 2019, Joseph Biden, the Democratic nominee, chose her as his running mate in August 2020, making her the third woman to appear as the Vice Presidential candidate on a major-party ticket. The Biden–Harris ticket prevailed in the November election, making Harris the first woman, first African American, and first Asian American elected Vice President of the United States. During her victory speech, Harris said she was thinking about her mother "and about the generations of women—Black women, Asian, White, Latina, Native American women who throughout our nation's history have paved the way for this moment tonight." Harris was sworn in as Vice President on January 20, 2021.[9]

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Brenda Jones

1959–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

2018–2019

Democrat from Michigan



Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

In 2018, Detroit city council president Brenda Jones won a special election to fill the vacancy caused by the resignation of longtime Representative John Conyers Jr. of Michigan. Conyers's decision to step down midway through the 115th Congress (2017–2019) in December 2017 set off a complicated and drawn-out electoral process in which Jones won the special election for the remainder of 115th Congress but lost the general election for the 116th Congress (2019–2021) on the same day. Jones's term on Capitol Hill lasted six weeks.

Brenda Jones was born on October 24, 1959. Her family moved to Detroit, Michigan, when she was a child, and she graduated from Cass Technical High School. Jones earned a bachelor's degree and a graduate certificate from Wayne State University. Before her political career she worked with and served as president of a Detroit-area labor union.[1]

Jones won her first public office in 2005 capturing a seat on the Detroit city council. She served in city government for more than a decade, and in 2014 the city council elected Jones as its first president; she was re-elected city council president in January 2018. The *Detroit Free Press* credited her with running "the city's most professional, least controversial council in recent history."[2]

In December 2017, Representative John Conyers—who had represented Detroit in the House since 1965—resigned from Congress amid accusations that he had sexually harassed staff and used taxpayer money to settle harassment claims. Following Conyers's announcement, the state's Republican governor, Rick Snyder, scheduled the special election to fill the vacancy for November 6, 2018, the same day as the general election, which, he said, would save the expense of holding a separate election. This meant that the vacancy would remain for more than 10 months, almost the entire rest of the 115th Congress. In March 2018, a judge upheld Snyder's decision by dismissing a lawsuit to hold the special election earlier in the year. In the meantime, the primary elections for both the special election to fill Conyers's seat in the 115th Congress and the general election for the full term in the 116th Congress were scheduled for August.[3]

Jones announced her candidacy for both the special and general elections in late January 2018, gaining early endorsements from Michigan Representative Brenda L. Lawrence and Detroit Mayor Mike Duggan. "It is my intention to honor and carry on, to the best of my ability, the legacy of John Conyers," Jones said. "It is absolutely

vital that the progress he made fighting for our human and civil rights is never forgotten." In a crowded primary on August 7, 2018, Jones won the Democratic nomination for the special election to fill Conyers's remaining term in the 115th Congress with 38 percent of the vote. Jones, however, narrowly lost the Democratic primary for the general election to the 116th Congress. Rashida Tlaib won with 31 percent of the vote, and Jones came in second with 30 percent.[4]

Because the district was heavily Democratic, winning the primary election was tantamount to winning the general election. In the immediate aftermath of the primary, Jones faced the prospect of having to resign as city council president to serve out Conyers's remaining weeks in Congress. Article I, section 6, of the Constitution prevents Members of Congress from holding two elected offices simultaneously. But legal officials in Detroit saw no reason for Jones to resign before taking Conyers's seat and announced that "under Michigan Law, it is permissible (under certain circumstances) for Council President Jones to hold both offices." Detroit's general counsel made it clear that the issue would also need to be evaluated from the federal side, and Jones immediately requested an opinion from the House Ethics Committee.[5]

On November 6, 2018, Brenda Jones formally won the special election to the 115th Congress with 87 percent of the vote. She also waged a last-minute write-in campaign for the general election but took less than 1 percent of the vote. In late November, Jones received informal guidance from the House Ethics Committee that she would not have to resign from the city council on two conditions: that she received no salary from Detroit and that the council stayed in recess during her Washington service. The House agreed by unanimous consent to seat Jones without requiring her to resign from the Detroit city council. On November 29, 2018, Jones was sworn in to the 115th Congress. "I am ready to roll up my sleeves in this lame-duck session and do what you expect me to do," Jones said.[6]

Despite her short term in the House, Jones introduced two pieces of legislation on December 20, 2018. Her first bill, the Minimum Wage Fairness Act of 2018, penalized states that lowered their minimum-wage requirements. Her second bill, the SHELTER Act of 2018, sought to end certain federal tax breaks and to use the resulting revenue to fund affordable housing programs. With few days remaining in the Congress, the House took up neither bill.[7]

When the 115th Congress ended, Jones returned to her position as president of the Detroit city council. In 2020, Jones unsuccessfully challenged Representative Rashida Tlaib in the Democratic primary, garnering 34 percent of the vote. She married Bishop John Pitts Jr. later that year. In January 2021, Jones announced she would retire from the city council.[8]

Notes

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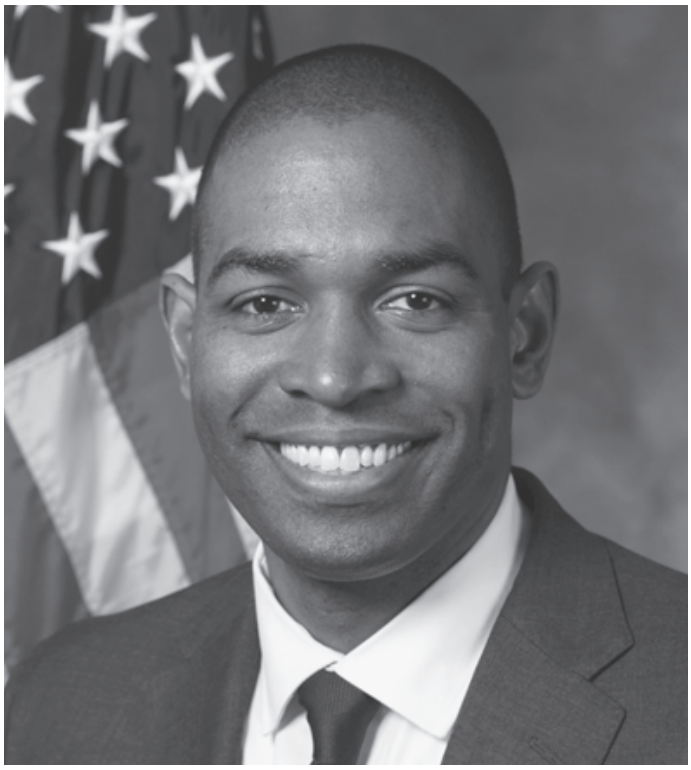
Antonio Delgado

1977–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

2019–2022

Democrat from New York



Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

In 2018, Antonio Delgado left behind a lucrative law career to challenge an incumbent Member of the U.S. House of Representatives, becoming the first Black and Hispanic Congressman to represent a district in Upstate New York. In Congress, Delgado focused on improving infrastructure and employment opportunities in economically depressed rural areas. "Working families like the one that I come from, have been left behind," he declared.[1]

Antonio Delgado was born in Schenectady, New York, on January 28, 1977, to Thelma and Anthony Delgado. Delgado's parents divorced when he was two, and he was raised by his mother, a secretary for General Electric and the New York civil service department, and his stepfather, William Hill, a business manager. Delgado graduated from Notre Dame-Bishop Gibbons High School, a Catholic school in Schenectady, and earned a bachelor's degree from nearby Colgate University in 1999. Upon graduation, he was awarded a prestigious Rhodes Scholarship, and spent two years studying at Oxford University in the United Kingdom, graduating with a master's degree in 2001. He also earned a law degree from Harvard Law School in 2005. At Harvard, he met Lacey Schwartz, a documentary filmmaker whom he married in 2011; they have two children: Maxwell and Coltrane. After law school, Delgado moved to Los Angeles, where he launched a music production company and pursued a career in hip-hop. In 2011, he moved to New Jersey to work at Akin Gump, a large New York City law firm.[2]

Delgado was driven to politics after the election of President Donald J. Trump in 2016. In 2017, he moved with his family to Rhinebeck in Upstate New York and soon launched an exploratory committee to challenge incumbent Republican Representative John J. Faso in the 2018 election. The district included much of the Hudson River Valley, spanning west to the Catskill Mountains. It was 85 percent White and evenly divided politically. President Barack Obama carried the district in 2012 while Trump prevailed in 2016. In the crowded Democratic primary, Delgado faced six other candidates, none of whom had held elected office. Delgado was an adept fundraiser and won the primary with a 22 percent plurality and a four-point lead over the runner-up. In the general election, Delgado faced off against Faso, a first-term Representative and formerly the Republican leader in the New York state assembly. The National Republican Congressional Committee released advertisements scrutinizing Delgado's music career and

song lyrics in an attempt to sway voter opinion against him. Delgado, who stressed healthcare as the most important campaign issue, criticized Faso's vote to repeal the Affordable Care Act and advocated for a public option, which would allow Americans to choose between state-run and private health insurance plans. He also pledged to bring jobs back to the district after a recent exodus of large companies. In November, Delgado won with 51 percent of the vote. He won re-election in 2020 with 52 percent of the vote.[3]

During his two terms in the House, Delgado served in the Congressional Black Caucus, as well as on three committees: Agriculture; Small Business; and Transportation and Infrastructure. In the 117th Congress (2021–2023), he wielded the gavel as chair of the Agriculture Committee's Subcommittee on Commodity Exchanges, Energy, and Credit, which oversees agricultural markets and the development of rural infrastructure, including renewable energy sources and broadband internet.[4]

As a member of the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, Delgado introduced legislation to bolster funding for public transportation in rural areas. He worked to improve safety standards for passenger vehicles after a limousine crash in his district killed 20 people in 2018. His bill, the End the Limo Loophole Act, was incorporated into the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, which became law in 2021. The legislation defines vehicles that can carry nine or more passengers as commercial vehicles and strengthens inspection requirements for passenger-carrying commercial vehicles.[5]

From his seat on the Agriculture Committee, Delgado focused on the development of infrastructure in rural America and on assisting the small family farms in his district. His bill, the Family Farmer Relief Act, eased the debt limits and eligibility requirements for small farmers filing for Chapter 12 bankruptcy, allowing them to reorganize their debt more easily. It was signed into law in August 2019. As chair of the Subcommittee on Commodity Exchanges, Energy, and Credit, he introduced bills to study the availability of broadband internet in rural communities by requiring data collection on internet speeds and the geographic areas serviced by internet providers.[6]

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Delgado sought to help small businesses facing economic hardship. His Small Business Repayment Relief Act waived Small Business Administration loan payments for six months. It became law as part of the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act. Delgado's Small Business Relief Accessibility Act was included as part of the 2021 American Rescue Plan. It established a pilot program to help small businesses learn about and access available SBA relief options.[7]

In the spring of 2022, the House passed Delgado's One Stop Shop for Small Business Compliance Act, which directed the Small Business Administration to create and maintain a central website listing all small business compliance guides and resources to assist business owners in meeting federal standards and regulations. A month later, the House approved his VA Peer Support Enhancement for MST Survivors Act, which aimed to provide all claimants of sexual trauma in the military with a peer support specialist trained as a victims advocate.[8]

On May 3, 2022, New York Governor Kathy Hochul selected Delgado as her new lieutenant governor following the resignation of Brian Benjamin. Hochul praised her new running mate as a "battle-tested campaigner." Delgado resigned from the House on May 25, 2022, and was sworn in as lieutenant governor of New York later that day.[9]

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Kwanza Hall

1971–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

2020–2021

Democrat from Georgia



Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives

In 2020, Kwanza Hall won a special election to fill the vacancy caused by the death of Representative John Lewis of Georgia, the civil rights activist who held the Atlanta-based seat for more than three decades. Although he only spent one month as a Member of Congress, Hall voted on crucial government funding bills and advocated for infrastructure, justice reform, and historic preservation. On the day he was sworn in to the 116th Congress (2019–2021) Hall told the House, "We have a lot of things on the plate in front of us, and I just want to be a unifier, a person who can help us get some things done … as Congressman Lewis would."[1]

Kwanza Hall was born on May 1, 1971, in Atlanta, Georgia. His father, Leon W. Hall, joined the Southern Christian Leadership Conference when he was 17 years old and worked as a youth coordinator for Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in the march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama, in 1965. The Halls lived on the same street as John Lewis and knew him well. Hall graduated from Benjamin E. Mays High School in 1989 and then attended the Massachusetts Institute of Technology until 1995. After founding a number of businesses, Hall turned to politics. In 2002, he won election to Atlanta's board of education, holding that position until 2005 when he successfully ran for city council. He served until 2017, when he resigned to run an unsuccessful campaign for mayor. Following the election, Hall returned to business pursuits and consulting.[2]

After serving in Congress for more than 33 years, John Lewis died of cancer on July 17, 2020. He represented the majority-Black and predominantly Democratic Fifth District, which covered most of Atlanta and some neighboring suburbs and had historically drawn Black Americans from other parts of the South who sought out new economic opportunities. Because Lewis had won the primary in June, the Georgia Democratic Party was required by state law to quickly choose a new candidate to replace him on the general election ballot in November. The party selected state senator Nikema Williams to run for the seat in the 117th Congress (2021–2023). Williams declined to run in a special election to fill the vacancy for the remainder of the 116th Congress, however.[3]

Five Democrats, one Independent, and one Libertarian entered the September 29 special election. Hall finished first with 32 percent of the vote, but because no candidate reached the 50 percent threshold, the race moved to a runoff election between Hall and second-place finisher Democrat Robert M. Franklin Jr., a former president

of Morehouse College, on December 1. Both Hall and Franklin maintained that they would work hard during their short time in office and told voters they would be honored to finish John Lewis's term. "I can do the equivalent of what I did in 15 years … in 15 days," Hall told newspapers, referring to his past elected service. "I know what not to waste my time on. I know how to be effective." In December, Hall won the special election with 54 percent of the vote.[4]

Sworn in two days later on December 3, 2020, Hall did not receive committee assignments. But he backed the Democratic Party in critical end-of-the-year votes on military spending, government appropriations, and stimulus funds to provide relief from the COVID-19 pandemic. In total, he sponsored six bills, including a proposal directing the U.S. Secretary of Transportation to report on the possibility of new transit infrastructure projects in Atlanta. Speaking on the House Floor, Hall said it was, "an important first step to bringing economic power of transit-oriented development to often neglected areas … without displacement of longtime residents." The bill was referred to the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure.[5]

Building off his work from the Atlanta city council, Hall focused on aspects of criminal justice reform in Congress. He introduced the Nonviolent Drug Crime Expungement Act, to remove nonviolent drug offenses from citizens' records and to review related sentences. He also wrote a bill designed to safeguard the voting rights of citizens recently released from prison. Hall called for "a comprehensive solution to end these injustices. I believe in second chances and the power of redemption. People returning from incarceration should have opportunities and pathways to succeed and contribute to society in a meaningful way without stigma." Both bills were sent to the Judiciary Committee but were not reported out.[6]

During his time in the House, Hall often evoked Representative Lewis's legacy. He proposed the John Lewis Prompt and Accurate Reporting of Elections Act to require states to tally ballots cast in early voting before the date of an election. Hall also advocated for the building that housed the Southern Christian Leadership Conference—where Dr. King and Lewis worked—to be designated a National Historic Site. "It is one of the greatest honors of my life to be able to complete the term for which [Representative Lewis] was last elected and take the baton and bring his service across the finish line. But I would be remiss if I did not use my opportunity to make sure their lessons are known for other generations to come."[7]

Hall's term expired with the 116th Congress. He returned to Atlanta and joined a real estate investment firm.[8]

Notes

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PART TWO

Current Members

INTRODUCTION TO

Profiles of Current Members

More than 150 years ago, on December 12, 1870, Joseph H. Rainey of South Carolina took the Oath of Office and became the first African American to serve in the U.S. House of Representatives, less than a year after Hiram R. Revels of Mississippi was sworn in as a Member of the U.S. Senate in February 1870. To date, another 173 Black Americans have followed Rainey and Revels to serve as Members of Congress.* The history of Black Americans in Congress contains many themes that resonate in the larger chronicle of American democracy: struggle and perseverance, the gradual attainment of power, advancement through unity, and remarkable legislative achievements.

The 61 African Americans (56 Representatives, two Territorial Delegates, and three Senators) who serve in the 117th Congress (2021–2023) have inherited the historical legacy that extends to the Reconstruction era after the Civil War. As the largest group of Black legislators to serve simultaneously in the history of the institution, these lawmakers account for more than one-third of all the African Americans who have held seats in Congress.

The biographical profiles of these current Members, like those of their predecessors, contain information on precongressional careers, first House or Senate campaigns, committee and leadership positions, and legislative achievements. Because these Members are incumbent, comprehensive accounts of their congressional careers must await a later date. Their profiles are arranged in two distinct groups. First, the 49 individuals who have served in two or more Congresses are ordered alphabetically and profiled in 800-word entries. Second, the 12 first-term Black Americans of the 117th Congress are profiled in résumé format entries at the end of this section. All Members were given the opportunity to review their profiles before the book was published.

Among the individuals profiled in this section are Delegate Eleanor Holmes Norton of Washington, DC, and Representative Maxine Waters of California, whose 31 years of congressional service make them the current deans of African Americans in Congress. They are also the longest-serving Black women in the history of the U.S. House of Representatives.

As these Members leave Congress, their profiles will be updated in the online version of this volume—available at https://history.house.gov—to reflect a more complete account of their congressional careers and their contributions to the rich history of African Americans in Congress.

*The closing date for this volume was June 1, 2022.

Alma S. Adams

1946–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

2014–

Democrat from North Carolina



Image courtesy of the Member

Drawing upon a career in state and local office that stretched back to the mid-1980s, Alma S. Adams won a special election to the U.S. House of Representatives on November 4, 2014, to succeed a longtime incumbent. In the House, she has advocated for increasing wages, expanding educational opportunities, and reducing disparities in health care. "When I took office in 2014 I made it a priority to fight for students, small businesses, women, and veterans," Adams declared. "I am eager to continue our progress."[1]

Alma Adams was born Alma Jean Shealey on May 27, 1946, to Benjamin and Mattie Shealey in High Point, North Carolina. Her family moved to Baltimore, Maryland, when she was an infant, before relocating to Newark, New Jersey, where she attended West Side High School, from which she graduated in 1964. Adams grew up in a single-parent family with her siblings and her mother, who made a living as a domestic worker. After high school, she returned to her home state to attend North Carolina A&T State University in Greensboro, earning her bachelor's degree in 1968. During her sophomore year of college, she married Billy Adams. The couple had two children, Billy and Linda, but later divorced. In 1972, Adams earned a master's degree in art education and joined the faculty of Bennett College, a historically Black women's college in Greensboro, where she taught art for 40 years. She also developed a career as a professional artist. In 1981, she earned a Ph.D. in art education from The Ohio State University in Columbus. She made her initial foray into politics as the first African-American woman elected to the Greensboro school board, serving from 1984 to 1986. She then served on the Greensboro city council until 1994, when she was appointed to the North Carolina state house of representatives, where she served for 20 years. As a state representative, she sponsored legislation that led to the first increase in North Carolina's minimum wage in nine years.[2]

In 2014, President Barack Obama nominated longtime Representative Melvin L. Watt to direct the Federal Housing Finance Agency, creating a vacancy in the House from North Carolina's Twelfth District, centered on one of the nation's largest banking sectors in Charlotte. Adams joined the crowded race for the Democratic nomination to fill Watt's seat. Backed by interest groups representing women's rights and organized labor, among other causes, Adams won 44 percent of the vote, leading her closest opponent, a state senator, by more than 20 percent.[3]

On the day of the general election, Adams easily pulled ahead of Republican challenger Vince Coakley with 75 percent of the vote, simultaneously winning the remainder of Watt's term in the 113th Congress (2013–2015), as well as a full term in the next Congress.[4] Despite redistricting challenges that forced her to move to Charlotte to maintain residency, Adams consistently won re-election with at least 67 percent of the vote and ran unopposed in 2020.[5]

Adams was sworn in at the end of the 113th Congress, giving her a boost in seniority over the rest of the 2014 class. She received her first committee assignments during the 114th Congress (2015–2017), obtaining spots on three committees: Agriculture; Education and the Workforce; and Small Business. In 2019, she swapped her seat on Small Business for one on the Financial Services Committee. When Democrats took the majority in the 116th Congress (2019–2021), Adams became vice chair of the Agriculture Committee and chair of the Subcommittee on Workforce Protections of the renamed Education and Labor Committee.

As a former college professor, Adams has made inroads into education reform. In 2015, she cofounded the Congressional Bipartisan Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) Caucus to bring attention to the challenges facing these institutions, which often provide higher education opportunities to underserved and low-income communities.[6] In 2019, Adams introduced successful legislation through the Education and Labor Committee to support HBCUs, to increase funding for Pell Grants, and to simplify the process for student loan repayment recertifications.[7]

Having grown up without health insurance, Adams has worked to reduce disparities in health care provided to low-income Americans. In one of her first speeches on the House Floor, Adams expressed her support of the Affordable Care Act and her commitment to expand access to health insurance. In 2019, she introduced the Maternal CARE Act, which would create federal grant programs designed to reduce infant mortality and protect maternal health.[8]

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Colin Allred

1983–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

2019–

Democrat from Texas

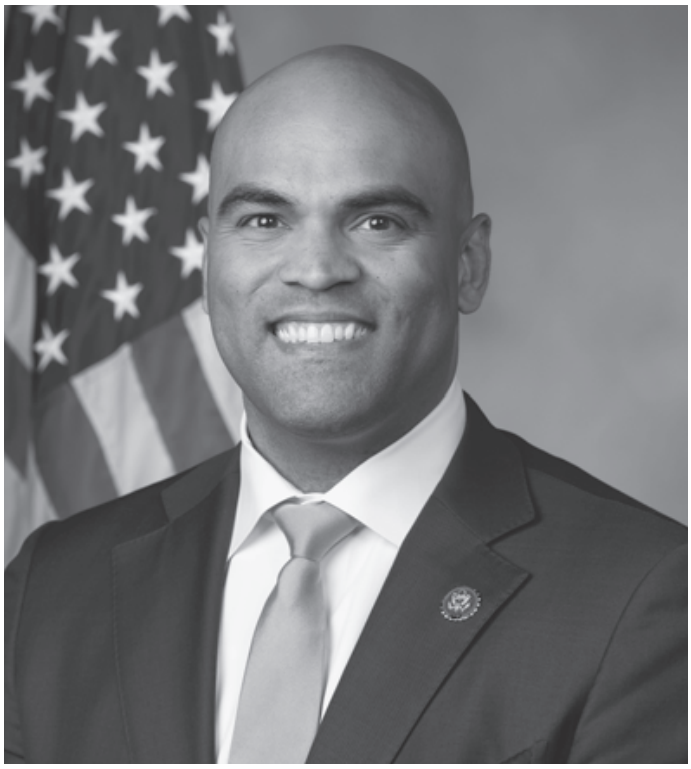

Image courtesy of the Member

A former professional football player and attorney, Colin Allred won election to the U.S. House of Representatives in 2018 by championing the Affordable Care Act and ousting a veteran Republican incumbent committee chair. Representing a swing district in the wealthy northern suburbs of Dallas, Texas, Allred has dedicated his legislative efforts to veteran care, assisting working families, and election reform.

Colin Allred was born in Dallas on April 15, 1983. Allred was raised by his mother, public school teacher Judith Allred, and her family in North Dallas. Allred attended public schools and graduated from Hillcrest High School in 2001. Allred's football talents in high school earned him a scholarship to Baylor University in Waco, Texas. He played as a linebacker for the Baylor Bears before graduating with a bachelor's degree in 2005. Though he was accepted to law school at the University of California's Berkeley campus, Allred deferred when he was picked up by the National Football League's Tennessee Titans where he played until a season-ending injury in 2010. Allred left professional sports following his injury. He re-applied to UC Berkeley and earned his law degree there in 2014.[1] Allred turned his attention to politics after law school, working first as a voting rights attorney before joining the Office of General Counsel in the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development in 2016.[2] Allred is married to attorney Alexandra Eber, and the couple has two children.[3]

Shortly after President Donald J. Trump took office, Allred announced his intention to challenge veteran incumbent U.S. Representative Pete Sessions for his home district in increasingly suburban and affluent north Dallas. Allred picked up several prominent endorsements and won more than a third of all votes in the seven-candidate March 2018 Democratic primary—more than twice the total of his nearest competitor. Allred then commandingly won the May runoff.[4] Running as a hometown candidate in a district where Democrats had offered little opposition to Sessions, who was then chair of the powerful Rules Committee, Allred framed the race in generational terms. He claimed that after more than two decades in office, Sessions had lost touch with the diversifying population. Allred also focused on health care policy, criticizing Sessions for his votes to repeal the Affordable Care Act and replace it with alternatives that weakened protections for preexisting conditions.[5] Allred won with 52 percent of the vote and was re-elected in 2020 by the same margin.[6]

Allred's fellow Democratic freshmen selected him as one of two co-presidents of the 116th Congress (2019–2021) class of lawmakers.[7] Allred was assigned to three committees: Foreign Affairs; Transportation and Infrastructure; and Veterans' Affairs. He retained all three assignments in the 117th Congress (2021–2023). Allred introduced several bills through the latter committee to improve the lives of veterans and provide support during the COVID-19 pandemic. He sponsored the Aid and Attendance Support Act which would have increased benefits for veterans and their families who required at-home or nursing home medical assistance during the pandemic. Allred also aimed to address a flawed medical claims system at the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs by providing a review period for veterans or their representatives before claim determinations are finalized.[8]

Allred has passionately advocated for paternity leave and increasing support for working families. He made headlines when he took parental leave shortly after taking office in 2019, following the birth of his first child. Though individual congressional offices have varying policies in place, Allred's decision to take time off was uncommon. Allred's personal experience proved formative, and he again took leave with the birth of his second son in early 2021. "This experience makes it clearer than ever to me that we need to provide basic paid sick leave and paid parental leave so that no matter who you are or where you live," he said, "hardworking people can have financial security and peace of mind while spending time with their families."[9] To that end, Allred introduced the House version of the Advancing Support for Working Families Act. His proposal gave new parents the option of advancing $5,000 of the child tax credit to assist with costs related to newborns and adoptions. The bill attracted support from the Trump administration but was not signed into law.[10]

Allred has made voting rights a priority during his two terms in office. He joined his Democratic colleagues in backing the John R. Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act of 2021, designed to revise the procedures for federal election oversight following the Supreme Court's 2013 decision declaring parts of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 unconstitutional. He also cosponsored the For the People Act, a sweeping election reform bill, and twice introduced the Know Your Polling Place Act to require election officials to notify voters of any change to their polling place.[11]

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Karen Bass

1953–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

2011–

Democrat from California



Image courtesy of the Member

Karen Bass worked as a physician assistant, community activist, educator, and nonprofit executive for three decades before she won a seat in the California state assembly in 2004. During three terms in the assembly, Bass served as majority whip and majority leader before becoming the first Black woman in U.S. history to serve as a speaker of any state legislative body in 2008. In 2010, she was elected as a Democrat to the U.S. House of Representatives. On Capitol Hill, she has embraced leadership roles within her party and worked on health care, economic development, child welfare, and U.S. policy on Africa.

Karen Bass was born in Los Angeles, California, on October 3, 1953. Her father, Dewitt Bass, was a mail carrier, and her mother, Wilhelmina, was a former beauty salon owner and homemaker. Bass completed her bachelor's degree at California State University, Dominguez Hills, and earned a physician's assistant certificate and a masters of social work degree from the University of Southern California (USC). She worked at USC as a nurse, a physician assistant, and a clinical instructor.[1]

Bass has long been an activist tackling injustice and poverty at home and abroad since her middle school years. "My life has been defined by the fight for social justice," she recalled in 2005. She was active in the struggle against apartheid in South Africa as the co-chair of the Los Angeles-based Southern Africa Support Committee. In 1990, she founded Community Coalition, a nonprofit that addressed poverty, crime, gang violence, and addiction. As executive director, "I stopped doing international work and just focused on domestic work," she recalled. "One of the reasons I was excited about coming to Congress is I could do both."[2] In the state assembly, Bass worked on foster care, economic development, health care, and criminal justice reform. As assembly speaker in 2009 during the economic crisis of the Great Recession, she negotiated a state budget deal to preserve programs in the face of a $40 billion deficit, for which she received a John F. Kennedy Profile in Courage Award.[3]

When Representative Diane E. Watson of California retired in 2010, she endorsed Bass for the vacant seat in the Thirty-Third District. Bass won 85 percent of the vote in the Democratic primary and defeated her opponent in November with 86 percent of the vote. She easily won re-election six times. After redistricting in 2012, Bass represented the Thirty-Seventh District. Largely comprised of neighborhoods west and south of downtown Los Angeles,

it also includes West L.A., Culver City and South L.A. The district has a diverse population and is one of the most Democratic in the nation.[4]

In the 112th Congress (2011–2013), Bass was assigned to the Foreign Affairs Committee and the Budget Committee. She was named to the Democratic Steering and Policy Committee and co-chaired the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee's Women LEAD project, which recruits women to run for office.[5]

In her second term, Bass earned a seat on the Judiciary Committee, where she served on the Over-criminalization Task Force and explored criminal justice reforms such as reevaluating the U.S. Code and revising mandatory sentencing laws.[6] She also backed legislation to reduce recidivism by providing financial, educational, and employment assistance for prisoners and parolees upon their release. She was instrumental in including provisions addressing women in prison in the First Step Act and supported its passage in 2018.[7] Bass was named interim chair of the Judiciary Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, and Homeland Security in 2019.[8] Two weeks after the murder of George Floyd, a Black man in police custody in Minneapolis, Minnesota, Bass led the effort to institute nationwide policing reforms by introducing the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act. The bill passed the House later that month. Bass reintroduced the bill in the 117th Congress (2021–2023); this version passed the House in March 2021.[9]

Bass served as chair of the Congressional Black Caucus during the 116th Congress (2019–2021), during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic and worked to assure that federal relief efforts addressed the disproportionate health and economic impact on communities of color.[10]

As Ranking Member on the Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Africa, Bass supported economic development and human rights throughout the African continent. She was an original co-sponsor of the African Growth and Opportunity Act to promote trade across sub-Saharan Africa, and she mobilized support to combat the Ebola outbreak in West Africa in 2014. Bass also introduced a bill to advance democratic reforms in Zimbabwe in return for U.S. trade and investment, as well as international debt relief programs. The bill became law in 2018.[11] Bass chaired the Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, and Global Human Rights in the 116th and 117th Congresses (2019–2023).

Bass has been a committed advocate for the poor and marginalized. She founded the Congressional Caucus on Foster Youth to improve foster care resources, promote kinship care, and improve educational outcomes for foster children.[12] Her bill to prevent child trafficking and aid victims of sex trafficking in the foster care system passed the House in 2015.[13] She also championed the Affordable Care Act as a way to increase access to health insurance and create jobs.[14]

Bass announced her campaign for mayor of Los Angeles on September 27, 2021.[15]

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Joyce Beatty

1950–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

2013–

Democrat from Ohio



Image courtesy of the Member

Joyce Beatty has used her seat on the influential House Committee on Financial Services to expand opportunities for her constituents through banking reforms, housing, and diversity and inclusion. Upon entering Congress in 2013, she emphasized aiding the underprivileged, saying, "I am not willing to be in a position where we only cut funding to hurt those who can't help themselves. I want to realize fairness and equality for all."[1]

Joyce Beatty was born on March 12, 1950, in Dayton, Ohio. During the civil rights movement, her father Herman Reeder, a brick mason, and her mother, Annie, a civil servant, moved the family to integrate a predominantly White neighborhood. Beatty graduated from Nettie Lee Roth High School in Dayton with honors. She earned a bachelor's degree in speech and theater from Central State University in 1972 and a master's degree in counseling from Wright State University in 1975. Beatty also enrolled and completed her doctoral coursework at the University of Cincinnati. She married Otto Beatty Jr. and has two stepchildren and two grandchildren.[2]

From 1975 to 1983, Beatty was a professor at Sinclair Community College in Dayton. She also served as the administrator for the human services levy in Ohio's Montgomery County. A small business entrepreneur, Beatty owned a clothing boutique and headed her own consulting firm. From 2008 to 2012, she was senior vice president of outreach and engagement—the first African American to serve as senior vice president—at Ohio State University in Columbus, Ohio's flagship institution of higher education.[3]

In the 1980s, Beatty became active in the Democratic Party, serving as a delegate to the 2004, 2012, and 2016 Democratic National Conventions, and delivering speeches during the 2012 and 2016 conventions. In 1999, she succeeded her husband in the Ohio house of representatives, representing a Columbus-area district. Beatty served five terms in the state house and was its first woman Democratic leader.[4]

In 2012, Beatty ran for a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives. The district consisted of the state capital, Columbus, was wholly contained in Franklin County, and included a diverse mix of professional and working-class Ohioans.[5] Beatty defeated three candidates in the Democratic primary. In the general election, she won with 68 percent of the vote, becoming the first African American to win election to Congress in Ohio outside of the Cleveland area. In her subsequent re-elections, Beatty has won comfortably.[6]

Since entering the House in the 113th Congress (2013–2015), Beatty has served on the Committee on Financial Services. In the 116th Congress (2019–2021), when Democrats regained the House majority, she became the inaugural chair of the new Financial Services Subcommittee on Diversity and Inclusion, joined the Joint Economic Committee, was appointed to the Kennedy Center Board of Trustees, and elected vice chair of the influential Congressional Black Caucus (CBC). In the 117th Congress (2021–2023), Beatty was elected chair of the CBC.[7]

On Financial Services, Beatty has worked to improve diversity and inclusion, empower people through financial literacy, and direct federal money to affordable housing, homeless veterans, and aging-out foster youth. As co-chair of the House Financial and Economic Literacy Caucus, Beatty introduced the Housing Financial Literacy Act, which would provide a discount on Federal Housing Administration-backed mortgage insurance premiums once prospective buyers complete a certified housing counseling course. She also proposed a bill to launch mentorship programs for financial institutions where 51 percent of stock is owned by minority individuals.[8] Her signature piece of legislation, known as the "Beatty Rule," would require at least one racially diverse candidate and one gender diverse candidate be interviewed for a vacancy among the Federal Reserve Regional Bank presidents.[9] The House passed all three bills during the 116th Congress.

In the House, Beatty has sought bipartisan solutions on public health and education issues. In the 114th Congress (2015–2017), Beatty introduced a bill to improve the response to victims of child sex trafficking by creating an internet tip line to report cases of exploitation or abuse. The bill passed the House, and the measure became law via the Justice for Victims of Trafficking Act, which President Barack Obama signed May 29, 2015. In 2015, she sought tax deductions for elementary and secondary school teachers' out-of-pocket expenses through the REPAY Supplies Act. The bill was added to the Consolidated Appropriations Act, which became law in 2015.[10] Finally, she was a cosponsor for a bipartisan bill to increase access to telemedicine for stroke survivors and another measure to designate the National Veterans Memorial and Museum in Columbus.[11]

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Sanford D. Bishop Jr.

1947–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1993–

Democrat from Georgia



Image courtesy of the Member

Sanford D. Bishop Jr. served 16 years in the Georgia state legislature before winning election to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1992. A longtime member of the Appropriations Committee, Bishop has championed federal fiscal responsibility. Representative Bishop focuses on military and veterans' issues, as well as on agricultural legislation important to his middle and southwest Georgia district.

Sanford D. Bishop Jr. was born on February 4, 1947, in Mobile, Alabama, to Sanford D. Bishop Sr. and Minnie S. Bishop. His father served as the first president of Bishop State Community College; his mother was the college librarian. Bishop was student body president at Morehouse College in Atlanta, Georgia, graduating in 1968 with a bachelor's degree in political science. He joined the ROTC and served in the U.S. Army until 1971, when he earned a law degree at Emory University in Atlanta. Bishop initially worked as a private practice lawyer who specialized in civil rights cases. In 1976, he won election to the Georgia house of representatives, representing a district that covered Columbus. He served there for 14 years before winning election to the Georgia senate in 1990. In the state legislature, Bishop helped establish the Georgia commission on equal opportunity and the state's office of child support receiver.[1] He is married to Vivian Creighton Bishop, and they have a daughter, Aayesha J. Reese.[2]

Backed by Black leaders and the Columbus business community in 1992, Bishop was one of five primary challengers to enter the race for a U.S. House seat after the six-term incumbent, Representative Charles Floyd Hatcher, was part of the House "bank" scandal. The district encompassed much of southwestern Georgia, including large stretches of farmland and Fort Benning, the state's largest military installation. Redistricting under the Voting Rights Act made the district the state's third majority-Black district in 1992.[3] Bishop forced Hatcher into a runoff before defeating the incumbent with 53 percent of the vote in a head-to-head contest.[4] Touting assurances from Democratic leadership that he would receive Hatcher's seat on the Agriculture Committee crucial to his district, Bishop defeated Republican Jim Dudley in the general election with 64 percent of the vote. Though Bishop faced difficult races in 2000 and 2010, he has typically carried large majorities, most recently winning 59 percent of the vote in 2020.[5]

In the 103rd Congress (1993–1995), Bishop received assignments to three committees: Agriculture; Post Office and Civil Service; and Veterans' Affairs. In the 104th

Congress (1995–1997), the Post Office and Civil Service panel was subsumed under the new Government Reform Committee, and Bishop left that assignment. In the 105th Congress (1997–1999), Bishop swapped Veterans' Affairs for an assignment to the Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence. In the 108th Congress (2003–2005), he relinquished all his committee assignments to serve on the exclusive Appropriations Committee. Since the 116th Congress (2019–2021), Bishop has chaired the Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and Related Agencies. In the 117th Congress (2021–2023), Bishop returned to the Agriculture Committee while maintaining his seat on Appropriations.

Bishop's primary legislative focus has been providing for a better quality of life for residents across the urban, suburban, and rural areas of middle and southwest Georgia—highlighting that the well-being of one affects the others. Bishop shaped major farm bills through the Agriculture Committee, crafting revised price support programs for peanut production, a major agriculture industry in his district.[6] He negotiated provisions of the 2008 farm bill that instituted the peanut-rotation program, a compromise between conservation and agricultural economic assistance.[7] During the Donald J. Trump administration, Bishop leveraged a working relationship with Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue, with whom Bishop had previously served in the Georgia senate.[8] Since becoming an Appropriations subcommittee chair, Bishop has led the crafting of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's spending bills.[9]

Bishop also has used his position on the Appropriations Committee to direct funding to the large military facilities throughout his district.[10] Since 2011, Bishop has pursued passage of the Disabled Veterans Tax Termination Act to guarantee simultaneous payment of retirement and disability compensation to eligible disabled veterans.[11] Following an initial effort in 2009, Bishop secured full passage of a bill establishing the Jimmy Carter National Historic Site within his district as a National Historical Park in 2021.[12]

Bishop is a member of the bipartisan Problem Solvers Caucus. He has joined Republican efforts to pass a balanced budget constitutional amendment, to ban flag desecration, and to allow school prayer.[13] Bishop has distanced himself from the rest of his caucus on the subject of gun control. In the 115th Congress (2017–2019), Bishop was one of only six Democrats who voted for a bill to institute federal protections for concealed-carry handgun owners.[14]

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Lisa Blunt Rochester

1962–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

2017–

Democrat from Delaware



Image courtesy of the Member

The first African-American woman from Delaware to win election to a federal office, Lisa Blunt Rochester broke multiple barriers on her path to Congress. As the only Representative for the state of Delaware, she represents a complex constituency that prioritizes negotiation and bipartisanship. At a reception after she was sworn in as a Member of the U.S. House of Representatives, Blunt Rochester held up a scarf bearing a print of the "X" her formerly enslaved great-great-great-grandfather had made in order to vote in Georgia during Reconstruction. "This represents where we've come from," she said. "We have the right to stand up; we have the right to serve."[1]

Lisa Blunt Rochester was born Lisa Blunt on February 10, 1962, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, to Ted Blunt and Alice LaTrelle. At age seven, her family moved to Wilmington, Delaware, where she graduated from Padua Academy in 1980. Blunt Rochester started college at Villanova University in Pennsylvania, where she met and married basketball player Alex Bradley. Together they had two children, Alex and Alyssa, before divorcing in 2003. After a period abroad for Bradley's professional basketball career, Blunt Rochester resumed her studies stateside and earned a bachelor's degree from Fairleigh Dickinson University in Rutherford, New Jersey, in 1985. She later earned a master's degree from the University of Delaware in Newark, Delaware, in 2003.[2]

Blunt Rochester joined then Representative Thomas Richard Carper's Delaware congressional office as a constituent relations caseworker in 1988. She followed Carper into the Delaware governor's office in 1993, serving first as a special assistant before being named deputy secretary of health and social services and then state secretary of labor in 1998. Blunt Rochester was appointed state personnel director in 2001. Three years later, she was named chief executive officer of the Metropolitan Wilmington Urban League, a nonprofit community organization with the goal of empowering minority communities. In 2006, she married businessman Charles Rochester and moved to Shanghai, China, where she coauthored a book about expatriate women who reinvented themselves in Shanghai. Blunt Rochester returned to Delaware following her husband's death in 2014. From 2012 through 2015, she also served as a senior fellow at the Institute for Community Inclusion at the University of Massachusetts Boston.[3]

Shortly after Representative John C. Carney Jr. announced his campaign for governor of Delaware in late

2015, Blunt Rochester entered the Democratic primary as an early frontrunner for the state's lone At-Large district. In late summer 2016, she captured the nomination with 44 percent of the vote against five other candidates.[4] During the campaign, Blunt Rochester called for a higher minimum wage, stricter gun control measures by closing purchasing loopholes, and criminal justice reform. She faced Air Force veteran Hans Reigle in the general election.[5] Blunt Rochester won with 56 percent of the vote, becoming both the first woman and the first person of color elected to Congress from Delaware.[6]

Blunt Rochester took office in the 115th Congress (2017–2019) with assignments to the Committee on Agriculture and the Committee on Education and the Workforce. In keeping with Delaware tradition, she pursued bipartisan solutions, looking for ways to work with congressional Republicans. Her bill to lower prescription drug costs passed the House with a scattering of Republican votes in May 2019, and her bill to address financial fraud targeting senior citizens received widespread bipartisan support in the House.[7] Blunt Rochester joined Republicans in votes to reopen the government in February 2018 and was the only Democratic cosponsor on the Strengthening Coastal Communities Act of 2018, which provided coastal homeowners easier access to disaster relief grants.[8] In November 2018, she coauthored an op-ed with Pennsylvania Republican Glenn Thompson urging the Senate to vote on reauthorization and improvements to the Family Violence Prevention and Services Act.[9]

Blunt Rochester introduced the Clean Slate Act in each of her three terms in office. The bill would seal arrest records for certain nonviolent offenses, including marijuana possession, with the goal of eliminating barriers to employment. "We want to allow people a clean slate and to move forward with their lives after they've done what they were supposed to do," Blunt Rochester said of the bill.[10] She also voted for the broad bipartisan criminal justice reform bill signed by President Donald J. Trump in December 2018.[11]

Blunt Rochester won re-election in 2018 and 2020 with at least 57 percent of the vote. In the 116th Congress (2019–2021), she left her previous committee assignments to take a seat on the exclusive Committee on Energy and Commerce.[12]

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Cory A. Booker

1969–

UNITED STATES SENATOR

2013–

Democrat from New Jersey



Image courtesy of the Member

Cory A. Booker leveraged national renown and powerful connections to catapult from mayor of Newark to the U.S. Senate, becoming the first Black American to represent New Jersey in that chamber. Booker has emphasized bipartisanship in his efforts to pass criminal justice reform, environmental assistance, and infrastructure legislation, though he made headlines for his vocal opposition to several major nominations during the Donald J. Trump presidency.

Cory Anthony Booker was born in Washington, DC, on April 27, 1969, to Cary and Carolyn Booker, executives at the technology company IBM. The family moved to Harrington Park, New Jersey, where Booker grew up and played football at Northern Valley Regional High School in neighboring Old Tappan. After graduating in 1987, Booker earned a football scholarship to Stanford University in California.[1] He graduated with a bachelor's degree in political science in 1991 and a master's degree in sociology and urban affairs a year later. Awarded a Rhodes Scholarship, Booker attended Queen's College at London's Oxford University for two years before returning to study law at Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut. Booker earned his law degree in 1997 and practiced public interest law in Newark, New Jersey, as part of a sponsored fellowship.[2]

One year later, Booker gave up the fellowship to run for Newark's city council. Booker served on the council from 1998 to 2002, when he launched a mayoral bid against longtime incumbent Sharpe James. Booker lost the race but immediately announced his intention to run again in 2006.[3] In between campaigns, he opened a new law firm, studied public policy, and went door-to-door throughout the city. In March 2006, Mayor James announced his retirement; Booker easily outpaced state senator Ronald L. Rice and cruised to victory.[4] As mayor of Newark, Booker cultivated an influential network of prominent supporters and pursued a high-profile revitalization of city schools. Booker also presided over a balanced budget, an expansion of affordable housing, and improvements to the city's mass transit.[5]

In early 2013, Booker began preparing to run for the Senate seat being vacated the next year by New Jersey Senator Frank Raleigh Lautenberg. When Lautenberg died in June 2013, Governor Chris Christie appointed state attorney general Jeffrey Scott Chiesa, who declined to run in an October special election for the remainder of Lautenberg's term. Booker accelerated his plans to run in the August Democratic primary.[6] Benefiting from a national profile, he bested three other candidates, including

Representatives Frank Pallone Jr. and Rush Holt, with 60 percent of the vote.[7] In the special election, Booker defeated former Bogota, New Jersey, mayor Steve Lonegan with 55 percent of the vote.[8] He won a full term in 2014 with 56 percent of the vote and was re-elected in 2020 with 57 percent.[9]

Booker was sworn in to the 113th Congress (2013–2015) on October 31, 2013. He was assigned to the following Senate committees: Commerce, Science, and Transportation; Environment and Public Works; and Small Business and Entrepreneurship. In the 114th Congress (2015–2017), Booker joined the Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee; he left the following Congress. Booker also left the Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee during the 115th Congress (2017–2019) and joined the Committee on Foreign Relations and the Judiciary Committee. In the 117th Congress (2021–2023), Booker exchanged his seat on Environment and Public Works for a spot on the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry.

Booker has emphasized reaching across the aisle to pass legislation. He worked with Texas Senator Ted Cruz to pass the Emergency Information Improvement Act of 2015, providing emergency relief to broadcasters in the wake of storms and disasters.[10] Booker also partnered with Senator Rand Paul to pursue marijuana decriminalization and passing a law making lynching a federal crime.[11] In 2018, Booker helped negotiate passage of the First Step Act, a significant criminal justice reform bill that aimed to reduce recidivism and help released felons find homes and employment.[12]

In the 113th Congress, Booker was named chair of the Environment and Public Works Oversight Subcommittee. In 2019, following reports of a drinking water crisis in parts of New Jersey, Booker shepherded a bill to passage that allowed states to reallocate funds to repair municipal piping and lower lead levels.[13] Democrats elevated Booker to chief deputy whip during the 115th Congress; in the 117th Congress, he was appointed vice chair of the Democratic Policy and Communications Committee.[14]

From his seat on the Judiciary Committee, Booker drew national attention for his opposition to several of President Trump's Cabinet and judicial nominations, particularly Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh and later for his defense of President Joseph R. Biden Jr.'s nominations, especially Supreme Court Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson. Booker announced his candidacy for the Democratic nomination for President in February 2019. He suspended his campaign in January 2020 prior to the first Democratic caucus.[15]

Notes

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Anthony G. Brown

1961–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

2017–

Democrat from Maryland



Image courtesy of the Member

A former U.S. Army attorney, state representative, and lieutenant governor, Anthony G. Brown brought significant governing experience when he won election to the U.S. House in 2016. Representing the Maryland suburbs outside Washington, DC, Brown has focused on transportation and climate issues in his district while building partnerships between the executive branch and local defense contractors.

Anthony Gregory Brown was born in Huntington, New York, on November 21, 1961, to Dr. Roy and Lilly Brown, immigrants from Jamaica and Switzerland, respectively. Brown, one of five children, grew up and attended public schools in Huntington, New York. He graduated from Huntington High School in 1979 after serving as the school's first Black student body president. Brown attended the U.S. Military Academy in West Point, New York, in the summer of 1979 before applying to Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts. After obtaining a bachelor's degree from Harvard in 1984, he was commissioned in the Regular Army through the Reserve Officer Training Corps at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Cambridge, Massachusetts; attended Army flight school at Fort Rucker, Alabama, graduating first in his class; and served as an Army helicopter pilot with the 3rd Infantry Division in Germany. In 1989, Brown joined the Army Reserve and returned to Harvard, where he completed a law degree in 1992. Brown was a law clerk for the chief judge of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Armed Forces for two years and practiced law privately in the Washington, DC, area for twelve years. Brown transferred to the Army Judge Advocate General's Corps in 1995 and retired at the rank of colonel in 2014. Brown married Karmen Bailey Walker in 2012; they have three children.[1]

Brown launched his political career in 1998 by winning election to the Maryland house of delegates representing a district in Prince George's County. Brown was appointed majority whip before he was deployed to Iraq with the 353rd Civil Affairs Command for 10 months in 2004, where he assisted in the effort to rebuild the Iraqi government while continuing to serve in the legislature. In the 2006 Maryland gubernatorial race, Baltimore mayor Martin O'Malley selected Brown as his running mate.[2] Brown's legislative connections assisted the O'Malley–Brown administration in implementing the Affordable Care Act and coordinating military base realignment within Maryland. Brown touted these efforts in his own unsuccessful 2014 gubernatorial campaign against Republican Larry Hogan.[3]

When Senator Barbara Ann Mikulski announced her intention to retire, Representative Donna F. Edwards declared her candidacy to replace Mikulski in 2016, leaving a vacancy in the Fourth District. The wealthy majority-Black district included large sections of Prince George's and Anne Arundel counties.[4] Brown received key endorsements to pull ahead of former state's attorney Glenn Ivey, winning the six-candidate primary with 42 percent of the vote.[5] In the general election, Brown campaigned on a pledge to deliver effective constituent services and economic opportunities for working families. Running against Republican candidate George McDermott in a solidly Democratic district, Brown won a commanding 74 percent of the vote. Brown defeated McDermott by similar margins in 2018 and 2020.[6]

Brown has served on the Armed Services Committee since the 115th Congress (2017–2019). During his first term, he was also assigned to the Natural Resources Committee and the Ethics Committee, though he was reassigned after the 116th Congress (2019–2021), when he was selected to serve as vice chairman of the Armed Services Committee. Brown was also assigned to the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee during his second term, where he worked to stop Governor Hogan's proposal to widen highways around Maryland's DC-area suburbs by adding toll lanes. Brown unsuccessfully attempted to submit amendments to the annual appropriations bill barring the use of federal funds to implement the plan. However, Hogan's proposal was ultimately scaled back.[7] In the 117th Congress (2021–2023), Brown joined the Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

Much of Brown's early legislative work leveraged his military experience and relationships. Brown successfully attached an amendment to the defense appropriations bill in 2018 protecting the functions of the Defense Information Systems Agency, part of the U.S. Department of Defense and located in Fort Meade, Maryland.[8] As an Armed Services Committee member, Brown organized a group of defense firms and academic institutions to address issues including the aging workforce and supply chain weaknesses.[9] In 2019, the annual defense authorization law included his proposal providing financial incentives for contractors to establish training programs that meet the needs of the Department of Defense.[10]

In 2020, Brown partnered with Republicans to introduce the Diversity in Defense Act to include more diversity-related requirements in the armed forces. The bill was included in the House-passed version of the fiscal year 2021 National Defense Authorization Act.[11]

In October 2021, Brown announced that he would not seek re-election for a fourth term in the House but would instead campaign for the Democratic nomination for Maryland attorney general in 2022.[12]

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G.K. Butterfield

1947–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

2004–

Democrat from North Carolina

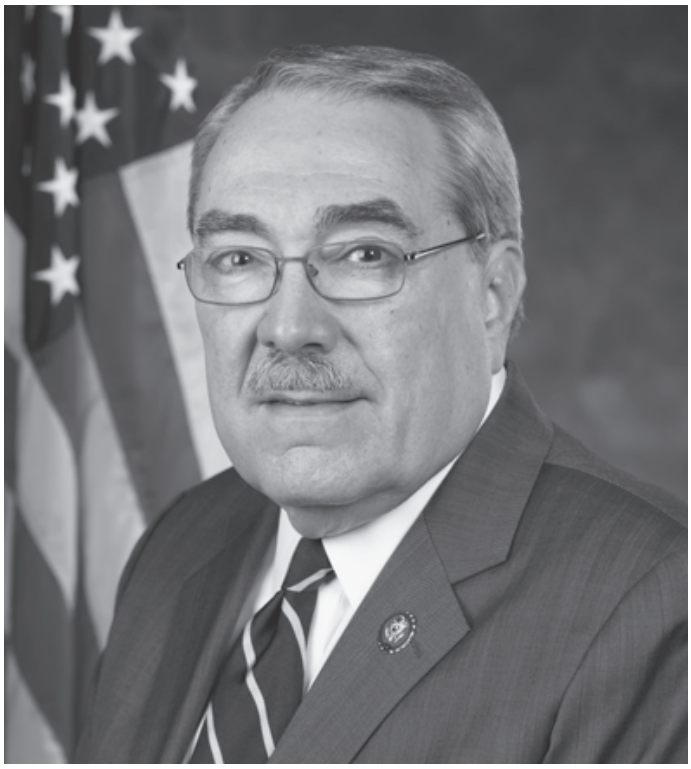

Image courtesy of the Member

After serving for more than 15 years as a North Carolina judge, including a term on the state supreme court, G.K. Butterfield won a 2004 special election to serve in the U.S. House of Representatives. Re-elected to the 109th Congress (2005–2007) less than four months later, Representative Butterfield has prioritized addressing health care disparities and racial discrimination during nearly two decades in the House.

George Kenneth "G.K." Butterfield Jr. was born on April 27, 1947, in Wilson, North Carolina. His father, Dr. George Kenneth Butterfield Sr., was a dentist who won a seat on the Wilson city council in 1953—making him one of a handful of African Americans to hold political office in the state since Reconstruction.[1] Town officials later changed the election format to deprive the senior Butterfield and all Black candidates of a chance to win further elections. "I saw how the political system was manipulated to obtain an unfair result," the younger Butterfield recalled. "Having seen that injustice has made me want to be involved politically."[2] Butterfield served two years in the U.S. Army as a personnel specialist from 1968 to 1970 before graduating in 1971 from North Carolina Central University in Durham, North Carolina, with a bachelor's degree in sociology and political science. Three years later, he earned a law degree from North Carolina Central University and commenced private law practice. Butterfield is married to Dr. Sylvia James and has three daughters.[3]

Butterfield later served as president of the North Carolina Association of Black Lawyers and filed several successful voting rights lawsuits. In November 1988, he won election to the North Carolina superior court, where he served for 12 years. In 2001, North Carolina Governor Mike Easley appointed Judge Butterfield to the North Carolina supreme court, where he served for two years. In 2002, Butterfield lost his re-election bid and was subsequently appointed special superior court judge.

In 2004, when incumbent Representative Frank W. Ballance Jr. announced his retirement from the U.S. House, Butterfield won the nomination to run in the special election.[4] The heavily Democratic district, which covered large swaths of eastern North Carolina, was largely rural and poor and was one of two majority-Black congressional districts in the state. Butterfield ran on a platform that promised more federal dollars to help small business development revitalize the local economy.[5] On July 20,

2004, Butterfield easily won both the special election to serve the remainder of the term in the 108th Congress (2003–2005) and the Democratic primary for the full term in the 109th Congress. In November 2004, Butterfield prevailed with 64 percent of the vote. He was not seriously challenged at the polls until 2020 when his share of the vote fell to 54 percent.[6]

Representative Butterfield was sworn in on July 21, 2004.[7] He received assignments on the Agriculture and Small Business committees. He left the Small Business panel to accept a seat on the Armed Services Committee in the 109th Congress. In the 110th Congress (2007–2009), Butterfield gave up other assignments for a seat on the influential Energy and Commerce Committee. Butterfield also served on the Committee on Standards of Official Conduct during the 111th Congress (2009–2011) and joined the Committee on House Administration in the 116th Congress (2019–2021), where he chaired the Subcommittee on Elections beginning in 2021. Since 2007, Butterfield has served as a chief deputy whip, making him the first Democrat from North Carolina to serve in this position.[8]

From his seat on the Energy and Commerce Committee, Butterfield has taken particular interest in health care costs, the pharmaceutical industry, and interstate commerce. In 2012, Butterfield worked with Representative Michael T. McCaul of Texas to provide drug companies with faster federal regulatory reviews in exchange for prioritizing research to treat rare pediatric diseases. The bill became law in 2012.[9] When the law expired in 2020, he drafted a bill to reauthorize the provisions which passed the House.[10] Butterfield also authored and guided a bipartisan bill through the committee that combated coin counterfeiting; it became law in 2014.[11]

Butterfield has pushed for honest reflections on historic racial discrimination. During development of the Capitol Visitor Center, he lobbied to include exhibits dedicated to nineteenth-century Black representation in Congress.[12] In 2014, he sponsored a resolution establishing a memorial for enslaved people and Black soldiers who fought in the American Revolution.[13] The following year, Butterfield was elected chair of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) during the 114th Congress (2015–2017). He led a CBC delegation to Ferguson, Missouri, in early 2015 to address the unrest precipitated by the killing of an unarmed Black man by police.[14] Later that year, Butterfield led discussion on the House Floor regarding use of the Confederate battle flag and the rise of racially motivated hate groups.[15]

On November 18, 2021, Butterfield announced his intention to retire at the end of the 117th Congress (2021–2023).[16]

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André Carson

1974–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

2008–

Democrat from Indiana



Image courtesy of the Member

In March 2008, André Carson won a special election as a Democrat to the U.S. House of Representatives to fill the vacant seat left by the death of his grandmother Julia May Carson. Carson became the second person of Islamic faith elected to Congress. As a former law enforcement officer, Carson has urged transparency in national security and racial and faith equality. He is the Dean of Indiana's congressional delegation and the most senior Muslim Member of Congress currently serving.

André D. Carson was born in Indianapolis, Indiana, on October 16, 1974.[1] Carson's grandmother was Julia Carson, a political trailblazer who served 18 years in the Indiana state legislature before winning election to the U.S. House in 1996. Introduced to national politics at an early age, Carson accompanied his grandmother to the 1984 Democratic National Convention. Carson graduated from Arsenal Technical High School in Indianapolis.[2] He graduated with a bachelor's degree in criminal justice from Concordia University Wisconsin in Mequon, Wisconsin, in 2003. Two years later, he earned a master's degree in business management from Indiana Wesleyan University in Marion, Indiana.[3]

Carson worked as an Indiana state excise officer for nearly a decade. He also worked in intelligence and counterterrorism for the Indiana Department of Homeland Security and served at the Indiana Intelligence Fusion Center. There he worked in an anti-terrorism unit to protect Indianapolis and the United States from terrorist threats at home and abroad. In 2007, Carson served on the Indianapolis and Marion County city-county council, while working for Cripe Architectural and Engineering Firm.[4]

After the untimely death of his grandmother, Julia Carson, a vacancy opened in the Seventh Congressional District.[5] After securing the Democratic nomination, Carson emphasized his opposition to the war in Iraq and endorsed tax cuts for working families.[6] Carson ultimately won the March special election with 54 percent of the vote, but just two months later, he faced seven challengers in the primary for a full term. Carson captured a plurality and went on to win the general election.[7]

Carson was sworn in on March 13, 2008, and accepted assignments to the Financial Services Committee and the Science and Technology Committee.[8] Carson left the latter committee after the 110th Congress (2007–2009). In the 113th Congress (2013–2015), he exchanged his seat on the Financial Services Committee for seats on the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee and the Armed Services

Committee; he left the Armed Services Committee after one term. In the 114th Congress (2015–2017), he joined the Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence.

As a Muslim with law enforcement experience, Carson brought a unique perspective to the House Intelligence Committee.[9] In the 116th and 117th Congresses (2019–2023), Carson chaired the Intelligence Subcommittee on Counterterrorism, Counterintelligence, and Counterproliferation. As committee chair, Carson has urged intelligence agencies to address the threat posed by White supremacist organizations.[10] In addition, Carson strongly objected to President Donald J. Trump's travel ban placed on Muslim-majority countries and compared the decision to segregation and Japanese internment. He coauthored the NO BAN Act, which would repeal these travel bans and prevent similar bans in the future.[11]

Alongside the Indiana state delegation, Carson spearheaded legislation in 2018 designating the Landmark for Peace Memorial in downtown Indianapolis as the Kennedy–King National Commemorative Site. The bill incorporated the memorial, which honors Senator Robert Francis Kennedy's impromptu Indianapolis speech on the night of Martin Luther King Jr.'s death, into the African American Civil Rights Network managed by the National Park Service.[12]

Carson voted for the Affordable Care Act and continues to support efforts to lower the cost of health care and prescription drugs. He supports abortion rights, criminal justice reform, LGBTQ equality, greater rights for immigrants and refugees, restoring the Voting Rights Act, and other progressive polices aimed at creating a more inclusive society. He has served as part of the Democratic leadership's whip team and the Congressional Black Caucus's leadership team.[13]

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Yvette D. Clarke

1964–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

2007–

Democrat from New York



Image courtesy of the Member

In November 2006, Yvette D. Clarke won election as a Democrat to the U.S. House of Representatives. From attending neighborhood meetings as a small child to working in local and state government, Clarke has served her Brooklyn constituents, immigrant communities, and small business owners throughout her life. "I think we have an obligation to look at the dynamics within our most impoverished communities," she once said, "and look for ways in which we can provide pathways to opportunity."[1]

Yvette Diane Clarke was born in Brooklyn, New York, on November 21, 1964, to Leslie and Una S. T. Clarke, who emigrated to the United States from Jamaica. Leslie, an engineer and architect, and Una, a community activist, raised Yvette and her brother, Leslie Jr., in the Flatbush neighborhood of Brooklyn. Clarke was exposed to public service at a young age when she attended community meetings with her mother. She graduated from Edward R. Murrow High School in 1982 and attended Oberlin College in Oberlin, Ohio, from 1982 to 1986.[2]

Returning to New York, Clarke worked as a child care specialist and then became a legislative aide to New York state senator Velmanette Montgomery and New York assemblywoman Barbara Clark. She also worked as an executive assistant for the New York state workers' compensation board and as director of the Bronx Overall Development Corporation. In 2001, Clarke won a New York city council seat which had been occupied by her mother since 1991. Consequently, Clarke became the first daughter to succeed her mother in the council's history. She served on the council from 2002 to 2007.[3]

Clarke then set her sights on running for a congressional district that cut across the heart of Brooklyn and included her Flatbush neighborhood. The district included sections of Crown Heights, Brownsville, and Sheepshead Bay—an economically diverse area with a large minority population and a deep base of Democratic support. In 2004, Clarke ran against 12-term incumbent Major R. Owens but lost in the primary with 28 percent of the vote. When Owens announced that he would retire from the House in 2006, Clarke ran for the seat again. She beat three opponents in the Democratic primary with 31 percent of the vote. In the November general election, she defeated four opponents, garnering 77 percent of the vote. In her seven re-election campaigns, Clarke has earned no less than 73 percent of the vote, most recently winning a seat in the 117th Congress (2021–2023) with 83 percent of the vote.[4]

In the 110th and 111th Congresses (2007–2011), Clarke served on three House committees: Education and Labor; Homeland Security; and Small Business. In the 111th Congress, Clarke chaired the Homeland Security Subcommittee on Emerging Threats, Cybersecurity, and Science and Technology. In 2011, she left Education and Labor but remained on the other committees through the 112th and 113th Congresses (2011–2015). Clarke also joined the Ethics Committee in the 113th Congress (2013–2015). In the 114th and 115th Congresses (2015–2019), Clarke left Homeland Security and joined the Energy and Commerce Committee. In the 116th Congress (2019–2021), when Democrats regained the House majority, Clarke left Ethics and Small Business and rejoined the Homeland Security Committee. Additionally, she served as vice chair of the Energy and Commerce Committee. In the 117th Congress, Clarke is a senior member of both Energy and Commerce and Homeland Security, where she chairs the Homeland Security Subcommittee on Cybersecurity, Infrastructure Protection, & Innovation. Clarke has been a member of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) since coming to Congress in 2007. Today Clarke chairs the CBC's Immigration Task Force.

Throughout her congressional career, Clarke has focused on protecting and promoting the rights and opportunities of immigrant communities. Upon entering Congress, Clarke sponsored a bill that directed the U.S. Attorney General and the Homeland Security Secretary to provide to Congress a plan to clear the backlog of name check requests from U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services. More recently, Clarke introduced the Protect Our Sanctuary Cities Act, which would nullify an executive order that compelled law enforcement officials to deport certain immigrants. Clarke has also been a prominent advocate of the DREAM Act to grant residency to undocumented immigrants who entered the country as minors.[5]

Clarke championed small businesses from her positions on the Small Business and Energy and Commerce Committees. She submitted a bill that directed the Small Business Administration to establish a pilot program to help small businesses started by entrepreneurs in poverty-stricken areas. She has also been critical of the lack of support for minority-owned small businesses within the Federal Communications Commission.[6]

On the Homeland Security Committee, Clarke has focused on cybersecurity threats. As chair of the Subcommittee on Emerging Threats, Cybersecurity, and Science and Technology in the 111th Congress, she introduced legislation that authorized funding for the Homeland Security Secretary to prepare a strategic plan that included development of nuclear detection technology, critical infrastructure protections, and border security enhancements. In July 2021, Clarke's bill to establish a cybersecurity grant and training program to assist state and local governments passed the House.[7]

Notes

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Emanuel Cleaver II

1944–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

2005–

Democrat from Missouri

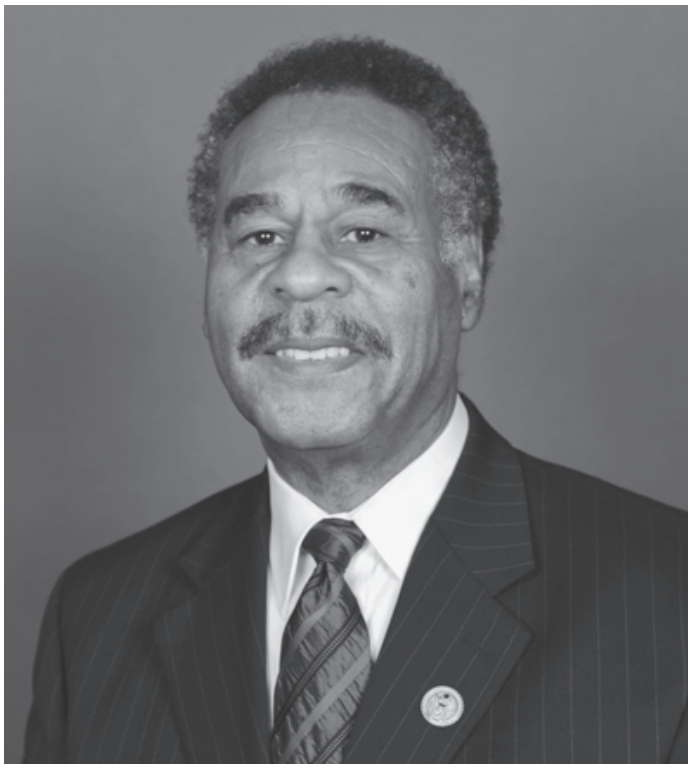

Image courtesy of the Member

Emanuel Cleaver II won election to the U.S. House of Representatives in 2004. As a former Kansas City mayor and city councilman, he entered Congress in 2005 with extensive local government experience. From his seat on the Financial Services Committee, Representative Cleaver promoted college tuition savings plans, affordable housing, and home ownership. He also championed legislation to commemorate Missouri's Black history.

Emanuel Cleaver II was born in Waxahachie, Texas, on October 26, 1944. His family's religious roots—his great-grandfather, grandfather, and an uncle were preachers—inspired him to a life of ministry.[1] He graduated from Booker T. Washington High School in Wichita Falls, Texas, in 1963 and earned a bachelor's degree in sociology from Prairie View A&M University in Prairie View, Texas, in 1972. Two years later, Cleaver graduated with a master's degree in divinity from the St. Paul School of Theology in Kansas City, Missouri. Cleaver served as an ordained Methodist minister for a central Kansas City congregation. Cleaver and his wife, Dianne, a psychologist, have four children and three grandchildren.

Cleaver was active in the 1960s civil rights movement and entered elective politics in 1979, successfully campaigning for a city council seat in Kansas City. He served there until 1991, acting as mayor pro tempore and chairing the council's planning and zoning committee.[2] He won election as Kansas City mayor in 1991, becoming the first African American to do so.[3] Cleaver served as mayor for eight years, focusing on job growth and economic development. He worked as a radio talk show host after leaving office in 1999.[4]

In December 2003, five-term Democratic Representative Karen McCarthy announced she would not run for re-election. Cleaver pursued the nomination for the vacant seat representing the middle class, largely Democratic district that covered portions of Kansas City and some of its eastern suburbs.[5] African Americans accounted for 24 percent of the population and Democratic Representatives had held the seat since before the New Deal.[6] Cleaver won the August 3, 2004, primary with 60 percent of the vote against Jamie Metzl, a former White House Fellow and National Security Council aide.[7] In November, he faced Republican Jeanne Patterson, a businesswoman and political newcomer, and prevailed with 55 percent of the vote. In his eight re-elections, Cleaver won with margins between 52 and 64 percent of the vote.[8]

When Cleaver joined the 109th Congress (2005–2007), he was assigned to the Financial Services Committee, where he has served throughout his House tenure. In the 110th Congress (2007–2009), Cleaver joined the newly created Select Committee on Energy Independence and Global Warming, remaining on the panel until it was eliminated in 2011. In the 111th Congress (2009–2011), he served on the Homeland Security Committee for one term. In the 116th Congress (2019–2021), he returned to the Homeland Security panel and joined the Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress. He also chaired the Financial Services Committee's Subcommittee on National Security, International Development, and Monetary Policy. In the 117th Congress (2021–2023), he chaired the Housing, Community Development, and Insurance Subcommittee.

In 2010, the House passed Cleaver's bill to create Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation-insured college savings accounts to provide an additional option for families planning for college.[9] During debate on the House Floor, Cleaver told his colleagues that customers suffered losses of up to 50 percent in their existing stock-based college investment accounts following the 2008 recession.[10] The Senate did not act on the bill.

As ranking member of the Financial Services Subcommittee on Housing and Insurance, Cleaver worked closely with the panel's chair, Missouri Representative Blaine Luetkemeyer, to introduce the Housing Opportunity Through Modernization Act. When signed into law in 2016, the measure amended the review process for federally subsidized Section 8 housing, expanded foster care aid, and revised Federal Housing Administration guidelines making it easier for first-time home buyers to purchase condominiums.[11]

Cleaver continued to focus on housing during the COVID-19 pandemic. In March 2021, he introduced the Stabilizing Rural Homeowners During COVID Act to expand the Department of Agriculture's rural housing loan programs. As chair of the Financial Services Committee's Housing, Community Development, and Insurance Subcommittee, Cleaver held a hearing to examine safety and health in public housing during the pandemic.[12]

In the 112th Congress (2011–2013), Representative Cleaver served as chair of the Congressional Black Caucus. Under his leadership, the caucus organized a national job fair tour to increase employment, especially in Black communities. The tour visited Detroit, Michigan; Miami, Florida; Atlanta, Georgia; and Los Angeles, California in August 2011.[13] In 2020, Cleaver's Negro Leagues Baseball Centennial Commemorative Coin Act was signed into law. The measure instructed the U.S. Department of the Treasury to design and produce commemorative coins to celebrate the founding of the Negro National League.[14] The law dedicates the proceeds of coin purchases made by private citizens to the Negro Leagues Baseball Museum in Kansas City—a museum Cleaver advocated for during his time as mayor.[15]

Notes

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James E. Clyburn

1940–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1993–

Democrat from South Carolina

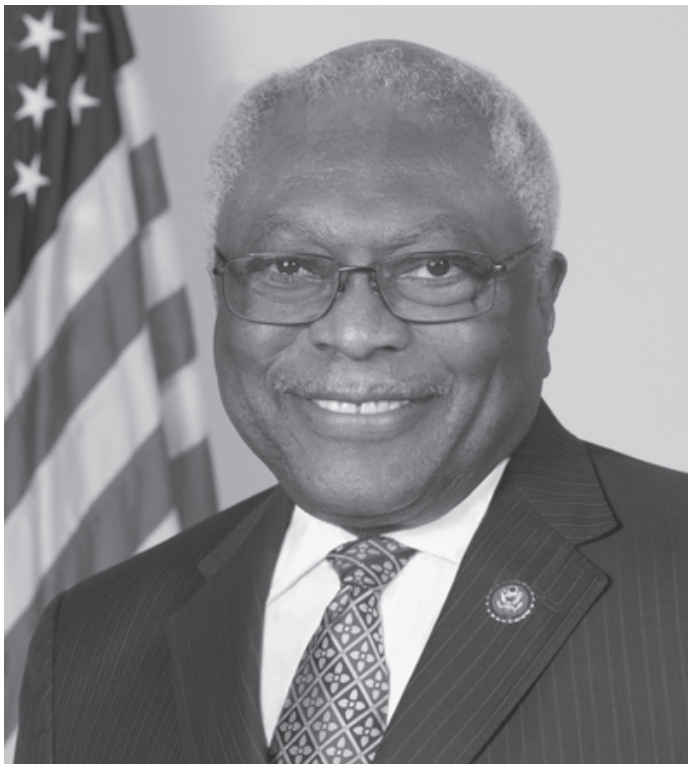

Image courtesy of the Member

James E. Clyburn's 1992 election made him the first African American from South Carolina to serve in Congress since 1897. He has been part of the top tier of congressional leadership since his 2006 election as Majority Whip and is only the second Black Representative to ascend to the third-ranking position in the U.S. House of Representatives. An influential voice in the Democratic Party, Clyburn has crafted policies to support rural and low-income residents of his South Carolina district and across the nation.

James Enos Clyburn was born in Sumter, South Carolina, on July 21, 1940, the eldest of three sons of Enos L. Clyburn, a minister, and Almeta Clyburn, a beauty shop operator. Clyburn grew up in the segregated South and took an early interest in civil rights activism. At age 12, he was elected president of the Sumter youth chapter of the NAACP. He attended Mather Academy, a private high school of all Black students, and continued his studies at South Carolina State College, in Orangeburg, South Carolina, where he graduated with a bachelor's degree in 1961. During the early 1960s, he organized student civil rights protests, which resulted in several arrests. After one such arrest, he was taken to an Orangeburg courthouse where he met his future wife, Emily England, a fellow South Carolina State student who brought the detained students food. They raised three daughters—Mignon, Angela, and Jennifer—and were married for 58 years until Emily Clyburn's death in 2019.[1]

After college, Clyburn taught high school history before working as an employment counselor at the South Carolina Employment Security Commission and directing Charleston's neighborhood youth corps.[2] Starting in 1968, he led the South Carolina state commission for farm workers. In 1971, he was appointed to the staff of South Carolina Governor John West. In 1974, he was appointed head of the state commission for human affairs, which investigated cases of employment discrimination. He held this post for 18 years.[3]

In 1992, a federal court drew a majority-Black congressional district in eastern South Carolina in compliance with the Voting Rights Act. It was a sprawling district encompassing all or part of 16 counties and parts of Charleston, Columbia, and Florence.[4] As a statewide appointee, Clyburn enjoyed widespread name recognition and secured an early fundraising advantage. He captured the Democratic primary over four other candidates with 56 percent of the vote. In the general election, Clyburn

easily won a seat in the 103rd Congress (1993–1995) with 65 percent of the vote. In his subsequent 14 re-elections, Clyburn has won with comfortable margins between 63 and 94 percent of the vote.[5]

During his first three terms in the House, Representative Clyburn served on the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee (formerly the Public Works and Transportation Committee) and the Veterans' Affairs Committee. He also landed a seat on the Small Business Committee during the 104th Congress (1995–1997). In the 106th Congress (1999–2001), Clyburn won a seat on the Appropriations Committee, on which he served exclusively until his election as Majority Whip. Since 2020, Clyburn has chaired the Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis.

Clyburn's rise into the ranks of Democratic leadership began in his first term, when he was elected freshman class president. In the 106th Congress he chaired the Congressional Black Caucus. After the 2002 election, Clyburn won a three-way contest for vice chair of the Democratic Caucus. His colleagues elected him Democratic Caucus chair in 2005 and then Majority Whip for the 110th and 111th Congresses (2007–2011). Clyburn served as Assistant Democratic Leader from 2011 to 2019, when Republicans held the House majority. After Democrats regained control of the chamber in 2018, Clyburn was re-elected Majority Whip.[6]

As Majority Whip, Clyburn worked with Ways and Means Committee Chair Charles B. Rangel of New York to amend the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009—Congress's stimulus package developed in response to the Great Recession—to ensure that relief funds were distributed equitably. Clyburn devised the 10-20-30 formula that allocated at least 10 percent of federal funding from certain rural relief programs to counties that have had a 20 percent poverty rate for the past 30 years.[7] He was a major supporter of the 2010 Affordable Care Act and has fought to maintain funding for community health centers, which provide basic health care to underserved communities.[8] Clyburn created a House task force to promote rural broadband access and helped craft provisions of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, which allocated $65 billion for broadband infrastructure and became law in late 2021.[9]

Clyburn's bill to establish Congaree National Park—South Carolina's first national park—was signed into law in 2003.[10] In 2006, Clyburn's Gullah/Geechee Cultural Heritage Act became law as part of the National Heritage Areas Act, which funded cultural preservation efforts and provided for federal recognition of the Gullah people, descendants of enslaved Africans who lived along the southeastern Atlantic coast.[11] His focus on preserving the history of his home state can also be seen in his creation of the South Carolina National Heritage Corridor as part of the Omnibus Parks and Public Lands Management Act of 1996 and the Reconstruction Era National Historical Park included in the John D. Dingell, Jr. Conservation, Management, and Recreation Act of 2019.[12]

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Danny K. Davis

1941–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1997–

Democrat from Illinois

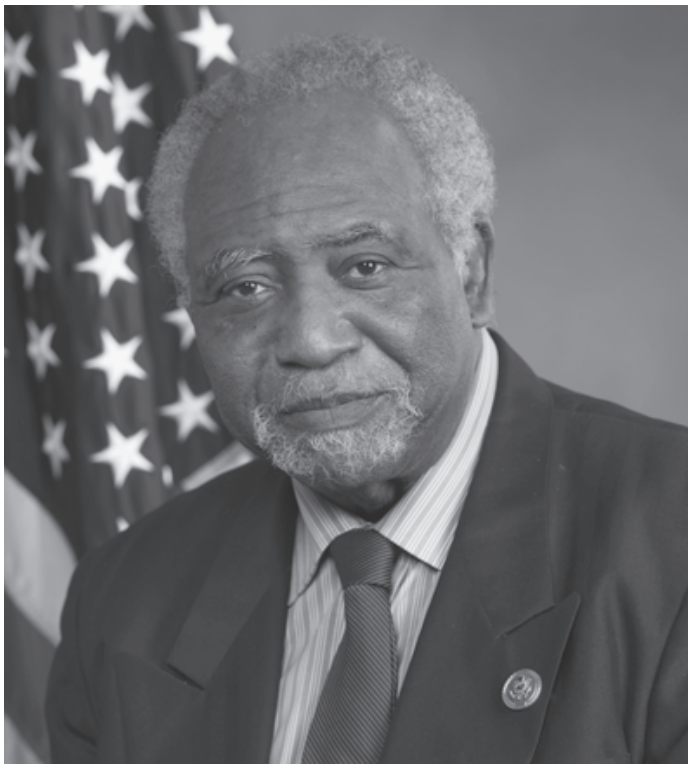

Image courtesy of the Member

After 18 years as a Chicago alderman and county commissioner, Danny K. Davis won election to a U.S. House of Representatives seat representing the city's West Side in 1996. In Congress, Davis has created legislation to bring social services, improved health care, and economic opportunities to his district. "The best way to evaluate the effectiveness and greatness of a society is by how well it treats its old, how well it treats its young, and what it does for those who have difficulty caring for themselves," he said.[1]

Danny Davis was born on September 6, 1941, to Mazzie Glass and Hezekiah Davis, cotton farmers in Parkdale, Arkansas.[2] He graduated from Savage High School in Parkdale in 1957 and four years later earned a bachelor's degree from Arkansas Agricultural, Mechanical, and Normal College in Pine Bluff, Arkansas. After college, Davis moved to Chicago, where he took a job as a post office clerk and later became a teacher in the Chicago public school system. He earned a master's degree from Chicago State University in 1968 and, in 1977, completed a Ph.D. in public administration at the Union Graduate School in Cincinnati, Ohio.[3] Davis is married to Vera G. Davis and has two sons: Jonathan and Stacey.[4]

After teaching, Davis embarked on a career as a community organizer for public health. He served in leadership positions at several federally funded community health centers in Chicago that were opened as part of the Lyndon B. Johnson administration's War on Poverty, and he ultimately became president of the National Association of Community Health Centers.[5] In 1979, Davis was elected to the Chicago city council, where he served as alderman for West Chicago's 29th ward. In 1990, he was elected as Cook County board commissioner, a post he held until 1996. He was among the first wave of Black aldermen who were not part of the Democratic political machine constructed by Chicago Mayor Richard J. Daley, who died in 1976.[6]

In 1984 and 1986, Davis unsuccessfully challenged incumbent Representative Cardiss Collins for a seat representing much of Chicago's West Side—a majority-Black district encompassing neighborhoods from the downtown Loop to the city's western suburbs.[7] He also ran in Chicago's 1991 mayoral primary but lost to incumbent Richard M. Daley, the son of the former mayor.[8]

When Cardiss Collins announced her decision to retire at the end of the 104th Congress (1995–1997), Davis entered the Democratic primary to succeed her in 1996.

With widespread name recognition from his long tenure in local government, Davis emerged from a crowded field of 10 and won with 32 percent of the vote in the heavily Democratic district.[9] In the general election, he won with 83 percent of the vote and has achieved similar margins in each of his 12 subsequent re-elections.[10]

When Davis was sworn in to the 105th Congress (1997–1999) he received assignments on the Government Reform Committee and the Small Business Committee. He also picked up a seat on the Education and the Workforce Committee in the 108th Congress (2003–2005). He has since left the latter two panels to serve on the tax-writing Ways and Means Committee, which he first joined in the 111th Congress (2009–2011). Davis has chaired the Subcommittee on Worker and Family Support since the 116th Congress (2019–2021). In the 110th Congress (2007–2009), he chaired the renamed Oversight and Government Reform Committee's Subcommittee on the Federal Workforce, Postal Service, and District of Columbia.

From his seat on the Ways and Means Committee, Davis has sponsored legislation designed to assist working families and children, including strengthening family partnerships through financial assistance, expanding access to child and dependent care tax credits, and funding social programs.[11] During the COVID-19 pandemic, Davis introduced a bill that boosted funding for existing support programs that provide housing and employment assistance to foster youth and temporarily prevented children from aging out of the foster care system. The measure was incorporated into an omnibus appropriations bill that became law in 2020.[12]

Representative Davis's legislative agenda has also focused on economic development, job training, health care, and criminal justice reform. As a freshman, Davis authored an amendment to the 1998 surface transportation authorization bill that significantly increased funding for a public transportation program for welfare recipients.[13] Davis's amendments to the Healthcare Research and Quality Act of 1999 directed the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to allocate grants for health research to historically Black colleges and Hispanic-serving institutions and to submit an annual report documenting racial disparities in health care availability.[14] In 2008, President George W. Bush signed into law Davis's Second Chance Act, which was designed to prepare ex-offenders for re-entry into society and prevent recidivism. The program provided grants and aid to states and nonprofits to initiate and augment rehabilitation programs, including mentorship, drug treatment, and vocational training.[15] Davis has also proposed a measure that would expunge the criminal record of first-time nonviolent offenders after the completion of their sentence.[16]

Notes

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Val Butler Demings

1957–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

2017–

Democrat from Florida

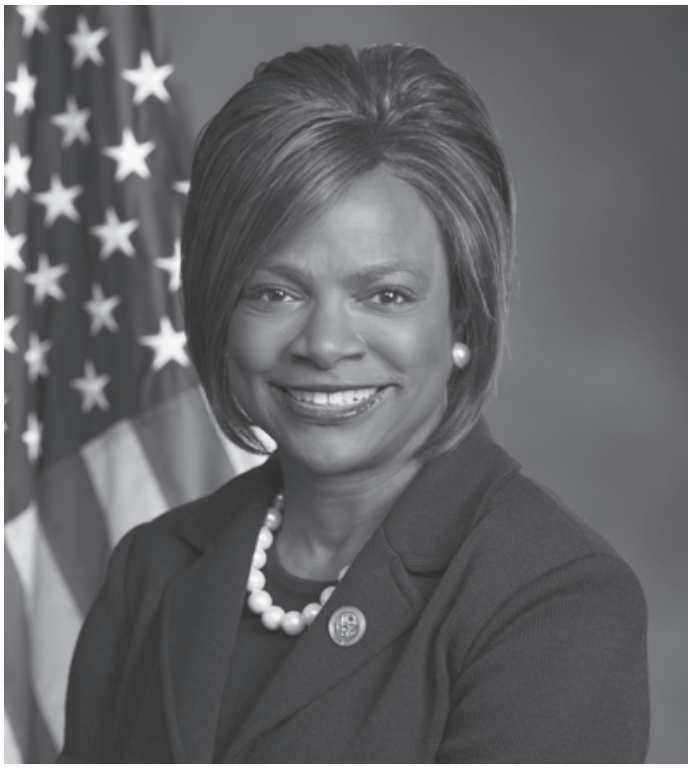

Image courtesy of the Member

In November 2016, Val Butler Demings won election to the U.S. House of Representatives as a Democrat from Orlando, Florida. A former law enforcement officer and chief of police, Demings served in the Orlando Police Department for nearly 30 years and brought her security credentials to the House, earning seats on the Committee on Homeland Security, the Committee on the Judiciary, and the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence.

Val Demings was born Valdez Venita Butler on March 12, 1957, and grew up in Jacksonville, Florida, the youngest of seven children. Demings's father, James, worked as a janitor and her mother, Elouise, as a domestic worker. After graduating from Wolfson High School in Jacksonville, Demings became the first in her family to graduate from college, earning a bachelor's degree in criminology from Florida State University in Tallahassee, Florida, in 1979. After a brief stint in social work, Demings joined the Orlando Police Department, beginning what would become a three-decade career in law enforcement. Demings worked her way up the ranks and later earned a master's degree in public administration from Webster University in Orlando, Florida, in 1996. Demings became commander of police operations in 2003 and chief of police four years later, making her the first woman to hold the top law enforcement job in Orlando. Demings and her husband Jerry, the current mayor of Orange County, Florida, have three sons and five grandchildren.[1]

When Demings retired from the Orlando police department in 2011, the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee approached her about running for the Tenth District stretching along the Gulf Coast.[2] Although Demings lost the close House race in 2012, she ran again in 2016 in the new Tenth District centered on Orlando following Florida's redistricting process. In recent years, Orlando, alongside its booming tourism sector, home to several amusement parks, has experienced a surge in growth driven by new technology companies and education.[3] In 2016, Demings secured the Democratic nomination with 57 percent of the vote before winning the general election with 65 percent of the vote. Demings has consistently won re-election with more than 63 percent of the vote and ran unopposed in 2018.[4]

Demings received a rare opportunity for a new lawmaker when party leadership named her to the Democratic whip team.[5] She was also assigned to the influential Homeland Security Committee. In December 2017, Demings won

a seat on the House Judiciary Committee, which had oversight of the Special Counsel investigation led by Robert Mueller into foreign interference in the 2016 presidential election.[6] Her seats on Judiciary, Homeland Security, and the Permanent Select Intelligence Committee placed her at the forefront of congressional oversight of the Donald J. Trump administration.

In June 2016, a gunman killed 49 people and wounded 53 others inside the Pulse nightclub in Orlando, Florida. At the time, it was the single deadliest mass shooting in American history. The assault on her home city, combined with her career in law enforcement, led Demings to champion a number of gun safety and anti-terror policies in the House.[7] From her seat on the Homeland Security Committee, Demings also worked to secure a renewal of Urban Area Security Initiative funding for Orlando.[8]

Several of Demings's bills have passed the House, with some becoming law. These include bills to increase accessibility of anti-terror training programs for local law enforcement agencies, strengthen the Urban Area Security Initiative program, to investigate Russian President Vladimir Putin's financial resources and associates, to require accreditation for U.S. Department of Homeland Security officer training programs, to invest in U.S.-made solar components and crack down on Chinese forced labor, and to support diversity in the media industry. Demings has also introduced legislation to fund the hiring of homicide detectives, prevent oil and gas price gouging, discourage evictions during natural disasters, and protect the right to vote.[9]

As a member of the Intelligence and Judiciary Committees, Demings participated in the House's impeachment inquiry into whether President Trump abused his office by asking a foreign government to investigate a political opponent. In January 2019, following the House's impeachment of Trump, Demings was named one of the House's impeachment managers and prosecuted the House's case in the Senate. This appointment made her, along with fellow managers Zoe Lofgren of California and Sylvia R. Garcia of Texas, one of the first women in U.S. history to serve in that role for a presidential impeachment.[10]

In the 117th Congress (2021–2023), Demings was named chair of the Homeland Security Subcommittee on Emergency Preparedness, Response, and Recovery. The subcommittee oversees the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the agency responsible for mass disaster response, most crucially hurricanes in Demings's Florida district.[11] In June 2021, Demings announced her intention to challenge Florida Senator Marco Rubio in the 2022 midterm election.[12]

Notes

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Dwight Evans

1954–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

2016–

Democrat from Pennsylvania



Image courtesy of the Member

After more than three decades as a state legislator, Dwight Evans challenged an incumbent and won election to the U.S. House of Representatives in 2016. In the House, Evans has focused on improving the economies of impoverished urban areas like those found in his Philadelphia district, particularly through the development of small businesses. "I have been dedicated to trying to find ways to build stronger neighborhoods block by block," he said.[1]

Dwight Evans was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, on May 16, 1954, the second of five children born to Henry and Jean Evans. His mother worked as a waitress and secretary, and his father worked for a moving and storage company. Evans grew up in the Germantown neighborhood and ultimately settled in West Oak Lane in northwest Philadelphia with his mother after his parents' divorce. Evans graduated from Germantown High School in 1971 and earned an associate degree from the Community College of Philadelphia in 1973. He then transferred to La Salle University, graduating with a bachelor's degree in 1975. After college, Evans briefly worked as a substitute teacher before landing a job at the Philadelphia Urban League, where he assisted and later directed a federally funded program to help city residents find employment.[2]

Evans was drawn to politics in 1978, when he volunteered for a state senate campaign and witnessed Philadelphia Mayor Frank Rizzo's divisive attempt to amend the city's charter so he could run for a third term. In 1980, Evans won election to the Pennsylvania state house of representatives from a legislative district that included his West Oak Lane neighborhood.[3] In 36 years in the state house, Evans helped develop the state's charter school system, secured funding for a statewide nutrition program, and served as the top Democrat on the appropriations committee from 1990 to 2010. He also made four unsuccessful bids for higher office: lieutenant governor of Pennsylvania in 1986, governor in 1994, and Philadelphia mayor in 1999 and 2007.[4] In 2013, Evans wrote a book, *Making Ideas Matter: My Life as a Policy Entrepreneur*, with coauthor William Ecenbarger.

In late 2015, Evans challenged Chaka Fattah for his seat in the U.S. House after the incumbent was charged with fraud and bribery for his participation in a racketeering scheme.[5] Among the several candidates who joined the race for the Democratic nomination, Fattah and Evans were considered the most high-profile contenders for the seat representing northwest Philadelphia and portions of

suburban Montgomery County. Fattah highlighted his work on the House Appropriations Committee, which allowed him to steer federal dollars towards projects to improve education, housing, and health care in the city. Evans avoided discussing Fattah's legal troubles and focused his campaign on issues facing urban residents. He cited his successes in improving the neighborhoods in his legislative district and committed to rebuilding American cities across the country.[6] On primary day, Evans prevailed with 42 percent of the vote to Fattah's 34 percent.[7] Fattah resigned from the House on June 23, 2016, just days after a federal jury found him guilty of 22 fraud-related charges. A special election to fill the vacant seat was scheduled for November 8, 2016, the same day as the general election.[8] Evans simultaneously won election to the remainder of Fattah's term and to a full two-year term with 90 percent of the vote. In 2018, the Pennsylvania supreme court ordered the state's congressional districts be redrawn, citing partisan gerrymandering. The boundaries of Evans's new district were only slightly altered, and he comfortably won re-election in 2018 and 2020.[9]

Evans took his seat in the House on November 14, 2016, and was assigned to the Agriculture Committee and the Small Business Committee at the beginning of the 115th Congress (2017–2019).[10] In the 116th Congress (2019–2021), Evans remained on Small Business but left the Agriculture Committee for a coveted spot on the tax-writing Ways and Means Committee.

Evans has dedicated his legislative efforts towards expanding the resources available to small businesses across the country. During his first full term, President Donald J. Trump signed into law his bill to reduce real estate appraisal costs for small businesses applying for Small Business Administration loans.[11] Evans also authored the Small Business Innovation Protection Act, which provides small businesses with training opportunities on how to protect their patents and intellectual property. The House passed his bill in 2018, and a Senate companion bill became law later that year.[12]

Since the 115th Congress, Evans introduced the Rehabilitation of Historic Schools Act three times. The bill was designed to partially offset the repair costs for school buildings through a tax credit typically used for the upkeep of historic structures. Ultimately, these provisions were included in a House-passed omnibus infrastructure bill in 2020.[13]

Notes

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Al Green

1947–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

2005–

Democrat from Texas



Image courtesy of the Member

In 2004, Al Green won election to the U.S. House of Representatives from the Houston area Ninth District. Green—a son of the segregated South, born in New Orleans, Louisiana, on September 1, 1947—has devoted his life to the elimination of all forms of invidious discrimination and the rectification of America's seminal sin: slavery. His mother, a maid, and father, a mechanic's helper, emphasized the importance of an education. Without acquiring an undergraduate degree, he earned his law degree from the Thurgood Marshall School of Law at Texas Southern University in 1974.

Upon graduating from law school, Green cofounded the law firm, Green, Wilson, Dewberry, and Fitch. In 1977, he was appointed justice of the peace in Harris County, Texas, and served until retiring in 2004. For nearly 10 years, Green served as president of the Houston branch of the NAACP. Under his leadership, the organization grew from 500 members to 3,500, expanded its budget, and acquired property to serve as its headquarters.[1] He stepped down as president in 1995.[2]

In 2004, Green, who considers himself a liberated democrat, "unbought, unbossed and unafraid," entered the congressional race for the newly configured Ninth District. Green ran on his long record of public service in Houston, emerging as the winner in the March Democratic primary with 66 percent of the vote.[3] He prevailed in the general election with 72 percent of the vote.[4]

In the 117th Congress (2021–2023), Green serves as the chair of the Oversight Subcommittee of the Financial Services Committee and on the Homeland Security Committee. In his first term, Green introduced the Homes for Heroes Act.[5] The bill created a veterans' affairs position in the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to help veterans experiencing homelessness find affordable housing. "I am sorry to report, Mr. Speaker," Green said on the House Floor when the bill came up for debate, "that as many are sleeping in the suites of life, too many are sleeping on the streets of life."[6] The measure was passed in 2016 when it was included in the Housing Opportunity Through Modernization Act and was signed into law.[7]

Green became the first lawmaker to introduce and force a vote on three articles of impeachment against President Donald J. Trump in the 115th and 116th Congresses (2017–2021). When the House finally passed articles of impeachment in 2019 and 2021, Green voted for all of them.[8]

Supported by his Texas Democratic congressional colleagues and both U.S. Senators from Texas, Green recommended Attorney Gregg Costa in 2011 as well as Federal Magistrate George Hanks and Harris County District Court Judge Al Bennett in 2014 for Federal District Court Judgeships. Additionally, in 2014, Green recommended Judge Costa be elevated to the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals. All three were nominated by President Barack Obama and confirmed by the Senate to their respective benches.

In December 2020, Green's legislation establishing an Emergency Capital Investment Program became law as part of the 2021 Consolidated Appropriations Act.[9] The legislation established a $9 billion Emergency Capital Investment Program for minority depository institutions and Community Development Financial Institutions serving low- and moderate-income communities.

In March 2021, Green's legislation reauthorizing and funding the State Small Business Credit Initiative was included in the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021; it funded the State Small Business Credit Initiative at $10 billion.[10] The funds expanded access to capital for small businesses adapting to the pandemic and seeking to create high-quality jobs across the nation. The funding is expected to catalyze $100 billion in private investment for small businesses.

In November 2021, Green's legislation, the Minority Business Resiliency Act (H.R. 2689), was signed into law as part of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act.[11] The Minority Business Development Agency (MBDA) is the only federal agency dedicated solely to the growth of minority businesses. H.R. 2689 permanently codified the MBDA in federal law to promote and administer programs to assist the development and resiliency of minority business enterprises.

During the 117th Congress, Representative Green introduced three resolutions to start healing the chasm of racial animus within America. The first of these was the Slavery Remembrance Day resolution, which would create a commemorative day to remember the victims of slavery. The second was a resolution to remove the name of Richard B. Russell, a self-proclaimed White supremacist, from the Russell Senate Office Building. The third was a resolution to create a Cabinet-level Department of Reconciliation which would be tasked with eliminating racism and discrimination in the United States.[12]

During his tenure as a U.S. Representative, Green has been successful in securing more than $100 million worth of funding for community projects for Texas's Ninth Congressional District.

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Jahana Hayes

1973–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

2019–

Democrat from Connecticut



Image courtesy of the Member

In November 2018, Jahana Hayes won election as a Democrat to the U.S. House of Representatives. Hayes became the first Black woman elected to Congress from Connecticut. A former National Teacher of the Year who taught social studies for more than a decade, Jahana Hayes has made education her primary focus during her two terms in the House. Hayes relies on her experiences growing up under difficult circumstances to shape policy initiatives to aid struggling communities.

Jahana Hayes was born Jahana Flemming on March 8, 1973, in Waterbury, Connecticut. Hayes became pregnant at 17 and was forced from her honors courses to a program for teen mothers. Her guidance counselors encouraged her to finish school and attend college; Hayes graduated from Crosby High School in Waterbury. She later enrolled in Naugatuck Valley Community College. In 2002, she earned an associate degree while working nights. Hayes graduated with a bachelor's degree from Southern Connecticut State University in nearby New Haven, Connecticut, in 2005. After college, Hayes taught social studies at James Hillhouse High School in New Haven. Two years later, she took a position at John F. Kennedy High School in her hometown of Waterbury. Hayes later earned a master's degree from the University of Saint Joseph in West Hartford in 2012 and her certificate in educational leadership from the University of Bridgeport in Bridgeport, Connecticut, in 2014.[1] She is married to Milford Hayes; the couple have four children.[2]

Hayes came to national attention in 2016 when she was named National Teacher of the Year. Conferred by the Council of Chief State School Officers, which selected from applications submitted by all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and four territories, the award included being honored at the White House and a year spent traveling the nation as an education ambassador. Hayes left the classroom to advocate for public education, and following her tenure as Teacher of the Year, she served as an administrator and mentor for new teachers in the Waterbury central district office.[3]

Connecticut's Fifth Congressional District includes suburban communities such as Simsbury but also urban communities such as Danbury and Waterbury; African Americans compose about 7.5 percent of the district's population. In 2018, Hayes won a commanding 62 percent of the vote in the primary election, before receiving 56 percent of the vote in the general. She won re-election in 2020 with 55 percent of the vote.[4]

In both her terms in the House, Hayes has served on the Agriculture Committee and the Education and Labor Committee. Reflecting her background as a teacher, Hayes has prioritized educational measures and relief for students, teachers, and working families. In keeping with her campaign promises, Hayes's first bill was a resolution against using federal funding to arm school employees.[5] She submitted several measures through the Education and Labor Committee, including proposals for electric school buses, expanding Pell Grant eligibility, debt relief for teachers, and increased subsidies for child care.[6] In 2021, she submitted the House version of the CARE for Kids Act to ensure that children raised by grandparents were eligible for free school lunch programs.[7] "Having been raised by my grandmother," Hayes said. "I am personally aware that the nuclear family has changed."[8]

In the 117th Congress (2021–2023), Hayes chairs the Agriculture Subcommittee on Nutrition, Oversight, and Department Operations. As subcommittee chair, Hayes oversees the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. Hayes, who received benefits growing up and raising her own family, called the position "deeply personal" and argued "hunger is not inevitable—it's a policy decision."[9] Hayes had previously requested a study on hunger and homelessness among college students.[10] Shortly after being named chair, she introduced the Student Food Security Act to expand the food stamp program to include struggling college students.[11]

Following high COVID infection rates in her hometown, Hayes twice submitted resolutions declaring racism a public health crisis.[12] She also submitted a bill directing the U.S. Secretary of Veterans Affairs to address staffing gaps at mental health facilities for veterans; this provision was included in the Commander John Scott Hannon Veterans Mental Health Care Improvement Act of 2019.[13]

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Steven A. Horsford

1973–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

2013–2015; 2019–

Democrat from Nevada



Image courtesy of the Member

A former state legislator, Steven A. Horsford has served in Congress for three nonconsecutive terms. First elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 2012, he lost re-election two years later but staged a political comeback in 2018. He is the first African-American Member of Congress from Nevada. In the House, Horsford has worked to improve the nation's health care system and bring more jobs to south and central Nevada.

Steven A. Horsford was born in Las Vegas, Nevada, on April 29, 1973, to Pamela Horsford and Gary Shelton. Horsford was the oldest of four children.[1] After graduating from Ed W. Clark High School in Las Vegas, Horsford attended the University of Nevada-Reno. When he was 19 years old, Horsford's father died from gun violence. He returned home from college to help his family and eventually had to leave school.[2] Horsford later resumed his studies and completed a bachelor's degree in 2014.[3] A devoted family man, Horsford is father to three children.[4]

As an undergraduate, Horsford interned for the Nevada state assembly's education committee and campaigned for Governor Bob Miller's re-election in 1994. He later worked as a lobbyist in the state legislature. For more than a decade, Horsford worked as the CEO of The Culinary Academy of Las Vegas, a nonprofit training institute for students interested in careers in the hospitality industry. In addition, he was president of Nevada Partners, a nonprofit community organization that provides job training for underserved communities.[5]

In 2003, Horsford was elected Democratic national committeeman and represented his state at the 2004 Democratic National Convention.[6] Later that year, he won election to an open seat in the Nevada state senate. After Democrats regained control of the state senate in the 2008 election, Horsford became the youngest senate majority leader in Nevada history as well as the first African American to hold that position. As majority leader, Horsford helped pass legislation to recognize same-sex domestic partnerships in Nevada. Working with Republican lawmakers, he helped override 25 of Governor Jim Gibbons's vetoes.[7]

By the 2012 election, Horsford was well-positioned to seek election to the U.S. House. He chose to run in the newly created Fourth District, which combined a large swath of the rural middle of the state with the densely populated environs of northern Clark County.[8] The new district had a Democratic voter registration majority and

was about 27 percent Latino and 16 percent African American in 2012.[9]

Horsford ran unopposed in the Democratic primary and faced Republican Danny Tarkanian in a contentious race for the seat. Horsford echoed the priorities of President Barack Obama: supporting the Affordable Care Act and clean-energy jobs, championing the rights of immigrants, and increasing funding for the U.S. Department of Education.[10] The Democratic majority in the district carried Horsford to victory with just more than 50 percent of the vote to Tarkanian's 42 percent.[11]

In 2014, Horsford narrowly lost re-election in the competitive district to Republican Cresent Leo Hardy. Horsford spent four years working at the marketing and consulting firm he founded before challenging Hardy in a rematch in 2018.[12] He prevailed with 52 percent of the vote and won re-election in 2020 with 51 percent.[13]

In the 113th Congress (2013–2015), Horsford was assigned to the Homeland Security, Natural Resources, and Oversight and Government Reform Committees, but dropped the first two assignments for a seat on the Financial Services Committee in 2014.[14] When Horsford returned to the House in the 116th Congress (2019–2021), he was assigned to three committees: Budget; Natural Resources; and Ways and Means. In the 117th Congress (2021–2023), he left Natural Resources for a seat on the Armed Services Committee.

Much of Horsford's district is public land administered by the Bureau of Land Management. On the Natural Resources Committee, Horsford promoted legislation to expand the use of these public lands for economic development and conservation.[15] Horsford has also introduced bills to promote tourism at the Lake Meade National Recreation Area and to designate certain lands as National Conservation Areas.[16]

During his first year in office, Horsford underwent surgery for a heart ailment. He said the experience renewed his support for universal health care.[17] Since his appointment to Ways and Means in 2019, Horsford has introduced multiple bills aimed at restricting prescription drug price hikes for people on Medicare and Medicaid. Horsford has also sponsored legislation to provide hospitals with grants to train low-income individuals for jobs in the health care field.[18]

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Horsford sponsored a bill that would expand tax credits to help businesses in the hospitality industry recover from lost revenue.[19] When Congress passed the 2021 American Rescue Plan, it included his legislation to extend federal unemployment compensation for an additional six months.[20]

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Sheila Jackson Lee

1950–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1995–

Democrat from Texas



Image courtesy of the Member

Sheila Jackson Lee won election to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1994. From her seats on the Judiciary, Budget, and Homeland Security Committees, she has focused on the needs of her constituents and has called attention to national issues, such as health care reform, immigration, and criminal justice reform.

Sheila Jackson Lee was born in Queens, New York, on January 12, 1950. She graduated from Jamaica High School and attended New York University before transferring to Yale University, where she earned a bachelor's degree in political science in 1972. Before receiving her law degree from the University of Virginia in 1975, she married Elwyn Cornelius Lee; they raised two children: Erica and Jason. She is also the proud grandmother of two twin grandchildren: granddaughter Ellison Bennett Carter and grandson Roy Lee Carter III. In 1977 and 1978, Jackson Lee worked as a staff counsel for the U.S. House Select Committee on Assassinations, which investigated the murders of Martin Luther King Jr. and President John F. Kennedy. Jackson Lee then moved to Houston with her family, where her husband taught law and she practiced at a private firm. She left her practice in 1987 to serve as an associate judge in the Houston municipal courts. Two years later, she won election to the first of two terms on the Houston city council.[1]

In 1994, Jackson Lee challenged three-term incumbent Craig A. Washington for the Democratic nomination to a Houston-area seat in the U.S. House. Historically, the district has included many of the city's predominantly Black neighborhoods and was earlier represented by Barbara Jordan and Mickey Leland. Jackson Lee ran on a platform that called for reforms to America's health care industry and criticized Washington's vote against the North American Free Trade Agreement, arguing that it would generate new jobs. In the primary election, she defeated Washington with 63 percent of the vote.[2] She went on to win the general election handily with 73 percent of the vote against Republican Jerry Burley. In her subsequent 13 re-elections, she has won by similar margins—capturing a high of 90 percent in 1998.[3]

When Jackson Lee took her seat in the 104th Congress (1995–1997), her colleagues elected her president of the Democratic freshman class.[4] In her first term, she received assignments to the Judiciary and Science Committees but dropped the latter panel in the 109th Congress (2005–2007). In the 108th Congress (2003–2005), she

was assigned to the recently formed Select Committee on Homeland Security and kept her seat when it became a full standing committee. In the 110th and 111th Congresses (2007–2011), she served on the Foreign Affairs Committee and chaired the Homeland Security Committee's Subcommittee on Transportation Security and Infrastructure Protection. She also picked up an assignment on the Budget Committee in the 115th Congress (2017–2019). In the 117th Congress (2021–2023), Jackson Lee continued to serve on the Budget, Homeland Security, and Judiciary Committees and chair the Judiciary Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, and Homeland Security. Within the Democratic Caucus, Jackson Lee has served as Chief Deputy Whip since the 116th Congress (2019–2021).[5]

As cofounder of the Congressional Children's Caucus and a member of the Judiciary Committee, Jackson Lee has introduced numerous bills to fund bullying prevention and intervention programs, two of which have passed the House.[6] As chair of the Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, and Homeland Security, she has also introduced bills aimed at prison reform to lessen overcrowding and reduce sentences for nonviolent offenders.[7] In 2021, President Joseph R. Biden Jr. signed into law her bill to prohibit the practice of female genital mutilation.[8]

Jackson Lee has advocated for funding for NASA, a major employer in the Houston area.[9] She also persuaded the administration of President William J. Clinton to designate low-income neighborhoods in Houston, Texas, as "empowerment zones," making them eligible for millions in federal grants.[10] When she chaired the Subcommittee on Transportation Security and Infrastructure Protection from 2007 to 2011, she held several oversight hearings on the implementation of the Transportation Security Administration's new air cargo screening measures.[11] In 2017, she introduced a bill that would have appropriated $174 billion in federal disaster relief aid to regions affected by Hurricane Harvey.[12] During the 116th Congress, she secured passage of the Emancipation Trail Study Act, establishing a 51-mile National Historic Trail in Texas that chronicles the experience of African Americans who migrated from Galveston to Houston after emancipation.[13] Before his retirement, Michigan Representative John Conyers Jr. asked Jackson Lee to continue advocating for the Commission to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African Americans Act, which Conyers had introduced biennially since 1989. In 2019, the bill received a hearing, and in 2021, the Judiciary Committee sent it to the full House for consideration for the first time.[14]

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Hakeem S. Jeffries

1970–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

2013–

Democrat from New York



Image courtesy of the Member

In 2012, Hakeem S. Jeffries made the leap from the New York state assembly to the U.S. House of Representatives, where he has quickly risen through the ranks to become chair of the House Democratic Caucus. He has been a leading voice in crafting his party's legislative agenda. "We must use our majority to address racial injustice, confront the climate crisis, defend the Dreamers, expand access to high-quality, affordable health care, fix our crumbling infrastructure and end the era of voter suppression," he urged the caucus in 2020.[1]

Hakeem S. Jeffries was born in Brooklyn, New York, on August 4, 1970, to Laneda and Marland Jeffries, both social workers. He graduated from Brooklyn's Midwood High School in 1988 and earned a bachelor's degree from the State University of New York at Binghamton in 1992. He completed a master's degree in public policy at Georgetown University in Washington, DC, in 1994 and a law degree from New York University Law School in 1997. After law school, Jeffries clerked for Judge Harold Baer Jr. of the United States District Court for the Southern District of New York. He then practiced law in the private sector for several years. He is married to Kennisandra Jeffries, and they have two children.[2]

In 2000 and 2002, Jeffries unsuccessfully challenged Roger Green for his Brooklyn-area seat in the New York state assembly. When Green left the assembly in a bid for the U.S. House in 2006, Jeffries ran for and won election to the open seat.[3] In the state assembly, Jeffries successfully championed legislation to prohibit the New York City police department from storing the names and addresses of people stopped under the department's controversial "stop-and-frisk" policy, who were neither arrested nor fined.[4]

After six years in Albany, Jeffries announced his intention to run for a seat in the U.S. House against Representative Edolphus Towns, a 15-term incumbent. In April 2012, Towns announced his retirement, leaving the seat wide open.[5] The district, which was 53 percent Black, incorporated a mix of working- and middle-class neighborhoods in Brooklyn and parts of Queens. In the Democratic primary, Jeffries faced New York City councilman and former Black Panther Charles Barron. Both candidates pledged to allocate more government resources to lower the district's high unemployment rate, reduce housing costs, and combat police brutality. Barron received the endorsement of outgoing Representative Towns, while Jeffries carried the support of several labor unions and

raised far more money than his opponent.[6] Jeffries breezed through the primary with 72 percent of the vote. In the heavily Democratic district, he defeated Republican candidate Alan Bellone with 78 percent.[7]

As a freshman Member, Jeffries received two coveted assignments to the Judiciary and Budget committees. In the 114th Congress (2015–2017), he left the Budget Committee to serve on the Education and the Workforce Committee but returned to the Budget Committee in the 115th Congress (2017–2019). Jeffries quickly gained the favor of his Democratic colleagues, who elected him chair of the House Democratic Caucus for the 116th and 117th Congresses (2019–2023).[8] In 2020, he was appointed to serve as one of the impeachment managers for President Donald J. Trump's first trial in the Senate, after the House voted to impeach him for abuse of power and obstruction of Congress.[9]

From his seat on the Judiciary Committee, Jeffries has led criminal justice reform efforts.[10] Reaching across the aisle, Jeffries partnered with Representative Doug Collins of Georgia as a lead Democratic sponsor of the First Step Act, which the President signed into law in 2018.[11] The bill provides retroactive relief for the crack cocaine sentencing disparity. The law shortens sentences by ensuring inmates can earn 54 days of good time credit per year. In addition, the bill bans the practice of shackling women throughout the duration of their pregnancy, during childbirth, and for three months post-partum. On June 25, 2020, the House passed the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act. Jeffries helped lead the charge to pass the historic police reform bill, which included legislation authored by the Congressman to criminalize the chokehold and other inherently dangerous tactics such as a knee to the neck.[12]

Jeffries has successfully harnessed the power of intellectual property law to help small businesses. In 2014, President Barack Obama signed into law his bill to allow law schools to set up pro-bono legal clinics, in partnership with the United States Patent and Trademark Office, to help patent and trademark holders protect their work.[13] He also authored legislation to establish the Copyright Claims Board, providing creatives with an alternative way to pursue copyright claims worth less than $30,000 without resorting to costly litigation. The measure was incorporated into an omnibus appropriations bill in 2021.[14]

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Eddie Bernice Johnson

1935–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1993–

Democrat from Texas



Image courtesy of the Member

A nurse by training, Eddie Bernice Johnson was a political veteran decades before coming to Congress in the early 1990s. With her election to the Texas state legislature in 1972, Johnson became the first Black woman from the Dallas area to serve in the Texas house of representatives.[1] Elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1992, Johnson is the dean of the Texas delegation and Chair of the Science, Space, and Technology Committee.[2]

Eddie Bernice Johnson was born in Waco, Texas, on December 3, 1935, to Lee Edward Johnson and Lillie Mae (White) Johnson. She graduated from A.J. Moore High School in Waco in 1952, and three years later received a nursing diploma from Holy Cross Central School of Nursing in South Bend, Indiana. Eddie Bernice Johnson married Lacey Kirk Johnson a year later in 1956. Before they divorced in 1970, the couple had one son, Kirk. Johnson graduated in 1967 with a bachelor's degree from Texas Christian University in Fort Worth and later became the chief psychiatric nurse of the Veterans Administration hospital in Dallas. In 1976, Johnson earned a master's degree in public administration from Southern Methodist University in Dallas.[3]

In 1972, Johnson was elected as a Democrat to the Texas state legislature, becoming both the first Black woman from the Dallas area to serve in the Texas legislature and one of the first two Black women to serve in the Texas house.[4] As a member of the Texas legislature, she chaired the labor committee, becoming the first woman in Texas history to lead a major committee in the state house. In 1977, President James Earl "Jimmy" Carter appointed her as regional director for the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare—a post she held until 1981. In 1986, Johnson won election to the Texas state senate, eventually serving as chair of the redistricting committee.[5]

During the 1992 redistricting process, Johnson helped create a new congressional district designed to elect an African-American lawmaker, in compliance with court decisions following 1982 amendments to the Voting Rights Act. The district was about 50 percent Black and centered around South Dallas. Johnson then ran for the new seat, easily securing the Democratic nomination with 92 percent of the vote. In an election year that saw a record number of women run for office, she was elected as a Democrat with 72 percent of the vote. In 1996, when court-ordered redistricting changed the boundaries of her district, Johnson was re-elected with 55 percent of the vote. In her subsequent re-election campaigns, Johnson has won

comfortably, often with margins in excess of 80 percent. In 2020 she won election to the 117th Congress (2021–2023) with 77 percent of the vote.[6]

Johnson has served on two committees since her House career began in January 1993: Transportation and Infrastructure and Science, Space, and Technology. In the 110th and 111th Congresses (2007–2011), Johnson was chair of the Transportation and Infrastructure Subcommittee on Water Resources and Environment. In the 116th Congress (2019–2021), Johnson became the chair of the Science, Space, and Technology Committee and continued as chair in the 117th Congress. During the 107th Congress (2001–2003), Johnson served as chair of the Congressional Black Caucus.[7]

As a former nurse, Johnson has called attention to problems in the country's health care system, worked to strengthen the Medicare program, and repeatedly introduced legislation to create the position of National Nurse for Public Health, who would collaborate with the Surgeon General to determine national health priorities.[8] As chair of the Transportation and Infrastructure Subcommittee on Water Resources and Environment, she helped shepherd the 2007 Water Resources Development Act into law over President George W. Bush's veto. The bill funded nationwide projects on flood control, coastal and wetland restoration, and river dredging.[9]

As a Member of the Transportation Committee, she urged funding for bridge construction projects over Dallas's Trinity River. She cosponsored the 2005 surface transportation bill, which included more than $77 million for bridge construction projects in the city.[10] Early in her career, Johnson supported the North American Free Trade Agreement, recognizing that much of Dallas's business revolves around exports to Mexico. She later voted to normalize trade relations with China.[11]

As chair of the Science Committee, Johnson has defended the work of scientists at NASA and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration on climate change issues.[12] In 2019, she held a hearing on legislation to expand the recruitment and retention of underrepresented minority students in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) programs. She reintroduced the bill, known as the STEM Opportunities Act, in the 117th Congress and it passed the House in May 2021.[13] In 2019, President Donald J. Trump signed her bill to award a Congressional Gold Medal in recognition of the women mathematicians and engineers at NASA during the Space Race.[14]

In November 2021, Representative Johnson announced that she would not seek re-election in 2022 and would retire at the conclusion of the 117th Congress in January 2023.[15]

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Henry C. "Hank" Johnson Jr.

1954–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

2007–

Democrat from Georgia



Image courtesy of the Member

In 2006, Henry C. "Hank" Johnson Jr. successfully ousted an incumbent Representative in his bid for a U.S. House of Representatives seat. Prior to his service in Congress, Johnson ran his own law firm and served as a county magistrate judge, accruing decades of legal experience that he has used to shape his legislative agenda, which has included judicial reform and police accountability.

Hank Johnson was born in Washington, DC, on October 2, 1954, to Christine Callier Johnson and Henry C. Johnson Sr. His father worked for the Bureau of Prisons, and his mother was a schoolteacher. He grew up in Washington and graduated from Roosevelt High School before moving to Georgia to study at Clark College (now Clark Atlanta University), where he completed a bachelor's degree in 1976. In 1979, he earned a law degree from the Thurgood Marshall School of Law at Texas Southern University, a historically Black university. That year, he married fellow law student Mereda Davis Johnson, who later served as a magistrate court judge and won election to the DeKalb County commission in 2015. They have two adult children.[1]

In 1980, Johnson opened his own law firm in Decatur, Georgia, where he practiced with his wife for more than 25 years. He first ran for public office in 1986 when he made an unsuccessful bid for the Georgia house of representatives. Three years later, he was appointed as a judge for the magistrate court of DeKalb County. In 2000, he won election to the DeKalb County commission, where he served for five years.[2]

In 2006, Johnson launched a primary challenge against incumbent Representative Cynthia A. McKinney for a district in Atlanta's eastern suburbs, including a large part of DeKalb County. A second challenger, businessman John Coyne III, also entered the race. Johnson attacked McKinney's legislative record and claimed that she "failed to deliver any meaningful legislation."[3] He distributed campaign buttons that read "Replace McKinney" and pledged to bring employment and affordable health care to the district.[4]

On primary day, McKinney received 47 percent of the vote—a narrow plurality, with Johnson finishing second with 44 percent. Since no candidate secured a majority, a runoff was scheduled between the two. Johnson won the August runoff with 59 percent of the vote and defeated Republican Catherine Davis in the general election with 75 percent of the vote.[5] Johnson has won most re-elections

with comfortable margins, though he faced significant primary challenges in 2010 and 2014.[6]

In the House, Johnson has served on the Judiciary Committee since his first term, where he has chaired its Subcommittee on Courts, Intellectual Property, and the Internet since the 116th Congress (2019–2021). He has also served on the Armed Services Committee from the 110th through the 114th Congress (2007–2017), the Small Business Committee in the 110th Congress (2007–2009), and the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee in the 111th Congress (2009–2011) as well as the 115th through the 117th Congress (2017–2023). At the start of the 117th Congress (2021–2023), he also joined the Oversight and Reform Committee.

While serving on the Armed Services Committee, Johnson introduced the Stop Militarizing Law Enforcement Act, which would prohibit the transfer of certain military surplus equipment and weapons to civilian police departments, including armored vehicles and military-grade firearms. His bill was incorporated into the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act, which passed the House twice in 2020 and 2021.[7]

As a Judiciary subcommittee chair and a former judge, Johnson has proposed significant reforms to the federal judicial system. He introduced the Supreme Court Ethics Act, which would establish a code of conduct for Supreme Court Justices. The bill was incorporated into the For the People Act, a sweeping reform bill that passed the House in both 2019 and 2021.[8] He has also introduced bills to expand the Supreme Court from 9 to 13 seats and to create an online database that makes all public court records available for free.[9] "Wealth should not act as a barrier to access our courts," he said before the House.[10] Johnson has served as a manager in two impeachment trials of federal judges, the second of which resulted in the removal of U.S. District Court Judge G. Thomas Porteous Jr. from the bench in 2010.[11]

Since his first term in office, Johnson has advocated to end the use of certain mandatory arbitration clauses that are frequently found in employment and consumer contracts, which he believed prevented victims of employment discrimination from suing their employers in court. Johnson has introduced legislation to prohibit civil rights, employment, and consumer-related disputes from being forced into arbitration. His bill passed the House in 2019 and again in 2022.[12]

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Robin L. Kelly

1956–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

2013–

Democrat from Illinois

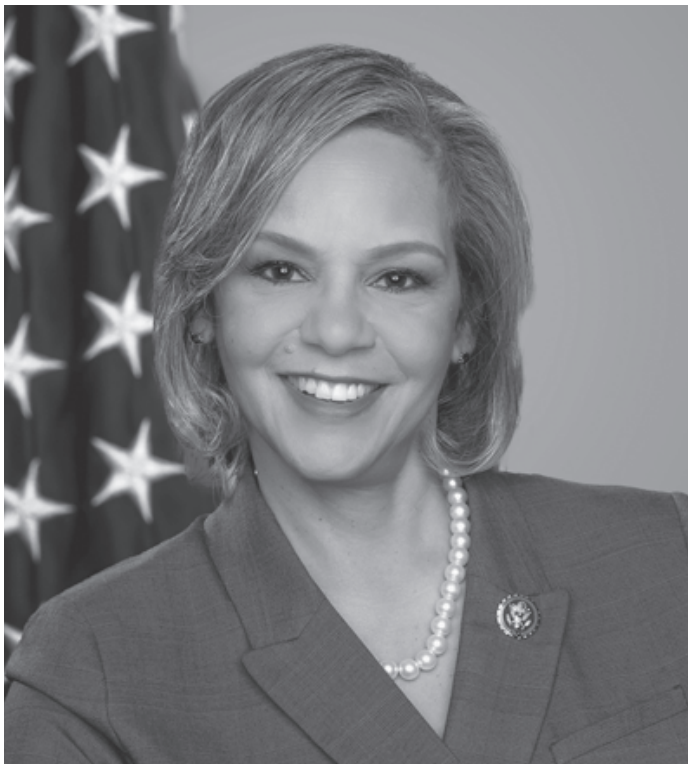

Image courtesy of the Member

A counselor, social worker, and civil servant before winning a special election to the U.S. House of Representatives in 2013, Robin L. Kelly has focused on expanding access to healthcare and reducing gun violence, both in her district and throughout the nation. "I ran for Congress … to bring about a safer, less violent, and more prosperous future," she declared on her first day in office. "One in which our children can grow up without the fear of gun violence."[1]

Robin Lynne Kelly was born in New York City on April 30, 1956. Her father was a grocery store owner, and her mother was a postal worker. Kelly attended local schools and graduated from Rhodes Preparatory School in 1973. She studied at Bradley University in Peoria, Illinois, where she earned a bachelor's degree in 1977 and a master's degree in 1982. Gravitating toward social work, Kelly worked at a youth shelter and at a hospital before returning to Bradley as director of minority student services. She eventually moved to Matteson, Illinois, a suburb south of Chicago, and was the town's community affairs director from 1992 to 2006. Kelly earned a Ph.D. in political science at Northern Illinois University in DeKalb, Illinois, in 2004. In 2003, she married physician Nathaniel Horn; each has two adult children from a previous marriage.[2]

Kelly's public career began when she was elected to the Illinois state house of representatives in 2002 and re-elected in 2004 and 2006. In 2007, Kelly resigned her seat to become the first African-American woman to serve as chief of staff to any Illinois constitutional officer. When the state treasurer, Alexi Giannoulias, ran for the U.S. Senate in 2010, Kelly entered the race to succeed him as treasurer but lost in the general election. Kelly then worked as chief administrative officer for Cook County, Illinois, for two years.[3]

In late 2012, Kelly ran for a seat in the U.S. House when the incumbent Representative, Jesse L. Jackson Jr., declined to serve in the 113th Congress (2013–2015), to which he had been re-elected. The congressional district ran along the Indiana border from Chicago's South Side to Kankakee County. In the primary, Kelly faced Deborah L. Halvorson, a former House Member who represented a nearby district in the 111th Congress (2009–2011). With gun safety as a central campaign issue, Kelly supported an assault weapons ban while Halvorson opposed it. Kelly defeated Halvorson in the primary by a 28-point margin and went on to win the April special election against Republican challenger Paul McKinley with 71 percent of the vote, becoming the

third African-American woman elected to Congress from Illinois.[4] She won with no less than 78 percent of the vote in her four re-elections.[5]

In the House, Kelly has served on the Committee on Oversight and Reform for her entire tenure. In addition, she served on the Committee on Science, Space, and Technology in the 113th Congress, Committee on Foreign Affairs in the 114th and 115th Congresses (2015–2019), and Committee on Energy and Commerce in the 116th and 117th Congresses (2019–2023). Kelly has served as a member of the House Democracy Partnership since the 116th Congress (2019–2021).

Kelly has used her Energy and Commerce Committee seat to address the gun violence that has affected her district. Kelly's Firearm Safety Act sought to tighten gun safety by enabling the Consumer Product Safety Commission to issue gun safety standards. She has repeatedly introduced legislation to require the U.S. Surgeon General to produce an annual report detailing the public health impacts of gun violence.[6]

Kelly's interest in public health has extended beyond her district. Her bill, the Action for Dental Health Act, became law in 2018 and called for the Department of Health and Human Services to award grants for oral health initiatives at the local and state level to prevent dental diseases. In the 116th Congress, she introduced a bill to expand coverage of postpartum care under Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program from 60 days to one year. In 2021, in the 117th Congress (2021–2023), she introduced a similar bill called the Helping MOMs Act, which would increase federal funding for pregnancy-related care under Medicaid. This policy was ultimately included in the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021.[7]

From her seat on the Oversight and Reform Committee, Kelly has authored and passed two bills to improve cybersecurity and expand internet accessibility. The Connected Government Act, which called for federal agencies to create or redesign websites to ensure they are compatible with mobile devices, was signed into law in 2018. The Internet of Things Cybersecurity Improvement Act, which became law in 2020, requires all smart devices operated by the federal government to comply with minimum cybersecurity standards established by the National Institute of Standards and Technology.[8]

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Brenda L. Lawrence

1954–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

2015–

Democrat from Michigan



Image courtesy of the Member

As a four-term mayor of a northern Detroit suburb and a veteran employee of the United States Postal Service, Brenda L. Lawrence brought more than three decades of public service experience to the U.S. House of Representatives upon her election in 2014. In the House, Lawrence prioritizes legislation to address the nation's critical infrastructure needs, especially water resources.

Brenda Lawrence was born Brenda Bray on October 18, 1954, in Detroit, Michigan. Her mother died when she was three years old, leaving her to be raised by her father and grandparents. Lawrence graduated from Pershing High School in Detroit and enrolled at the University of Detroit, but left school before finishing her degree to marry her high school sweetheart McArthur Lawrence, an autoworker. The couple had two children: Michael and Michelle. In 1978, Lawrence began a lengthy career in the U.S. Postal Service, starting as a letter carrier and eventually becoming a human resources manager. She returned to college and obtained a bachelor's degree in public administration from Central Michigan University in Mount Pleasant, Michigan.[1]

Her children's schooling drew Lawrence to education issues, and, in 1992, Lawrence won a seat on the Southfield, Michigan, board of education. She served on the board until 1996, when she won election to the Southfield city council. In 2001, Lawrence became the first woman and first African American to serve as mayor of Southfield. After Lawrence retired from the Post Office in 2008, she launched an unsuccessful campaign for Oakland County executive; and she was the Democratic nominee for Michigan lieutenant governor in 2010, but the campaign was unsuccessful in the general election. She first ran for Congress in 2012, entering a primary between two Democratic House incumbents Hansen Clarke and Gary C. Peters in a redrawn district that wound its way from southwest Detroit north to Pontiac. Lawrence came in third; Peters went on to win the seat.[2]

When Peters ran for an open U.S. Senate seat in 2014, Lawrence, then in her fourth term as Southfield mayor, announced her candidacy for the northern Detroit district. In the race for the Democratic nomination, Lawrence faced opposition from Clarke and state representative Rudy Hobbs. Lawrence ran a grassroots campaign, earning endorsements from women's groups and small businesses. She scored a victory, taking 36 percent of the vote in the primary. In the general election, Lawrence ran on policies that included protecting equal rights and women's reproductive rights. In September, Lawrence's Republican

opponent Christina Conyers (Representative John Conyers Jr.'s cousin) withdrew from the race, and the state party nominated local Republican Christina Barr to replace her. Lawrence won with 78 percent of the vote in the reliably Democratic district.[3] Lawrence has faced little Democratic opposition in her re-election efforts. She has won her three subsequent general elections with high margins of victory and most recently captured 79 percent of the vote in 2020.[4]

Lawrence took seats on the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform and the Committee on Small Business in the 114th Congress (2015–2017). In the 115th Congress (2017–2019), she left Small Business to serve on the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure. She then left that assignment to take a seat on the powerful Appropriations Committee in the 116th and 117th Congresses (2019–2023). Lawrence has also led several important caucuses as co-chair of the Congressional Women's Caucus, 2nd Vice Chair of the Congressional Black Caucus, co-chair of the Democratic Women's Caucus, founder and co-chair of the Congressional Caucus on Black–Jewish Relations, and co-chair of the Congressional Caucus on Foster Youth.[5]

From her seat on the Oversight and Reform Committee, Lawrence has prioritized investigations into how the water supply in nearby Flint, Michigan, was contaminated with poisonous levels of lead. In committee hearings, she questioned state officials, including then-Governor Rick Snyder, on the role Michigan's government played in the environmental disaster.[6] She has also advocated for expanded lead testing in the soil of demolished properties in Detroit and has twice introduced a bill to test for and remediate lead levels in drinking water at school facilities.[7] She has also authored legislation that would raise corporate taxes to pay for improvements to the country's water infrastructure.[8]

During Lawrence's congressional tenure, she passed two bills renaming two Detroit post offices, one after civil rights activist Mary Eleanora McCoy and another after the Queen of Soul, Aretha Franklin.[9] Lawrence has also worked to fix the U.S. Postal Service's financial woes and was instrumental in crafting and getting the Postal Service Reform Act of 2022 signed into law. She criticized a report issued by the Postal Task Force of President Donald J. Trump that proposed further cuts to the agency, and she pushed back against suggestions to privatize portions of the agency's delivery responsibilities.[10] Lawrence cosponsored the Postal Service Reform Act of 2022, which requires the Postal Service to maintain a public-facing website that provides service performance data and repeals the requirement that the agency prepay future health benefits for its retirees. Lawrence was among several lawmakers who rejected Postmaster Louis DeJoy's plan to implement slower delivery times. "We must pair these reforms with strong language to repair and to require robust service standards," she said.[11] The House and Senate passed the legislation in 2022.

In early January 2022, Representative Lawrence announced that she would not seek re-election and would retire from the House at the end of the 117th Congress in January 2023.[12]

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Al Lawson Jr.

1948–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

2017–

Democrat from Florida



Image courtesy of the Member

Al Lawson Jr. won election to the U.S. House of Representatives in 2016 with almost three decades of experience as a state legislator. During his three terms in Congress, he has focused on funding historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs), expanding opportunities for small businesses, and improving housing conditions in his northern Florida district.

Alfred Lawson Jr. was born in Midway, Florida, on September 23, 1948. After graduating from Havana Northside High School in Havana, Florida, in 1966, he went to Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University in Tallahassee. There, he competed in basketball and track and earned a bachelor's degree in 1970. Lawson played basketball professionally before returning to school. At Florida State University in Tallahassee, he worked as an assistant basketball coach and graduated with a master's degree in public administration in 1973.[1] In 1976, Lawson joined Northwestern Mutual Life Insurance, where he worked as a life insurance agent and financial adviser for 38 years.

In 1982, Lawson won election to the Florida state house and served until 2000, when he was elected to the state senate. Lawson chaired the committee on natural resources in both chambers, authoring major environmental bills concerning land acquisition and preservation.[2] When he reached his state senate term limit in 2010, he challenged Democratic incumbent Allen F. Boyd Jr. in Florida's Second Congressional District.[3] Lawson relied on name recognition from his state legislature tenure but lost in the Democratic primary.[4] He ran again in 2012 and won the primary but could not defeat Republican incumbent Steve Southerland, earning 47 percent of the vote.[5]

In 2016, redistricting altered Florida's Fifth District. It moved to the northern border, extending from Duval County to Gadsden County.[6] More than 47 percent of the district's Democratic voters were African American.[7] Since the newly configured boundaries included areas he represented in the state legislature, Lawson geared up for another campaign. This time, he looked to replace Democratic incumbent Corrine Brown, who had represented the Fifth District since 1993 but was under fraud investigations.[8] Lawson defeated Brown in the August primary, 48 to 39 percent—with another candidate claiming the remaining 13 percent.[9] In the general election, Lawson faced African-American Republican Glo Smith. On the campaign trail, Smith supported Republican presidential nominee Donald J. Trump's immigration policies and

tax reform proposals while Lawson promoted paths to citizenship for undocumented immigrants and restricting assault weapons.[10] Lawson won with 64 percent of the vote. He won his subsequent two elections by similar margins.[11]

As a new Member of the 115th Congress (2017–2019), Lawson joined the Congressional Black Caucus and the New Democrat Coalition, and was assigned to the Agriculture Committee and the Small Business Committee. In the following Congress, he left Small Business for a seat on the Financial Services Committee.

As a member of the Small Business Committee, Lawson introduced the Incentivizing Fairness in Subcontracting Act. The legislation aimed to create opportunities for small business owners by encouraging large companies with federal contracts to subcontract work to small businesses. The House passed the measure by voice vote in September 2018, but the Senate did not act on it.[12]

The House passed another of Lawson's bills, one commemorating Black history, in the 115th Congress. The measure would have prompted the Secretary of the Interior to determine the possibility of including in the National Park System the Jacksonville home of James Weldon Johnson—an activist, author, and songwriter and the first Black lawyer accepted to the bar association in Florida after Reconstruction. Lawson introduced a similar measure again in the following Congress.[13]

From his seat on the Agriculture Committee, Lawson had a hand in shaping the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018, commonly known as the Farm Bill. In preparation for drafting the measure, which provided funding for agricultural programs at historically Black colleges and universities, Lawson held several roundtable discussions in his district to get constituent input.[14] His HBCU Parity Act was included in the final version of the farm bill signed into law in December 2018.[15]

Lawson prioritized the health and safety of federal housing residents and called for federal intervention in the absence of local health and safety enforcement. He introduced the HUD Inspection Oversight Act in July 2019 to revise the federal property inspection requirements of housing units.[16] The same year, he advocated for residents in a federally-assisted Jacksonville apartment complex that went without hot water and gas for weeks.[17] In 2021, Lawson reintroduced the measure and joined Florida Senator Marco Rubio in publicly criticizing a rat infestation at another apartment unit that received federal funds.[18] "I was really concerned and really upset with the city code enforcement, because they didn't really do their job to have these kind of things happen," he told news outlets.[19] In both cases, he called on the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to address the issue.

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Barbara Lee

1946–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1998–

Democrat from California



Image courtesy of the Member

A longtime California state legislator and former senior congressional aide, Barbara Lee has pursued the interests of Oakland and the East Bay in the U.S. House of Representatives. On Capitol Hill, Lee advocated for the Affordable Care Act to address racial disparities in health care, promoted funding for affordable housing, and served on the influential Appropriations Committee.

Barbara Lee was born in El Paso, Texas, on July 16, 1946.[1] In 1960, her family moved to the Los Angeles area, where Lee graduated from San Fernando High School in 1964. Lee married as a teenager, gave birth to two sons, and later divorced.[2] As a single mother, Lee attended Mills College in Oakland.[3] In 1972, as the Black Student Union president, she arranged for Representative Shirley Chisholm of New York to speak at the college and later worked for Chisholm's presidential campaign. "Shirley became a close friend and a mentor," Lee recalled.[4] After graduating with a bachelor's degree in psychology in 1973, she earned a master's degree in social work from the University of California at Berkeley in 1975. That year Lee joined the staff of Oakland Representative Ronald V. Dellums as an intern, and worked in his office for nearly 12 years, eventually serving as his chief of staff.[5] In 1990, Lee won election to the California state assembly and later served in the state senate from 1997 to 1998.

Dellums announced his retirement in late 1997 and Lee entered the race for his seat. The district was 41 percent White, 31 percent Black, 15 percent Asian, and 12 percent Latino, and encompassed the Berkeley-Oakland area.[6] Dellums resigned from the House in February 1998 and Lee won the April 7 special election with 67 percent of the vote.[7] In her 11 subsequent re-elections, she has captured 80 percent of the vote or more.[8]

When Lee took her seat in the 105th Congress (1997–1999) on April 21, 1998, she received assignments on the Banking and Financial Services Committee (later renamed Financial Services), and the Science Committee. She left the Science Committee the following Congress for the International Relations Committee (later renamed Foreign Affairs) where she served through the 111th Congress (2009–2011). In the 110th Congress (2007–2009), she departed Financial Services for the Appropriations Committee. She was assigned to the Budget Committee in the 113th Congress (2013–2015). In the 117th Congress (2021–2023), Lee became chair of the Appropriations Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs.

In the 111th Congress, Lee served as chair of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC). As Congress debated health care reform, Lee led the CBC in supporting the Health Equity and Accountability Act, introduced by Virgin Islands Delegate Donna M. Christensen on behalf of the CBC, the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, and the Congressional Asian Pacific Islander Caucus.[9] The bill addressed issues of racial and ethnic inequalities in health services and contained measures to increase diversity among health workers, fund linguistic services, and collect data on health disparities.[10] Sections of the bill were included in the version of the Affordable Care Act that passed the House.[11] Lee introduced it again in the following Congress.[12] In 2018, she was elected to the Democratic leadership as one of three co-chairs of the Steering and Policy Committee, which makes Democratic committee assignments and helps shape the party's legislative agenda in the House.[13]

In 2003, Lee and then Representative Bernard Sanders of Vermont introduced a bill to create a Federal Housing Administration-funded program to build and rehabilitate affordable housing.[14] In 2013, Lee cofounded the Democratic Whip Task Force on Poverty and Opportunity with Democratic Whip Steny Hamilton Hoyer of Maryland, which became the Majority Leader's Task Force on Poverty and Opportunity in 2019. As chair, Lee develops legislation to help low-income Americans.[15]

Lee coauthored two laws providing funding and technical assistance for global health initiatives: the Global AIDS and Tuberculosis Relief Act of 2000 and the United States Leadership Against HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria Act of 2003.[16] As chair of the CBC Global AIDS Task Force, Lee introduced the Assistance for Orphans and Other Vulnerable Children in Developing Countries Act, which became law in 2005. The measure created a special advisor position in the U.S. Agency for International Development and directed the administration to examine the health and education needs of vulnerable children around the world.[17]

In 2001, Lee was the lone dissenting vote against the resolution authorizing President George W. Bush to use force overseas after the September 11, 2001, terror attacks.[18] In July 2014, the House approved Lee's coauthored resolution requiring President Barack Obama to seek congressional approval before committing ground forces in Iraq.[19]

As chair of the Appropriations Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs, Lee was responsible for overseeing the production of one of the 12 funding measures the full committee authors each fiscal year.[20] In March 2021, she led a subcommittee hearing addressing diversity in the U.S. foreign policy workforce.[21]

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Lucy McBath

1960–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

2019–

Democrat from Georgia



Image courtesy of the Member

In November 2018, Lucy McBath gained national attention when she won election as a Democrat to the U.S. House of Representatives in a once reliably Republican district.[1] Inspired to enter politics following the murder of her teenage son, Jordan, McBath has made gun violence prevention, health care, veterans, and voting rights key elements of her congressional career.

Lucy McBath was born Lucia Kay Holman in Joliet, Illinois, on June 1, 1960, to Dr. Lucien and Wilma Holman. Her mother was a nurse, and her father was a dentist who served as the president of the Illinois branch of the NAACP during the 1960s. He also owned *The Black Voice*, a regional newspaper.[2] McBath attended West Joliet High School and in 1982 earned a bachelor's degree in political science from Virginia State University in Petersburg, Virginia, one of a number of historically Black colleges and universities. In college, she interned for Virginia Governor Douglas Wilder. In 1984, she joined Delta Airlines as a flight attendant and later moved to Atlanta, Georgia, near the company's headquarters.[3] In 2008, she married fellow flight attendant Curtis McBath.[4]

On November 23, 2012, McBath's teenage son Jordan was shot and killed by a 45-year-old White man for "playing loud music." In the wake of her son's death, McBath joined the gun violence prevention advocacy groups Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America, Everytown for Gun Safety, and Mothers of the Movement. Everytown for Gun Safety elevated McBath to national spokeswoman, and she routinely testified before Congress and state legislatures in favor of gun safety legislation. In 2016, she spoke at the Democratic National Convention.[5]

In early 2018, McBath considered running for a seat in the Georgia state legislature. However, following the mass shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, McBath decided instead to run for Congress.[6] McBath entered a four-candidate primary in the Atlanta suburbs, which contained portions of Fulton, DeKalb, and Cobb counties. McBath placed first in the May primary, then defeated local businessman Kevin Abel in the July runoff.[7] Viewed as an underdog against incumbent Karen Handel in the general election, McBath staked out opposition to President Donald J. Trump's tax law and attempts to defund Planned Parenthood, and focused on stricter anti-gun-violence laws.[8] In 2018, McBath narrowly defeated Handel with 50.5 percent of the vote. McBath improved her margin in a 2020 rematch against Handel, winning 55 percent of the vote.[9]

During both of her terms in the House, McBath has served on the Judiciary Committee and the Education and Labor Committee. From her position on Education and Labor, McBath introduced legislation to support maternal health, refund defrauded students, and joined a bipartisan effort to end hazing at academic institutions.[10] McBath has twice introduced the Family Violence Prevention and Services Improvement Act to increase funding available for shelters and programs designed to assist victims of domestic abuse. The House passed her measure in October 2021.[11] McBath also has made health care a priority, passing legislation to expand health care protections for those who lose their job, to help plan for and prevent future pandemics, and to fund critical research to address the maternal mortality crisis and keep families safe.

McBath's position on the Judiciary Committee increased her visibility during high profile investigations of the Trump administration in the 116th Congress (2019–2021). In 2019, McBath's bill, the HAVEN Act, which excluded veterans benefits from income calculations for disabled veterans struggling against bankruptcy, was signed into law.[12] McBath also guided another bill through the Judiciary Committee to hasten the patent approval process for humanitarian innovations, which was signed into law in 2021.[13]

McBath has continued to advocate for legislation related to gun violence prevention, voting rights, and justice initiatives. She joined the House Gun Violence Prevention Task Force as vice chair and serves as the vice chair for the Bipartisan Women's Caucus. McBath has been considered "one of the House Democratic Caucus's most important voices" on gun violence prevention. She was one of eight original cosponsors on a new background check bill to tighten restrictions on private trades and exchanges; the bill stalled in the Senate.[14] Following the murders of George Floyd in Minnesota and Ahmaud Arbery in Georgia, McBath connected their deaths to her own painful past, calling them "a sucker punch in my heart and my gut" and reiterated her opposition to "stand your ground" laws.[15] She has continued to promote Democratic legislation to reform police departments and increase accountability.[16] McBath has been called a "Mother on a Mission" to protect families across America.

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A. Donald McEachin

1961–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

2017–

Democrat from Virginia

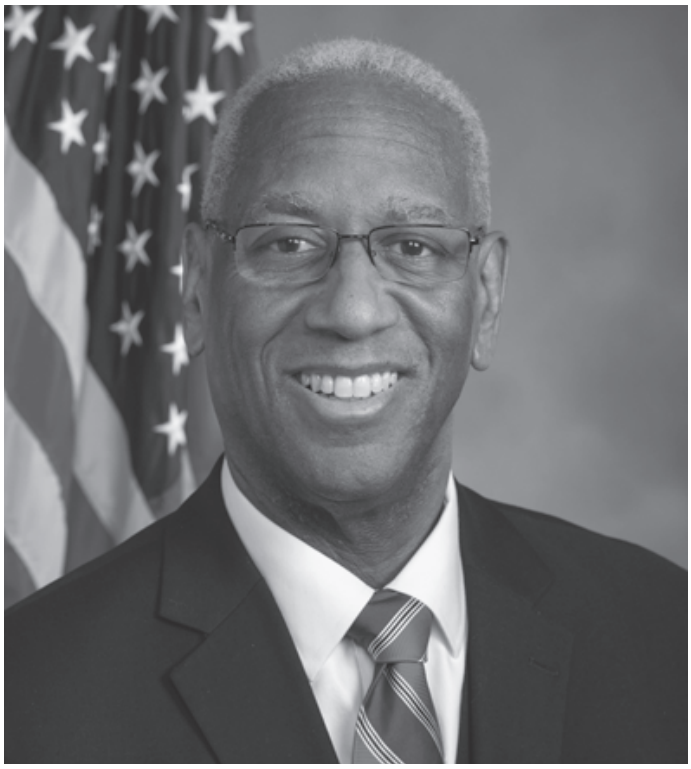

Image courtesy of the Member

Elected in 2016 from a redrawn district centered on Richmond, Virginia, A. Donald McEachin brought his experience as a veteran state legislator to Congress. A passionate advocate for environmental protection, McEachin has made addressing the climate crisis and its effect on underprivileged communities his chief legislative priority.

Aston Donald McEachin was born in Nuremburg, Germany, on October 10, 1961, to Ivan and Edna McEachin. His father Ivan, a Korean War veteran, left the U.S. Army in 1968 to work for C&P Telephone Company before its acquisition by Bell Atlantic; his mother Edna worked as a teacher and banker.[1] Donald McEachin spent his early years as a self-described "army brat" before the family settled in the Richmond, Virginia, area. McEachin attended St. Christopher's School, a private all-boys school in Richmond, graduating in 1979. After earning a bachelor's degree at American University in Washington, DC, in 1982, McEachin earned a law degree from the University of Virginia Law School in Charlottesville, Virginia, in 1986. While studying law, he met his wife Colette; they have three children.[2]

In 1990, he co-founded the McEachin and Gee personal injury law firm and won a landmark jury verdict in a civil case.[3] McEachin first ran for a seat in the Virginia house of delegates in 1991 but failed to secure the nomination. Four years later, McEachin ousted a veteran legislator in the primary despite little outside support. After an unsuccessful run for state attorney general in 2001, McEachin temporarily left politics. He enrolled at the Samuel DeWitt Proctor School of Theology at Virginia Union University, obtaining a master of divinity in 2008, and returned to the house of delegates in 2006. The next year, he earned the support of Virginia Senator James H. "Jim" Webb in primarying a state senator who had backed Webb's opponent. McEachin won the race and served in the Virginia state senate until 2016.[4] As a state senator, McEachin fought to expand Medicare and led negotiations reducing rates for the statewide utility giant in exchange for increasing support for solar power.[5]

In 2015, a federal panel of judges ruled that the Virginia congressional map illegally packed Representative Robert C. "Bobby" Scott's Tidewater district. When the legislature refused to redraw it, Virginia Governor Terry McAuliffe requested that the judges redraw the districts. A new district included part of Richmond and Henrico County, territory more favorable to Democratic candidates. Before the map was even finalized, McEachin emerged as the favorite among the state's Democratic establishment. He handily

won the June primary.[6] In the general election, McEachin faced Henrico Sheriff Mike Wade. McEachin supported maintaining the Affordable Care Act, improving local infrastructure, placing a ban on offshore oil drilling, and expanding refugee quotas. Amidst national concerns over police brutality and racism, Wade suggested Black men pulled over by police were already "on their way to jail" and typically suffered from mental illness or addiction. McEachin rebuked his opponent, recalling his own experience being racially profiled by police.[7] McEachin ultimately won with 58 percent of the vote. McEachin won re-election in 2018 and 2020 with more than 60 percent of the vote.[8]

McEachin entered Congress as only the third Black man ever to represent Virginia in Congress, and his election marked the first time the state simultaneously elected two Black Congressmen. Democratic leadership rewarded McEachin for his legislative experience by appointing him regional whip, and his fellow incoming freshmen named him one of three class presidents.[9] In the 115th Congress (2017–2019), McEachin was assigned to the Armed Services Committee and the Natural Resources Committee. The following Congress, McEachin left Armed Services for a seat on the Committee on Energy and Commerce. In March 2019, McEachin also was assigned to the newly created Select Committee on the Climate Crisis.

Assignments to Energy and Commerce and the Select Committee on the Climate Crisis aligned with McEachin's focus on environmental protection. Shortly after taking office, McEachin cofounded the United for Climate and Environment Justice Task Force to address the climate crisis's disproportionate effect on communities of color.[10] He submitted a bill to create interagency groups to regularly review the economic costs of greenhouse gases. He later proposed a Clean Cities Coalition Program under the auspices of the Department of Energy, encouraging cooperation between the executive branch and local urban task forces.[11] McEachin held to his original campaign promise to oppose and heavily regulate offshore drilling, twice introducing the Offshore Accountability Act to tighten reporting requirements for machinery failures on drilling rigs.[12] Starting in 2020, he pursued designating the Great Dismal Swamp located in Virginia and North Carolina as a National Heritage Area.[13] McEachin annually submitted resolutions honoring Earth Day and declared environmental protection "a moral obligation and an act of faith."[14]

McEachin proposed a ban on corporal punishment in schools and the creation of a mentor program for larger, older firms to assist newer firms in competing for Homeland Security contracts. Representing a Tidewater district near several naval bases, he also supported additional ship construction.[15]

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Gregory W. Meeks

1953–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1998–

Democrat from New York

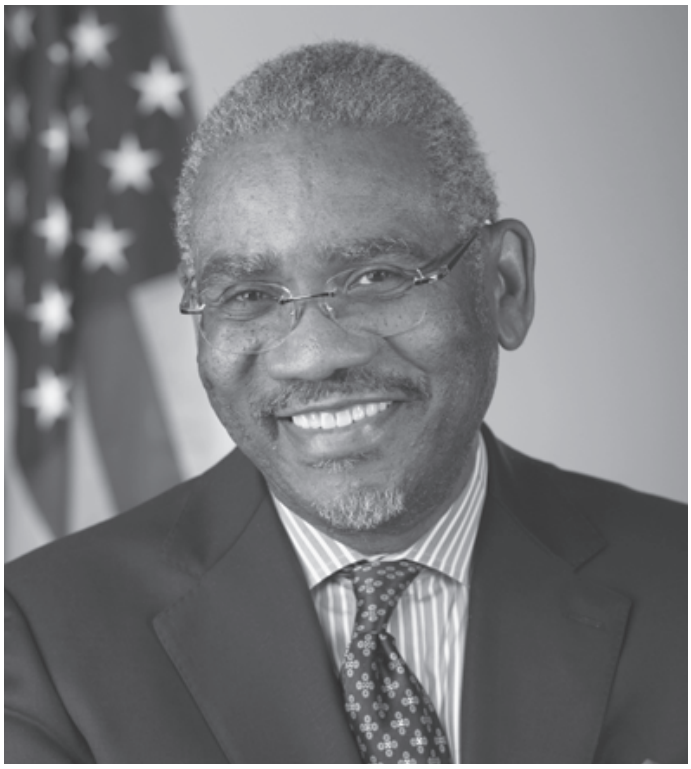

Image courtesy of the Member

Gregory W. Meeks, a former prosecutor and New York state legislator, has represented his Queens-centered U.S. House of Representatives district for 13 terms. An advocate for development at home and abroad, Meeks has served on the Financial Services Committee throughout his congressional career, heading two subcommittees in his tenure. He became the first African-American chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee in the 117th Congress (2021–2023). "My role, as part of a new generation of African American leadership," he said, "is to take us to the next phase of the civil rights movement: that is, the economic development of our community."[1]

Gregory Meeks was born on September 25, 1953, in East Harlem, New York. His father James was a heavyweight boxer, taxi driver, and theater handyman. His mother Mary was a teacher.[2] He is the oldest of four children.[3] He graduated from New York City's Julia Richman High School in 1971. Four years later, he graduated with a bachelor's degree from Adelphi University on Long Island. He earned a law degree from Howard University before settling in Far Rockaway, Queens. He worked for several legal offices in the New York City government before going into private law practice. From 1985 to 1992, he served as a supervising judge on the New York State Workers Compensation Board. Meeks entered elective politics when he made an unsuccessful bid for the New York City Council in 1991. In 1992 he won election to the New York state assembly, representing Far Rockaway until 1998.[4] Meeks is married to Simone-Marie, has three daughters: Ebony, Aja, and Nia-Aiyana, and two granddaughters: London Gayle Laidley and Jayla Janee Johnson.[5]

During the 105th Congress (1997–1999) U.S. Representative Floyd H. Flake announced his retirement, requiring a special election to fill the seat. In place of a Democratic primary, Queens political leaders determined the Democratic nominee.[6] In January 1998, they chose Meeks as their candidate.[7] The heavily Democratic district was 70 percent African American and Hispanic.[8] In the February 3 special election, Meeks won by 57 percent.[9] In his 12 re-elections, Meeks won majorities between 64 and 86 percent.[10] In 2019, the Queens County Democratic Party named Meeks its chair.[11]

When Meeks was sworn in on February 5, 1998, he received a seat on the Banking and Finance Committee (later renamed Financial Services).[12] In the 106th Congress (1999–2001), Meeks was appointed to the International

Relations Committee (later renamed Foreign Affairs). Congressman Meeks still serves on both panels. In the 111th Congress (2009–2011), Meeks chaired the Financial Services Committee's International Monetary Policy and Trade Subcommittee. In the 116th Congress (2019–2021), he chaired the Subcommittee on Consumer Protection and Financial Institutions. In the 117th Congress, Meeks became chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee.

As chair of the International Monetary Policy and Trade Subcommittee, Meeks led the Financial Services Committee's response to a deadly earthquake that shook Haiti in January 2010. He oversaw committee passage of the Haiti Debt Relief and Earthquake Recovery Act, written by Maxine Waters of California, to cancel the country's debts with several international development banks.[13] Meeks also introduced the Haiti Private Sector Development Act to support the country's rebuilding efforts.[14] As subcommittee chair, Meeks played a critical role as a conferee for the Dodd–Frank Wall Street Reform Act, the most consequential finance reform bill since the Great Depression.

As chair of the Consumer Protection and Financial Institutions Subcommittee in the 116th Congress, Meeks focused on issues of discrimination and persistent redlining in banking, advanced legislation to save minority banks, and submitted proposals to increase banking and access to capital for the poor and underbanked.

In November 2012, Hurricane Sandy devastated the New York coastline, causing severe damage to Meeks's district and leaving many of his constituents without power, food, or water. He worked to pass a $50.7 billion aid bill to rebuild and recover.[15] He also introduced the Disaster Assistance Recoupment Fairness Act to waive citizen debt owed to the Federal Emergency Management Agency due to clerical errors.[16] The bill attempted to reinstate an earlier law but was never voted on.[17] In 2020, Meeks and other New York officials announced the start of a federally-funded $336 million coastal construction project to reinforce the state's shorelines and prevent future damage caused by hurricanes.[18]

As chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee, Meeks introduced the Ensuring American Global Leadership and Engagement (EAGLE) Act in May 2021, which aimed to reshape the relationship between the United States and China, including expanding the U.S. State Department's presence in the region, giving protections to Hong Kong and Uyghur refugees, and encouraging a diplomatic boycott of the 2022 Beijing Olympics.[19] The committee voted favorably on the bill in July 2021. Prioritizing diplomacy in global leadership, Chairman Meeks successfully steered into law the first comprehensive authorizing bill for the State Department in nearly two decades. He also worked to strengthen the management and operations of the State Department, including its recruitment and retention of a diverse workforce. Under his tenure as chair, he held the first full committee hearing on LGBTQI+ rights abroad.

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Kweisi Mfume

1948–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1987–1996; 2020–

Democrat from Maryland



Image courtesy of the Member

Kweisi Mfume (pronounced Kwah-EE-see Oom-FOO-may) began his political career in the Baltimore city council before winning election to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1986. In 1996, Mfume voluntarily left his safe seat in the House to revive the then-struggling NAACP as its president and chief executive officer. He returned to the House 24 years later when he won the special election to fill the vacant seat opened by the death of his successor, Elijah E. Cummings of Maryland.[1]

Kweisi Mfume was born, raised, and educated in the City of Baltimore and there he followed his dreams to impact society and to help shape public policy. He attended Morgan State University and graduated *magna cum laude*. He also earned a master's degree from Johns Hopkins University.[2]

During his seven years of service in local government, Mfume chaired the Baltimore city council's committee on health policy and led the efforts to diversify city government, improve community safety, enhance business development, and divest city funds from the apartheid government of South Africa.[3]

At the age of thirty-eight, he was decisively elected to the U.S. House, and he firmly held his seat for the next decade.[4] Congressman Mfume served on several major committees. As a member of the Banking and Financial Services Committee, he held the ranking seat on the General Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee. He also served as a member of the Committee on Education and helped to impact commercial and industrial issues as a senior member of the Small Business Committee. While in his third term, he was chosen by the Speaker of the House Thomas S. Foley of Washington to serve on the Ethics Committee and the Joint Economic Committee of the House and Senate. He was later elected chair of the Joint Economic Committee.

Mfume consistently advocated for landmark business and civil rights legislation. He successfully cosponsored and helped to pass the Americans with Disabilities Act, strengthened the Equal Credit Opportunity Act, and co-authored and successfully amended the Civil Rights Bill of 1991 to apply its provisions to U.S. citizens working for American-based companies abroad. He also sponsored legislative initiatives banning assault weapons and establishing stalking as a federal crime. Mfume also served as both vice-chair and later chair of the Congressional Black Caucus.

Mfume left his congressional seat to become president and chief executive officer of the NAACP in February 1996 after being unanimously elected to the post; he served

in that position for nine years.[5] During that time, he reestablished the financial footing of the organization and significantly raised its national profile while also helping to restore its prominence among the nation's oldest civil rights organizations. His efforts included pursuing enhanced civil rights enforcement measures within the government and in the private sector, economic empowerment for all people, educational excellence, access to affordable healthcare in the most overlooked communities, and establishing 75 new college-based NAACP chapters across the nation.

In 2000, Mfume worked to negotiate, develop, and author the first-ever signed "Network Television Diversity Agreements" with broadcast television networks. In 2003, he successfully secured the NAACP's official United Nations' Status as a Non-Governmental Organization within that world body.

Mfume was an original member of the Continuity of Government Commission established following the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. The commission was created to study and recommend reforms related to presidential and congressional succession in a time of national catastrophic crisis or in the event of a terrorist attack.

Since his return to Congress in May 2020, Mfume's congressional successes include passing legislation to address the longstanding need for diversity in clinical cancer research by pharmaceutical companies using federal dollars (the Henrietta Lacks Enhancing Cancer Research Act), codifying and tripling the budget of the Minority Business Development Agency within Department of Commerce, the only federal agency tasked with promoting the growth and competitiveness of minority-owned businesses, bringing back billions of dollars in COVID-19 relief money to his Maryland district, and helping constituents with his constituent services efforts.[6] He remains a constant advocate for bipartisan political cooperation on social, economic, educational, and healthcare issues.

Mfume serves on the House Oversight and Reform Committee and the Education and Labor Committee, and he is vice-chair of the Small Business Committee. He is also a member of the Congressional Black Caucus, Congressional Progressive Caucus, Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) Caucus, Defense Spending Reduction Caucus, and Ukraine Caucus.

Mfume is the recipient of honorary doctoral degrees conferred by Brandeis University, the University of Maryland, Loyola University Maryland, University of the Virgin Islands, Meharry Medical College, Morgan State University, Morehouse College, Maryland Institute College of Art, Sojourner-Douglass College, Washington College, and Howard University.

Mfume has been honored with scores of other awards, proclamations, and citations, including twice being named "Marylander of the Year." His background in broadcasting includes 20 years in radio and television. His former bestselling autobiography published by Ballantine Books (Random House) is entitled *No Free Ride*. He is a proud husband and father of six adult sons.

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Gwen Moore

1951–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

2005–

Democrat from Wisconsin



Image courtesy of the Member

Following a lengthy career in state and local government, Gwen Moore won election as Wisconsin's first Black Member of the U.S. House of Representatives in 2004. Building off her record as a state legislator, Moore advocates on behalf of women and low-income families. "My struggle to put myself through college while I raised my baby girl inspired me to run for office," she has said. "My mission is to fight for programs that will help lift up poor women and children."[1]

Gwendolynne Sophia Moore was born in Racine, Wisconsin, on April 18, 1951. Her father was a union factory worker and her mother was a public school teacher. She was the eighth of nine children. She grew up in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and graduated from Northern Division High School in 1969. During her first year at Marquette University in Milwaukee, she became a single mother, seeking government assistance to support her family. Despite such challenges, she earned a bachelor's degree from Marquette in 1978. She is the mother of three children: Jesselynne, Ade, and Sowande.[2]

After college, Moore participated in Volunteers in Service to America, an antipoverty program created during the Lyndon B. Johnson administration, where she helped create a credit union in her community so that neighbors would not have to rely on predatory loans. She then held a variety of state and local government positions. On the municipal level, she worked for Milwaukee's department of city development, and on the state level, she worked for the Wisconsin housing and economic development authority, and the departments of employment relations and health and social services.[3]

In 1988, Moore won a seat in the Wisconsin state assembly. In 1992, after two terms in the assembly, Moore was elected to the state senate and became the first African-American woman to serve as a Wisconsin state senator. She held her seat in the senate for more than 10 years, eventually serving as president pro tempore from 1997 to 1998.[4]

When Milwaukee Representative Gerald Daniel Kleczka announced he was retiring from the House at the end of the 108th Congress (2003–2005), Moore entered the race to fill the seat against two other Democrats, state senator Tim Carpenter and Matt Flynn, a former chair of the Wisconsin Democratic Party. Moore ran a grassroots campaign and tapped into a support network that included women's organizations and teachers' unions. She won the primary with 64 percent of the vote. In the largely Democratic district, she won the general election easily, taking 70 percent of the vote over Republican Gerald H. Boyle.[5]

"We've got to preserve life, preserve resources and start focusing on a domestic agenda that's going to relieve us of a dearth of jobs, a lack of health care and a divestment in educational opportunities," she said upon her election.[6] Moore has won re-election eight times with comfortable margins. Most recently, she received 75 percent of the vote in the 2020 general election.[7]

Early in her House career, Moore was assigned to three committees: Financial Services; Budget; and Small Business. In 2019, she was appointed to the Ways and Means Committee. In the 117th Congress (2021–2023), Moore joined the Committee on Science, Space, and Technology and the Select Committee on Economic Disparity and Fairness in Growth. In 2011, Moore became the Democratic co-chair of the Congressional Women's Caucus for the 112th Congress (2011–2013).

Through her legislation, Moore has worked on behalf of vulnerable communities. While on the Financial Services Committee, which holds jurisdiction over housing policy, she introduced the Safe Housing Identification Exemption for the Lives of Domestic Violence Victims (SHIELD) Act in 2005. The legislation exempted victims of domestic violence or stalking from having their personal information disclosed through the federal Homeless Management Information System Database.[8] The bill's provisions were added to the 2005 reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) and passed into law.[9] From her work on the issue, Moore has led subsequent reauthorizations of VAWA. In January 2013, she introduced the VAWA reauthorization; a Senate companion bill became law two months later in March 2013.[10]

In 2018, Moore underwent treatment for small-cell lymphoma, and her cancer has been in remission since. She said her experiences with America's health care system "quadrupled" her commitment to the Affordable Care Act. She is an ardent supporter of women's reproductive rights and has worked to improve care for children and mothers.[11] In 2020, the House passed her bill to provide federal grants to improve data collection on cases of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome; a Senate version became law in late 2020.[12]

From her seat on the Ways and Means Committee, Moore has introduced legislation to reform the earned income tax credit, a tax credit for low-income workers. Her bill would increase the size of the credit and expand its eligibility criteria to include caregivers and college students.[13]

Notes

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Joe Neguse

1984–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

2019–

Democrat from Colorado



Image courtesy of the Member

When Joe Neguse won election to the U.S. House of Representatives in 2018 at the age of 34, he became the first African American to represent Colorado in Congress. As a federal lawmaker, Neguse has seen several of his bills signed into law, made efforts to preserve Colorado's public lands, and earned leadership positions within the House—including serving as the youngest impeachment manager in American history in 2021.

Joseph Neguse was born in Bakersfield, California, on May 13, 1984. His mother and father immigrated as refugees from the East African country Eritrea in the early 1980s and initially settled in California; the family moved to Colorado some years later.[1] Neguse graduated from Thunder Ridge High School in Highlands Ranch, Colorado, in 2002 before attending the University of Colorado in Boulder. He graduated *summa cum laude* with a bachelor's degree in political science and economics in 2005 and earned a law degree from the same university in 2009.

As a student, Neguse cofounded Colorado's largest voter registration nonprofit, and, in 2008, won election to the University of Colorado's Board of Regents for Colorado's Second Congressional District.[2] Following law school, Neguse practiced law in Denver and made an unsuccessful run for secretary of state in 2014. Colorado Governor John Wright Hickenlooper appointed him to his cabinet as the executive director for the Department of Regulatory Agencies, Colorado's consumer protection agency, in 2015.[3] Neguse and his wife Andrea have a daughter, Natalie.

After Democratic Representative Jared Polis announced he would run for Colorado governor in 2017, Neguse entered the race in Colorado's Second District.[4] On the campaign trail, he criticized President Donald J. Trump's restrictive immigration policies and made gun violence prevention and environmental protection the centerpieces of his campaign.[5] The heavily Democratic district encompassed mountain towns and many of Denver's suburbs in the north-central part of the state, including Boulder, Fort Collins, Loveland, and Granby. Only one percent of the population was Black.[6] Neguse won the primary over business executive Mark Williams, with 66 percent of the vote.[7] In the general election, he beat the Republican, Independent, and Libertarian candidates with 60 percent of the vote. He won by a similar margin in his subsequent re-election.[8]

In the 116th Congress (2019–2021), Neguse was assigned to the Judiciary Committee, Natural Resources

Committee, and Select Committee on the Climate Crisis. Neguse's fellow freshmen elected him as one of two co-class liaisons to House Democratic leadership.[9] In 2020, his colleagues elected him to co-chair the House Democratic Policy and Communications Committee, the number eight position in House Democratic leadership.[10] In the 117th Congress (2021–2023), Neguse joined the Rules Committee and became vice-chair of the Judiciary Immigration Subcommittee and the first Coloradan to chair the Natural Resources Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands.

One of the first bills Neguse introduced became law. Supported by his Colorado colleagues in the House and Senate, Neguse secured federal authorization to install an outdoor women's suffrage statue near the Capitol building in 2020. The design, created by one of his constituents, included influential advocates of color such as Sojourner Truth and Ida B. Wells.[11] "I want to ensure my daughter and every girl growing up alongside her feel represented and are assured of the fundamental role they play in our society," Neguse said in remarks he inserted into the *Congressional Record*.[12]

During his time in Congress, Neguse has been ranked by multiple entities as one of the most effective members of the House. Several of his bills, including legislation to increase funding for rural schools, expand opportunities for small businesses, and strengthen consumer protections, became law. From his seat on Natural Resources, Neguse also obtained the President's signature on multiple bills concerning public lands, including securing federal authorization to install the first women's suffrage monument in Washington, DC, and legislation incorporating the site of the Colorado Japanese internment location known as Amache into the National Park System. Neguse also secured passage of a bill expanding Rocky Mountain National Park in Colorado, and it became law on January 5, 2021.[13]

As chair of the Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands, and founder and co-chair of the bipartisan Wildfire Caucus, Neguse has held legislative and oversight hearings on the topics of the dangers of wildfires and the prospect of organizing a Civilian Climate Corps.[14]

On January 6, 2021, during the Joint Session of Congress to count the electoral votes from the 2020 presidential election, Neguse helped lead the debate on the House Floor to defend the results against Republican objections. On January 12, Speaker Nancy Pelosi of California named Neguse one of the House managers for the second impeachment of President Trump on the charge of incitement of insurrection following the violence at the Capitol on January 6.[15]

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Eleanor Holmes Norton

1937–

DELEGATE

1991–

Democrat from the District of Columbia



Image courtesy of the Member

In November 1990, Eleanor Holmes Norton won election as Delegate for Washington, DC, in the U.S. House of Representatives. A constitutional lawyer and former chair of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), Eleanor Holmes Norton has carried her lifelong commitment to protecting civil rights to Congress. Norton also has been a strong advocate for DC statehood and congressional voting rights. Alongside California Representative Maxine Waters, Norton is the longest-serving African-American woman in congressional history.

Eleanor Holmes Norton was born Eleanor Katherine Holmes in Washington, DC, on June 13, 1937, the oldest of three daughters of Coleman Holmes, a civil servant, and Vela Lynch Holmes, a teacher. She attended Dunbar High School in the District and earned a bachelor's degree at Antioch College in Yellow Springs, Ohio, in 1960. She graduated with a master's degree in American Studies in 1963 and a law degree in 1964—both from Yale University. While a student, Norton worked in the civil rights movement with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee in Mississippi. After graduating, she clerked for federal Judge A. Leon Higginbotham in Philadelphia and later became assistant legal director of the American Civil Liberties Union. In 1965, she married Edward Norton. The couple raised two children, Katherine and John, and separated in 1990.[1]

In 1970, New York Mayor John Vliet Lindsay appointed Norton to chair the New York City commission on human rights.[2] In 1977, President James Earl "Jimmy" Carter appointed her chair of the EEOC, where she served until 1981. During the 1980s, Norton taught as a tenured professor of law at Georgetown University Law Center in Washington, DC. After her election to Congress, Norton taught one course there annually until 2019.[3]

In 1990, Norton joined the race to be the District of Columbia's Delegate in the U.S. House after the incumbent, Walter E. Fauntroy, opted to run for mayor of Washington, DC. Norton ran on a platform advocating for statehood and greater federal funding for the District. She won the primary with a plurality of 40 percent of the vote. In the general election, she won 62 percent of the vote over Republican Harry Singleton. Norton has faced little or no opposition in her re-elections. In 2020, she easily secured re-election to her sixteenth term with 93 percent of the vote.[4]

As a Delegate, Norton can introduce legislation, speak on the House Floor, vote in committee, and chair a committee but cannot vote on legislation on the floor. In 1993, however,

Norton pushed for and won the right to vote on the House Floor in the Committee of the Whole. Republicans withdrew the rule when they took control of the House in the 104th Congress (1995–1997), but Democrats restored it when they again held the majority from 2007 to 2011, and again in 2019.[5] As a Delegate, Norton has often been afforded senatorial courtesy to recommend federal judges, the U.S. Attorney, and other significant federal law enforcement positions for the District.[6]

Norton has served on the Committee on District of Columbia, Committee on Post Office and Civil Service, Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, Joint Committee on the Organization of Congress, Committee on Oversight and Reform, Committee on Small Business, Select Committee on Homeland Security, and Committee on Homeland Security. She has chaired the Committee on District of Columbia Subcommittee on Judiciary and Education, the Committee on Post Office and Civil Service Subcommittee on Compensation and Employee Benefits, the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings, and Emergency Management, and the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure Subcommittee on Highways and Transit. In the 117th Congress (2021–2023), she sits on the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee and chairs its Subcommittee on Highways and Transit. She also serves on the Committee on Oversight and Reform, which holds jurisdiction over legislation affecting the District of Columbia.

Norton has used her positions on the Oversight and Transportation committees to bring significant economic development to the District of Columbia. When the District faced a financial crisis in the 1990s, Norton worked with Thomas M. Davis III of Virginia, then the chair of the District of Columbia Subcommittee, to pass legislation that created a financial control board to help balance the city's budget.[7] Norton helped ensure that the control board's broad budgetary powers did not infringe on the District's home rule.[8] She and Davis also collaborated on a law to create a tuition-assistance program that allowed college students from the District to attend out-of-state public institutions for the in-state price.[9] Norton also has supported legislation to redevelop portions of the District.[10]

Norton has prioritized statehood for the District of Columbia since her first term in office. On June 26, 2020, the House passed the Washington D.C. Admission Act for the first time, 28 years after Norton introduced her first statehood bill. In the 117th Congress, the House passed the Admission Act for a second time, but it has failed to gain traction in the Senate.[11]

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Ilhan Omar

1982–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

2019–

Democrat from Minnesota



Image courtesy of the Member

Just two years into her first term as a Minnesota state legislator, Ilhan Omar quickly seized on her burgeoning political profile to win election to the U.S. House of Representatives in 2018. She is the country's first Somali-American lawmaker. Having grown up in a family displaced by war, Omar has brought a unique perspective to policy debates on immigration, domestic spending, and foreign affairs.

Ilhan Omar was born on October 4, 1982, in Mogadishu, Somalia, to Nur Omar Mohamed, a teacher, and Farli Abukar. Omar's mother died when she was two years old and she was raised by her father and grandfather.[1] When Omar was a child, Somalia plunged into a civil war. She and her family fled the country and lived in a Kenyan refugee camp for four years. In 1995, her family was granted asylum to the United States and ultimately settled in Minneapolis. Omar became a naturalized U.S. citizen in 2000 at age 17.[2] She graduated from Thomas Edison High School in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and worked as a community nutrition educator for the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis. After earning a bachelor's degree from North Dakota State University in Fargo, North Dakota, in 2011, she returned to Minnesota to work as a child nutrition outreach coordinator for the state's department of education.[3] Omar is married to Tim Mynett, a political consultant, and they have four children.[4]

Omar developed her interest in politics as a teenager when she accompanied her grandfather to Democratic-Farmer-Labor (DFL) caucus meetings, acting as his interpreter.[5] In 2012, she managed Minnesota state senator Kari Dziedzic's campaign. The following year, she organized Minneapolis city council member Andrew Johnson's bid for office. Omar served as Johnson's policy aide until 2015 and worked at a nonprofit dedicated to the political empowerment of East African women living in the United States.[6] In 2016, Omar defeated a 44-year incumbent in a bid for a Minneapolis-area seat in the Minnesota house of representatives, becoming the nation's first Somali-American state lawmaker.[7]

On June 5, 2018, Minnesota Representative Keith Ellison announced his intention to run for Minnesota attorney general, setting off a frenzy of last-minute filings for the DFL primary in August. Omar joined the race for the open House seat representing Minneapolis and its surrounding suburbs. Though the district was majority White, it had a growing East African immigrant population.[8] In the primary, Omar faced several veteran

politicians, including former state house speaker Margaret Kelliher, and 11-year state legislator Patricia Torres Ray. Despite her relative lack of experience in elected office, Omar earned the endorsement of the DFL and Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey.[9] She advocated for affordable higher education, Medicare for all, and the abolition of the Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency.[10] Omar won the primary with a plurality of 48 percent of the vote.[11] In the heavily Democratic district, a DFL nomination all but ensured Omar's victory in the November general election. She bested her Republican opponent with a comfortable 78 percent and won re-election in 2020 with 64 percent.[12]

Along with Rashida Tlaib of Michigan, Omar was one of the first two Muslim-American women elected to the House and the first to wear a hijab on the House Floor. On the Opening Day of the 116th Congress (2019–2021), the House adopted a rules package that modified a 182-year-old rule banning hats in the chamber to allow exceptions for religious headwear.[13] In her first term, Representative Omar received assignments to three committees: Budget; Education and Labor; and Foreign Affairs. She remained on the latter two panels in her second term.[14]

From her seat on the Education and Labor Committee, Omar has worked to ensure equitable access to schooling. Working alongside Senator Bernard Sanders of Vermont, she introduced a bill that would cancel existing federal student loans and require the Department of Education to buy out and forgive private loans.[15] She has also cosponsored legislation to eliminate tuition at public colleges and universities for students below a certain income level.[16] During the COVID-19 pandemic, Omar introduced the MEALS Act, which ensured that children eligible to receive free and reduced-price school lunches would continue to receive meals during school closures.[17] The bill was incorporated into the Families First Coronavirus Response Act, which President Donald J. Trump signed into law in March 2020.[18]

As a Member of the Foreign Affairs Committee, Omar has endorsed a humanitarian approach to foreign policy. She has criticized the levying of economic sanctions on foreign governments, arguing that such measures only punish a country's citizens without affecting their leaders' behavior. She also introduced a bill that would allow certain exports to sanctioned countries, including healthcare and educational products.[19] In the 117th Congress (2021–2023), the House passed her bill, the Combating International Islamophobia Act, which would establish a new office within the State Department to monitor and combat Islamophobic activity in foreign countries.[20]

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Donald M. Payne Jr.

1958–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

2012–

Democrat from New Jersey



Image courtesy of the Member

In 2012, Donald M. Payne Jr. won election to the U.S. House of Representatives after the death of his father, Representative Donald M. Payne. Representing Newark, New Jersey, Payne has prioritized security, transportation, and access to health care in Congress. He has chaired two subcommittees of the Homeland Security Committee and the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee and has led hearings on high-speed rail systems and helping small, minority-owned businesses work on federal infrastructure projects.

Donald Payne Jr. was born on December 17, 1958, in Newark, New Jersey, to Donald Payne and the former Hazel Johnson. His mother died of cancer in 1963, and his father worked as a teacher before becoming a member of the Essex County board of freeholders and the Newark city council.[1] In 1976, Payne Jr. graduated from Hillside High School in Hillside, New Jersey, and went on to attend Kean College in Union, New Jersey.[2] Payne worked for the New Jersey highway authority and Essex County schools.[3] In 2005, Payne won election as a freeholder-at-large on the Essex County board of freeholders (now called the board of county commissioners).[4] The following year, he was elected as an at-large representative to the Newark city council and became president in 2010. He remained on the council and the board until 2012.

Payne's father, Donald Payne, became the first African American to represent New Jersey in Congress when he won election to the House in 1988. In March 2012, after 23 years in Congress as an advocate for education, health care, and human rights across the African continent from his seat on the Foreign Affairs Committee, the elder Payne died in office from colon cancer.[5] To fill the vacancy for the remainder of the 112th Congress (2011–2013), a special election was scheduled for June 5, the same day as the Democratic primary for the full term in the 113th Congress (2013–2015).[6] Payne joined five other candidates, including well-known state politicians, in running for the seat and the nomination.[7] The northeastern New Jersey district, which encompassed Newark, Orange, and Union, was majority Black and heavily Democratic.[8] The winner of the Democratic primary was expected to win the general election. Payne won the special election with 70 percent of the vote and the primary with 57 percent.[9] In November, he easily won election to the full term with 88 percent of the vote. In four subsequent House races, Payne secured re-election with overwhelming majorities of more than 79 percent.[10]

Since his arrival on Capitol Hill, Payne has been a member of the Homeland Security Committee. In the

116th Congress (2019–2021), he chaired the panel's Emergency Preparedness, Response, and Recovery Subcommittee. During his first two full terms, Payne sat on the Small Business Committee before joining the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure at the start of the 115th Congress (2017–2019). In the 117th Congress (2021–2023), he relinquished his Homeland Security subcommittee gavel and became chair of Transportation and Infrastructure's Subcommittee on Railroads, Pipelines and Hazardous Materials—a key position for his industrial district with numerous freight and passenger railroad lines.

In July 2015, Payne successfully guided the Department of Homeland Security Interoperable Communications Act into law.[11] The bill directed the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to create a strategy for maintaining communications between all of its agencies. During the floor debate in February 2015, Payne cited testimony from the DHS inspector general which reported a 99.8 percent failure rate of field radios attempting to communicate on one channel.[12] Payne told his colleagues, the "TSA must be able to talk to FEMA and the Coast Guard during an emergency, be it a terrorist incident or natural disaster."[13]

As chair of the Transportation and Infrastructure Subcommittee on Railroads, Pipelines, and Hazardous Materials, Payne focused on high-speed rail and Amtrak in the first session of the 117th Congress. In May 2021, he led a hearing to discuss the benefits of high-speed rail systems in the United States.[14] In April, he introduced the Rail Passenger Fairness Act, which would allow Amtrak to sue rail companies that prioritize freight trains ahead of passenger trains.[15] Payne co-authored the INVEST in America Act, which was signed into law as the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act of 2021 and contained a $66 billion investment in passenger rail, the single largest federal railroad investment since Amtrak was founded.[16]

Since 2015, Payne has co-chaired the Congressional Men's Health Caucus.[17] The group promotes active and healthy lifestyles for men, holds workout sessions and cancer screenings, and raises awareness of colorectal and prostate cancers on the Hill. In December 2020, as part of the Consolidated Appropriations Act, Payne's measure for Medicare to cover polyp removal during colonoscopies became law.[18] The procedure was not previously covered and caused unexpected expenses for patients.[19] "I have wanted to pass this bill since I lost my father … to the deadly disease in 2012," Payne stated in a press release. "I know it will increase the number of Americans who get screened for colorectal cancer … and help save thousands of lives annually."[20]

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Stacey E. Plaskett

1966–

DELEGATE

2015–

Democrat from the U.S. Virgin Islands



Image courtesy of the Member

Stacey E. Plaskett had a substantial legal career and experience on Capitol Hill before her election to the U.S. House of Representatives in 2014. In the House, Plaskett pushed for equal federal representation and access to government services for U.S. territories and other underserved areas and served as a House manager in President Donald J. Trump's 2021 impeachment trial in the U.S. Senate.

Stacey Plaskett was born in Brooklyn, New York, on May 13, 1966. Her parents moved from St. Croix, Virgin Islands, to the U.S. mainland in the 1950s. Her father was a New York City police officer and her mother was a clerk in the local court system. She graduated from Choate Rosemary Hall in Wallingford, Connecticut, in 1984 and earned a bachelor's degree from Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service in Washington, DC, in 1988. After college, she worked as an aide for Virgin Islands Delegate Ron de Lugo.[1] She enrolled at the American University School of Law in Washington, DC, while working for the American Medical Association. After completing a law degree in 1994, Plaskett moved to New York where she was an assistant district attorney in the Bronx until 1997. She returned to Washington, DC, to work on the House Committee on Standards of Official Conduct, and, in 2002, she joined the U.S. Justice Department, eventually serving as senior counsel to Deputy U.S. Attorneys General Larry Thompson and James Comey (at Justice she notably worked on the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act case against tobacco companies and the 9/11 Victims Compensation Fund). Plaskett served as deputy general counsel at AmeriChoice, a division of United Health Group, before moving to the U.S. Virgin Islands and working in private practice. In 2008, she became counsel to the Virgin Islands economic development authority, a position she held until 2014.[2] Plaskett is married to Jonathan Buckney-Small and they have five children.[3]

In 2012, Plaskett unsuccessfully challenged incumbent Delegate Donna M. Christensen in the Democratic primary.[4] Two years later, Christensen ran for territorial governor, and Plaskett entered the race for the Delegate's seat. In the Democratic primary, she faced Virgin Islands senators Shawn-Michael Malone and Emmett Hansen. Plaskett secured the nomination with 50 percent of the vote.[5] In the general election, she easily beat Republican nominee Vince Danet with 90 percent of the vote.[6] In 2016, Plaskett was challenged by former Virgin Islands Senator Ronald Russell in the Democratic primary and

won with 85 percent of the vote. She defeated Republican Gordon Ackley with 98 percent of the vote in the general election. In 2018, Plaskett won re-election unopposed and in 2020, she defeated an Independent candidate with 88 percent of the vote.[7]

When Plaskett arrived for the 114th Congress (2015–2017), she was assigned to the Agriculture Committee and Oversight and Government Reform Committee. In the 115th Congress (2017–2019), she took a seat on the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure. When Democrats won control of the House in the 116th Congress (2019–2021), Plaskett became chair of the Agriculture Subcommittee on Biotechnology, Horticulture, and Research. She retained the Agriculture subcommittee chair in the 117th Congress (2021–2023), but departed her other assignments for seats on the Budget Committee and the Ways and Means Committee. She became the first Member from a territory and only the fourth Black woman to be appointed to Ways and Means.

In the House, Plaskett worked to stimulate the Virgin Islands' economy and secure equal representation for her territorial constituency. She introduced legislation to require the federal government to return all excise tax revenue generated from rum production in the Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico to the respective territorial governments.[8] Hoping to boost medical tourism, Plaskett introduced a bill to waive visa requirements for residents of Caribbean nations to visit the Virgin Islands.[9] She also worked to ensure that the Virgin Islands benefited from federal programs. In 2019, she introduced a bill to define the word "state" as it relates to the federal code as automatically inclusive of territories unless expressly written otherwise.[10] Another of Plaskett's proposals was designed to remove the Medicaid cap imposed on the territories and allow them to receive funding equal to the states.[11]

In September 2017, two hurricanes designated as Category 5—the highest possible hurricane rating—hit the Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico, and Plaskett called for a "Marshall Plan" response for the two territories—a reference to the economic aid the United States provided to Europe after World War II.[12] A bipartisan Congress eventually authorized legislation not just to rebuild but to provide resilience to the two territories.

In 2019, the House voted to impeach President Trump for abuse of power and obstruction of Congress.[13] The violence at the Capitol on January 6, 2021, led the House to impeach Trump again, this time on the charge of incitement of insurrection. Speaker Nancy Pelosi of California chose Plaskett to serve as one of the impeachment managers, making her the first Territorial Delegate to hold this position during a presidential impeachment.[14]

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Ayanna Pressley

1974–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

2019–

Democrat from Massachusetts



Image courtesy of the Member

In 2018, Ayanna Pressley won the Democratic primary over an incumbent and, after winning the general election, she became the first Black woman elected from Massachusetts to serve in Congress. Early in her congressional career, she prioritized justice and healing and garnered national attention as a younger woman of color on Capitol Hill.

Ayanna Pressley was born on February 3, 1974, in Chicago, Illinois. She graduated from Francis W. Parker School in Chicago in 1992. While attending Boston University in Massachusetts, she worked in the district office of Representative Joseph Patrick Kennedy II.[1] In 1996, she got a job with Massachusetts Senator John Forbes Kerry as a volunteer coordinator in Washington, DC, eventually becoming political director.[2] In 2009, Pressley ran for a seat on Boston's city council. She won the race and became the first Black woman elected to the council in its 100-year history.[3] As a city councilor at large, Pressley founded and chaired a committee on healthy women, families, and communities.[4] She advocated for low-income young women of color by instituting sexual education programs, disciplinary reforms, and support for pregnant high schoolers in the Boston public schools.[5] Pressley is married to Conan Harris and is stepmother to his daughter Cora.[6]

In 2018, Pressley launched a campaign for Massachusetts's Seventh District against Democratic incumbent Michael Everett Capuano, who was elected to Congress in 1999 and had never faced a serious primary challenge.[7] After redistricting in 2012, the district covered most of Boston and its surrounding neighborhoods and was the state's only congressional district with a majority of people of color.[8] On the campaign trail, Pressley discussed her father's incarceration and his struggles with addiction, as well as her experience surviving sexual assault. She told voters she would bring their unheard voices to Congress, saying, "The people closest to the pain should be closest to the power."[9] In September, Pressley beat Capuano in the primary with 59 percent of the vote.[10] In the general election, she did not face a Republican opponent and won 87 percent of the vote. In her 2020 re-election, she won 82 percent of the vote.[11] In her first term, at the start of the 116th Congress (2019–2021), Pressley was assigned to the House Financial Services Committee and the House Oversight and Reform Committee.

The 116th Congress began during a government shutdown as Congress and President Donald J. Trump disagreed about border security. In response, the first bill Pressley introduced was the Fair Compensation for

Low-Wage Contractor Employees Act. The measure aimed to compensate furloughed, laid-off, or reduced-hours government contractors—such as those in food, custodial, and security services. It also directed agencies to restore paid leave if they required their employees to use it during the shutdown.[12] The measure was included in the House-approved appropriations bill but was removed before final passage.[13]

As a member of Financial Services, Pressley took aim at credit reporting practices and introduced the Comprehensive CREDIT Act. The measure consolidated several credit-related bills and would have allowed consumers to fix mistakes on their credit reports more easily, barred medical debt from affecting scores for a year, created a private student loan rehabilitation program, and make credit reports more accessible.[14] "At a time when wages are stagnant but the cost of housing, childcare, and education continue to rise, we should be working to provide our constituents pathways to financial stability and success," she said on the House Floor during the debate of the bill on January 29, 2020.[15] The House passed the bill later that day, 221 to 189.[16] The Senate, however, did not pass it. Pressley reintroduced it in the 117th Congress (2021–2023).[17]

In January 2020, Pressley publicly announced she lives with alopecia, an autoimmune disorder that causes hair loss. Pressley expressed that she had always been intentional about her hair as a public figure; she wore Senegalese twists as a city council member and in her first year in Congress, prompting young girls in her district to wear "My Congresswoman Wears Braids" shirts.[18] Pressley said she announced her condition to spread awareness about the disorder, which affects nearly 7 million people in the United States. In September 2020, Pressley took to the House Floor to speak during Alopecia Areata Awareness Month. "No doubt about it, a bald woman entering a room or entering the floor of the U.S. House of Representatives makes people uncomfortable," she told her colleagues. "Visually, it challenges every antiquated cultural norm about what is professional, what is pretty, what is feminine."[19] During the same speech, she spoke about a measure she co-sponsored with Massachusetts Representative James P. McGovern, to direct Medicare to cover the expense of medically-necessary wigs. The bill was sent to the Energy and Commerce Committee and the Ways and Means Committee to be considered.[20]

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Bobby L. Rush

1946–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1993–

Democrat from Illinois

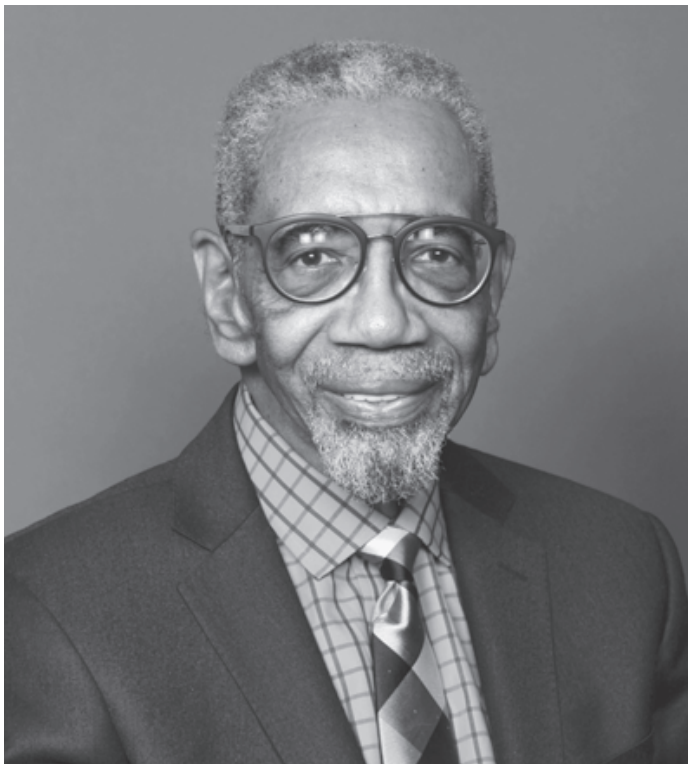

Image courtesy of the Member

A former Black Panther and Chicago alderman, Bobby L. Rush won election to the U.S. House of Representatives in November 1992 and has since become the dean of Illinois's congressional delegation. Rush has devoted his political career to bringing a measure of power to those outside the political system.

Bobby Lee Rush was born on November 23, 1946, near Albany, Georgia, the son of Cora Lee, a beautician and teacher, and Jimmy Lee Rush, a taxi driver. At age seven, he and several siblings moved to Chicago with his divorced mother.[1] In 1963, Rush dropped out of high school to join the U.S. Army. He was stationed in Chicago during the 1960s civil rights movement and joined the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. In 1968, he cofounded the Illinois chapter of the Black Panther Party.[2] When police murdered the chapter's chairman Fred Hampton in a 1969 raid, Rush took his place as leader. In 1974, Rush earned a bachelor's degree from Roosevelt University in Chicago. In 1994, he earned a master's degree in political science from the University of Illinois at Chicago, and four years later he completed a master's in theological studies from McCormick Theological Seminary in Chicago.[3] Rush was married to Carolyn Rush for 36 years and raised seven children. After his wife's death in 2017, Rush married Paulette Holloway.[4]

Rush first ran for office in 1975, when he unsuccessfully sought a seat on the Chicago city council. He also ran for the Illinois state house of representatives in 1978.[5] In 1983, Rush was elected alderman in the city's South Side Second Ward. In 1990, Rush became deputy chairman of the Illinois Democratic Party.[6]

In 1992, Rush challenged Representative Charles A. Hayes, a five-term veteran, in a district that encompassed much of Chicago's predominately African-American South Side and a few majority-White suburbs. Rush defeated Hayes in the primary by three percentage points.[7] In the general election, he defeated his Republican opponent with 83 percent of the vote. Rush has won his 14 re-elections with comfortable margins, though in 2000 he faced a significant primary challenge from then-state senator Barack Obama. Rush made an unsuccessful bid for Chicago mayor in 1999, receiving 28 percent of the vote in the primary against incumbent Richard M. Daley.[8]

In 103rd Congress (1993–1995), Bobby Rush served on the Committee on Banking, Finance, and Urban Affairs; Committee on Government Operations; and Committee

on Science, Space, and Technology. Rush has served on the Committee on Energy and Commerce since his second term in the House. In the 110th and 111th Congresses (2007–2011), he chaired its Subcommittee on Commerce, Trade, and Consumer Protection. In the 114th Congress (2015–2017) Rush emerged as the committee's second-highest ranking Democrat, and since the 116th Congress (2019–2021), he has chaired the committee's Subcommittee on Energy. In the 117th Congress (2021–2023), he also picked up a seat on the Committee on Agriculture.[9]

Rush's seat on the Energy and Commerce Committee has enabled him to advocate on behalf of consumers and improve healthcare services. Following a series of recalls on children's toys in the mid-2000s, Rush authored the Consumer Product Safety Improvement Act, which imposed strict testing requirements for lead and other prohibited chemicals in children's products. It became law in 2008.[10] In 2007, the House passed his bill to promote scientific research on the prevention and treatment of postpartum depression. These provisions were included in the 2010 Affordable Care Act.[11] Rush also sponsored legislation to reduce the prevalence of asthma in urban communities that was caused by cockroach infestations in schools and housing. The measure was signed into law in 2000 as part of the Children's Health Act.[12] In the 117th Congress, the House passed two of his bills designed to improve the resiliency of the country's energy grid.[13]

Throughout his House service, Rush has also addressed many challenges facing his Chicago district. When a hospital in Chicago's Englewood neighborhood faced severe staffing shortages, Rush passed into law a bill issuing temporary work visas to foreign nationals with nursing credentials to work in areas with limited healthcare capacity.[14] In 1999, Rush's son, Huey, was murdered in Chicago during an armed robbery, a tragedy that has strengthened Rush's resolve to address gun violence in his district. Three times he has introduced legislation that would expand the use of background checks and would require all gun owners to obtain a firearm license.[15]

In March 2022, President Joseph R. Biden Jr. signed into law Rush's bill, the Emmett Till Antilynching Act, which designates lynching as a federal hate crime. The legislation was enacted more than 120 years after George Henry White of North Carolina first introduced his antilynching bill in 1900.[16]

In early 2022, Representative Rush announced that he would not seek re-election to the House and would retire at the end of the 117th Congress in January 2023.[17]

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David Scott

1945–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

2003–

Democrat from Georgia

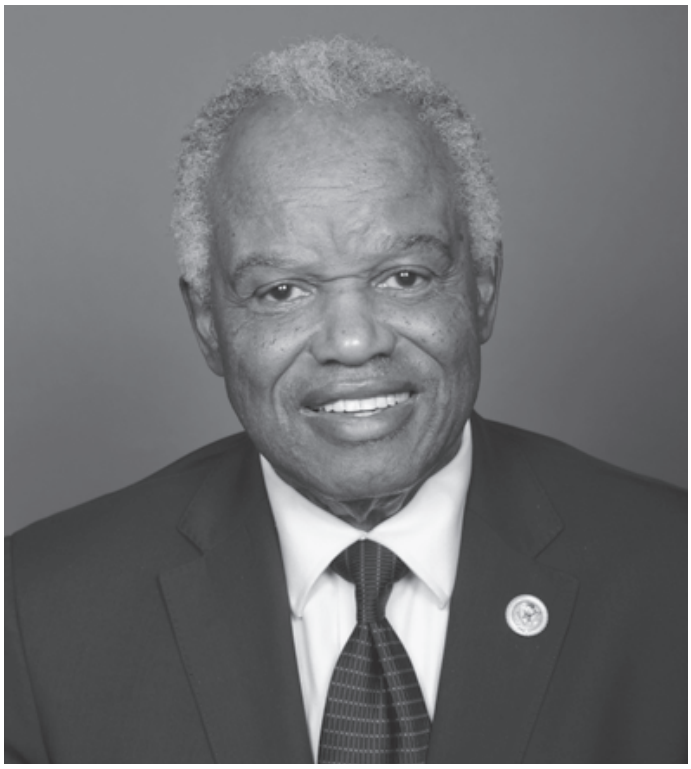

Image courtesy of the Member

A 28-year veteran of the Georgia legislature, David Scott won election to the U.S. House of Representatives in 2002 representing a newly created district in suburban Atlanta. Known for working across the aisle during his lengthy tenure in the state legislature, Scott has worked with Republicans to pass banking and agriculture reforms. "It's all about relationships," Scott said. "Going in, you try to meet people, you try to become friends with them, let them know that you're there to help them."[1]

David Albert Scott was born on June 27, 1945, in Aynor, South Carolina. His father Albert James Scott was a preacher, chauffeur, and businessman, and his mother Mamie Polite Scott was a domestic worker and a hospital worker. As a child he lived in Scranton, Pennsylvania, Scarsdale, New York, and Daytona Beach, Florida.[2] Scott graduated with a bachelor's degree in English and speech from Florida A&M University in 1967. Scott briefly interned at the Labor Department in Washington, DC, before earning a master of business administration degree from Wharton School of Business at the University of Pennsylvania in 1969. Scott married Alfredia Aaron, sister of Hall of Fame professional baseball player Henry "Hank" Aaron. They raised two daughters: Dayna and Marcye.[3]

After earning a business degree, Scott advised then Georgia Governor James Earl "Jimmy" Carter of Georgia on revenue policy. In 1972, he worked on Andrew Young's successful congressional campaign. Two years later, Scott won election to the Georgia house of representatives, where he served through 1982. He then won election to the Georgia senate, where he served from 1983 until 2002—eventually chairing the prestigious rules committee. He authored legislation that gave breast cancer patients and their doctors ultimate control over determining hospitalization and treatment measures to combat the disease as well as a law making it a felony to knowingly sell or provide a handgun to a minor. He further championed state senate bill 32, which became law and allowed local communities to fight landfill developments when landfill expansion disproportionately affected African-American communities. Scott owned and managed an advertising firm from 1979 through 2002.[4]

David Scott entered the race in 2002 for a newly reapportioned U.S. House district that surrounded metro Atlanta, including large parts of Fulton, Gwinnett, and Clayton counties. The district—the result of the spectacular growth of suburban Atlanta in the 1990s—also reached into

eight other surrounding counties, drawing in communities that had seen a rise in the African-American population during the 1990s. The new district was largely middle-class, and was 42 percent White, 41 percent Black, and 10 percent Hispanic. Scott won 54 percent of the vote against a former state Democratic Party chairman and a popular state senator, whom the party backed. With baseball legend Hank Aaron as his campaign chair, Scott organized a billboard campaign that reached thousands of drivers who used the major interstates that crossed the spidery district.[5] He won the general election with 60 percent of the vote. Scott has never received less than 69 percent of the vote in subsequent elections and has been re-elected unopposed several times.[6]

In the 108th Congress (2003–2005), Scott received seats on the Agriculture Committee and the Committee on Financial Services, assignments he has maintained throughout his career. During the 110th and 111th Congresses (2007–2011), Scott also served on the Foreign Affairs Committee. After Democrats regained the House majority in the 116th Congress (2019–2021), Scott was appointed chair of the Agriculture Subcommittee on Commodity Exchanges, Energy, and Credit. In the 117th Congress (2021–2023), he became the chair of the full Agriculture Committee.

From his seat on the Financial Services Committee, Scott strived to balance reducing financial regulations with protecting consumers. In 2008 and 2010, from his seat on the Committee on Financial Services, Scott sponsored legislation intended to streamline the licensing of insurance agents and brokers between states that passed the House.[7] Scott has attempted to combat predatory lending practices and provide financial education. He has also introduced legislation requiring the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau to report on and design strategies to assist historically underserved communities by the financial industry.[8] Finally, Scott authored successful legislation to establish a $10 billion Homeowner Assistance Fund to aid struggling homeowners affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Through the Agriculture Committee, Scott has worked on several policies important to his state and district. Scott authored bipartisan legislation to amend the Cotton Futures Act to help U.S. farmers compete against international cotton producers.[9] Scott played a major role in crafting the 2018 Farm Bill, successfully removing work requirements for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program from the final bill and working alongside Georgia Senator David Alfred Perdue Jr. to secure $80 million for an agriculture scholarship to historically Black colleges and universities.[10] Since becoming chair in 2021, Scott has introduced legislation to address racial prejudice within the United States Department of Agriculture.[11]

Congressman Scott maintains an active presence in his district where he sponsors annual health fairs and jobs fairs to help bring wellness and economic assistance to his constituents.[12]

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Robert C. "Bobby" Scott

1947–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1993–

Democrat from Virginia



Image courtesy of the Member

When he won election in November 1992 to the U.S. House of Representatives, Robert C. "Bobby" Scott became the first African American since John M. Langston left office in 1891 to represent Virginia. Because of his Filipino ancestry on his mother's side of the family, he was also the first American of Filipino ancestry to serve as a U.S. Representative.[1] During his lengthy career, Scott has led efforts to reform the criminal justice system and improve education nationwide.

Robert Cortez Scott was born in Washington, DC, on April 30, 1947, the son of Charles Waldo Scott, a doctor, and Mae Hamlin Scott, a teacher. He was raised in Newport News, Virginia. When Virginia officials resisted court-ordered public school integration in the late 1950s, Scott's parents sent him to Groton School, a college preparatory school in Massachusetts.[2] He graduated with a bachelor's degree in liberal arts from Harvard University (class of 1969), and four years later he earned a law degree at Boston College.[3] While in law school, Scott served in the Massachusetts National Guard and later in the U.S. Army Reserve.

Scott practiced law in Newport News, Virginia. From 1975 to 1980, he served as president of the local branch of the NAACP. In 1977, he won election to the Virginia House of Delegates and served there for five years until his election to the state senate, where he served for another decade. Scott is divorced and has no children.[4]

Scott first attempted to win national office in 1986, when he challenged two-term Republican incumbent Herbert Harvell Bateman for a seat in the U.S. House. The campaign generated wide name recognition for Scott, although he lost the general election by a margin of 56 to 44 percent.[5]

After gaining an extra seat in the 1990 Census and in order to comply with the 1982 amendments to the Voting Rights Act, Virginia created a new majority-Black district that ran from southeast Richmond into portions of Newport News and Norfolk at the mouth of the Chesapeake Bay. Scott, who had represented portions of the new district in the state legislature, ran for the seat. He received two-thirds of the vote in the primary, defeating two Black women—a state legislator and the chair of the state retirement system. In the general election, he prevailed handily over Republican candidate Daniel Jenkins with 79 percent of the vote.[6] Despite multiple court-ordered redistrictings, Scott has never received less than 66 percent of the vote and has run unopposed in multiple elections.[7]

Scott was appointed to three committees in the 103rd Congress (1993–1995): Judiciary; Education and Labor; and Science, Space, and Technology. He left the Science, Space, and Technology Committee after one term. Scott served on the Select Committee on U.S. National Security and Military/Commercial Concerns with the People's Republic of China, formed during the 105th Congress (1997–1999) to investigate China's covert actions within the United States. Scott left Education and Labor in the 108th Congress (2003–2005) to serve on the Budget Committee, but returned the following term. He served on the Budget Committee during the 110th and 111th Congresses (2007–2011) and the 116th and 117th Congresses (2019–2023). He left the Judiciary Committee in the 114th Congress (2015–2017) after becoming ranking member on Education and Labor. When Democrats regained the majority in the 116th Congress (2019–2021), Scott became chair of Education and Labor.

Reflecting his legal background and Judiciary Committee service, Scott has advocated criminal justice reform. He authored legislation providing state sentencing commissions access to national criminal records maintained by the Department of Justice.[8] Scott cosponsored the Death in Custody Reporting Act, signed into law in 2000, which requires states to report the deaths of individuals in the custody of law enforcement or in the process of arrest. Scott reintroduced an expanded version of the bill each Congress following its 2006 expiration and secured passage in 2014.[9] He also played a crucial role in the passage of the Fair Sentencing Act of 2010, which reduced mandatory minimum sentences in many drug cases.[10]

In 2015, Scott was one of the four primary negotiators of the Every Student Succeeds Act, which reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act for the first time in 13 years, replacing the No Child Left Behind Act.[11] As ranking member on the Education Committee, Scott also cosponsored legislation to strengthen protections for underaged criminal offenders.[12] Since becoming chair of the Education and Labor Committee in 2019, Scott has prioritized addressing unequal funding for schools along racial lines. As chair, he has guided two bills that aim to improve access to quality education in low-income communities and discourage discrimination in educational programs. Scott emphasizes that achieving equity in education requires additional federal assistance, "Low-income, at-risk students actually need more funding, not less. Equal isn't enough."[13]

Chairman Scott was also a lead author and negotiator of key provisions in the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 to provide historic federal investments in public K-12 schools and Historically Black College and Universities, as well as to shore up and protect the private retirement plans of millions of Americans.[14]

Notes

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Tim Scott

1965–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

2011–2013

UNITED STATES SENATOR

2013–

Republican from South Carolina



Image courtesy of the Member

Republican Tim Scott was appointed as South Carolina's junior U.S. Senator in 2013 after serving one term in the U.S. House of Representatives. He is the first African American to serve in both chambers of Congress and the first to serve as a Senator from South Carolina.

Tim Scott was born on September 19, 1965, in North Charleston, South Carolina. His mother, Frances Scott, raised him and his brother while working as a nurse's assistant.[1] He attended Presbyterian College in Clinton, South Carolina, from 1983 to 1984 before transferring to Charleston Southern University in North Charleston, South Carolina, where he earned a bachelor's degree in 1988. He won election to the Charleston County council in 1995 and served in that position until 2008, after an unsuccessful campaign for the state senate in 1996. In 2009, he won election to the South Carolina house of representatives.

In 2010, Scott started a run for South Carolina lieutenant governor but decided to enter the race for the open House seat left vacant by U.S. Representative Henry Edward Brown Jr., who chose not to seek re-election.[2] The heavily Republican district stretched along the coast of the state, from Myrtle Beach to Charleston.[3] The majority of its residents were White.[4] Also seeking election was Paul Thurmond, son of U.S. Senator James Strom Thurmond of South Carolina.[5] Scott came in first in the June contest with 32 percent, but because no candidate received more than half the vote the state scheduled a runoff between him and Thurmond, the second-place candidate.[6] This time, Scott won with 68 percent of the vote.[7] In the general election, Scott defeated Democrat Ben Frasier by 36 percent.[8]

In December 2012, shortly after Scott won re-election to the House with 62 percent of the vote, South Carolina Governor Nikki Haley appointed him to the U.S. Senate to fill the seat left open by Senator James W. DeMint, who resigned to become president of a DC-based think tank.[9] The special election to fill the remainder of the term set to expire in 2016 was scheduled for 2014. Scott won both the 2014 special and the 2016 general election with more than 60 percent of the vote.[10]

In the 113th Congress (2013–2015), Scott sat on the following committees: Commerce, Science, and Transportation; Energy and Natural Resources; Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions; Small Business and Entrepreneurship; and the Special Committee on Aging. In the 114th Congress (2015–2017), he replaced the first two assignments with spots on the Committee on

Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs, and the Committee on Finance. He also became the chair of Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs' Subcommittee on Housing, Transportation, and Community Development. In the 115th Congress (2017–2019), he joined the Committee on Armed Services, and he also chaired Finance's Subcommittee on Fiscal Responsibility and Economic Growth. In the 116th Congress (2019–2021), he left Armed Services and replaced both chairmanships with new ones on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs' Subcommittee on Financial Institutions and Consumer Protection, and Finance's Subcommittee on Energy, Natural Resources, and Infrastructure. In the Democratic controlled 117th Congress (2021–2023), he remained on the same committees.

In 2015, after a White police officer shot and killed an unarmed Black man named Walter Scott (no relation) in North Charleston, Scott came out in support of police officer body cameras. He requested a Senate hearing on the subject and introduced the Safer Officers and Safer Citizens Act, which offered grants from the Department of Justice to police departments for body cameras.[11] In 2020, after the police killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis, Minnesota, sparked worldwide protests, Scott re-introduced the Walter Scott Notification Act, which he had introduced twice previously. The measure restricted federal grants to police departments that failed to report data on fatal shootings.[12] He introduced the JUSTICE Act the same year, which aimed to incentivize law enforcement branches to complete de-escalation trainings, cease the use of chokeholds, and purchase body-worn cameras.[13] Neither bill passed the Senate.

Scott has successfully guided some of his measures into law, including the HBCU PARTNERS Act, which directs certain federal grant programs to present annual plans to Congress for increasing participation from historically Black colleges. Scott was also a principal negotiator in the 2017 tax reform package, which included his signature Opportunity Zone program that provides tax incentives for development in financially disadvantaged areas.[14]

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Terri A. Sewell

1965–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

2011–

Democrat from Alabama



Image courtesy of the Member

In 2010, Terri A. Sewell became the first African-American woman elected to the U.S. House of Representatives from Alabama and one of the first women from Alabama ever elected to Congress. A native of Selma, Alabama, and born two months before Bloody Sunday—the day when Alabama state troopers violently assaulted peaceful voting rights protesters in Selma in 1965—Sewell has carried the legacy of the civil rights movement with her to Congress, passing legislation to honor key figures in the movement and sponsoring a bill to restore the full protections of the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

Terri Sewell was born on January 1, 1965, in Huntsville, Alabama. Her father, Andrew, was a coach, and her mother, Nancy, was a librarian and the first Black woman elected to the Selma city council. Sewell graduated from Selma High School as its first Black valedictorian in 1982 and earned a bachelor's degree with honors from Princeton University in 1986. She graduated from Oxford University in Oxford, England, with a master's degree in 1988, and earned a law degree from Harvard Law School in 1992. Sewell started her law career clerking for a U.S. District Court judge in Birmingham, Alabama, later moved to New York City to practice law, and eventually returned to Alabama to become partner at a Birmingham law firm.[1]

In 2009, Sewell ran for the open congressional seat to represent Alabama's Seventh Congressional District after Democratic incumbent Artur Davis ran for governor.[2] The district included parts of Montgomery and Tuscaloosa and all of Birmingham and Selma. In the primary, Sewell faced several established candidates—including state representative Earl Hilliard Jr., the son of a former U.S. Representative.[3] She came in first with 37 percent of the vote in the June primary, but because no candidate received more than half the vote, the state scheduled a runoff.[4] She defeated Jefferson County commissioner Shelia Smoot in the runoff with 55 percent of the vote. Sewell won the general election against Republican Don Chamberlain, with 72 percent of the vote.[5] Along with her House colleague Martha Roby, Sewell became one of the first women elected from Alabama.[6] In her 2012 re-election, Sewell won with 76 percent of vote. She did not face a Republican challenger in four other re-elections.[7]

When Sewell took her seat in the 112th Congress (2011–2013), she was elected freshman class president and assigned to the Agriculture Committee and the Science, Space, and Technology Committee. She left those panels in the 113th Congress (2013–2015) for seats on the Financial

Services Committee and the Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence. In 2013, then Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi of California named Sewell to the Democratic Steering and Policy Committee.[8] Sewell continued to sit on the Intelligence Committee but left Financial Services in the 115th Congress (2017–2019) for a seat on the prestigious Ways and Means Committee. In the 116th Congress (2019–2021), Sewell served as vice chair of Ways and Means and chaired the Intelligence Committee's Subcommittee on Defense Intelligence and Warfighter Support. She left the Intelligence Committee at the start of the 117th Congress (2021–2023). Beginning in the 113th Congress, Sewell has served as a Chief Deputy Whip for House Democrats.[9]

Sewell used her position on the powerful Ways and Means Committee to pass key tax legislation, including the expansion and extension of the New Markets Tax Credit, to incentivize investment in rural and underserved communities.[10] In 2019, she introduced the RURAL Act, the HEARTS and Rural Relief Act, and the Rural Jobs Act, all of which target improvements for infrastructure, health care services, and local economies in rural areas.[11] In 2019, Sewell successfully extended the Caribbean Basin Initiative trade program through the Extension of the Caribbean Basin Economic Recovery Act.[12] The bill provided funding through fiscal year 2030 and was signed into law in October 2020.[13]

Sewell's district was the location of some of the country's most pivotal civil rights protests in the 1960s. In 2013, Sewell passed legislation to posthumously award the Congressional Gold Medal to four African-American girls killed in the 1963 bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church.[14] In 2015, Sewell passed legislation to award the Congressional Gold Medal to individuals who took part in the Selma to Montgomery March in 1965.[15] The House also passed Sewell's resolution to collect oral histories of Members who participated in the civil rights movement.[16]

Since the 113th Congress, Sewell has introduced the Voting Rights Advancement Act, that revised the procedures for federal oversight of elections following the Supreme Court's 2013 decision *Shelby County v. Holder*, which declared parts of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 unconstitutional. Sewell successfully shepherded the bill through the House in 2019 and 2021.[17]

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Bennie G. Thompson

1948–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1993–

Democrat from Mississippi

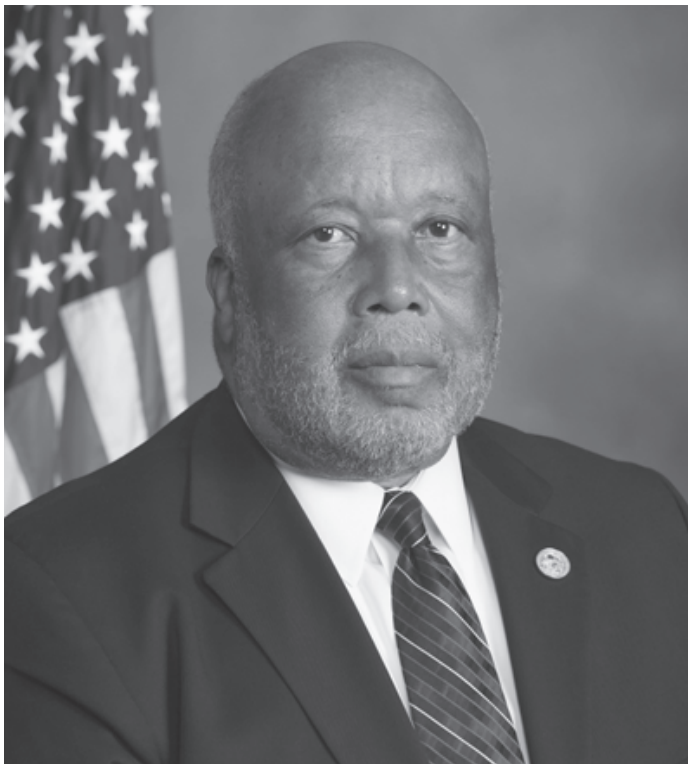

Image courtesy of the Member

A veteran of Mississippi politics for nearly 50 years, Bennie G. Thompson has served in the U.S. House of Representatives since winning a special election in 1993. As chair of the Homeland Security Committee, he has been at the forefront of national emergencies throughout his congressional career, including the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, Hurricane Katrina, and the coronavirus pandemic.

Bennie Thompson was born in Bolton, Mississippi, on January 28, 1948, to Will, an auto mechanic, and Annie Laura Thompson, a teacher.[1] He grew up in an all-Black neighborhood and attended segregated schools.[2] In 1968, he graduated with a bachelor's degree from Tougaloo College in Tougaloo, Mississippi. In college, he was a member of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and volunteered on the congressional campaign of civil rights activist Fannie Lou Hamer.[3] He earned a master's degree from Jackson State University in Jackson, Mississippi, in 1972. He married London Johnson, a teacher, and they raised one daughter: BendaLonne.[4]

In 1969, Thompson won election to the board of aldermen in Bolton, Mississippi, while working as a teacher. He served for four years, but his measures to improve the Black district were repeatedly blocked by the White mayor. In 1973, he won election as mayor of Bolton and served until 1979. In 1980, Thompson was elected to the Hinds County board of supervisors and remained on the board for 13 years.[5]

In 1993, Thompson entered the race for a congressional seat after four-term Democratic Representative Mike Espy of Mississippi resigned to become Secretary of Agriculture in the President William J. Clinton administration.[6] The district encompassed west-central Mississippi and included the state capital Jackson and a nearly 230-mile stretch of agricultural communities along the Mississippi Delta—some of which were the poorest counties in the country. A majority of the voting-age population was Black.[7] His two principal Democratic contenders were Henry Espy, the brother of Congressman Espy, and James Meredith, a 1960s civil rights activist and the first African American to attend the University of Mississippi.[8] In the all-party open primary in March 1993, GOP candidate Hayes Dent won with a 34 percent plurality. Thompson was second with 28 percent.[9] In accordance with state election law, the top two finishers squared off in another election, scheduled for April. Thompson prevailed against Dent, with a 55 percent

majority.[10] In his 14 re-election bids, Thompson won with comfortable margins between 54 and 72 percent.[11]

Thompson was sworn-in to the House on April 13, 1993, several months after the start of the 103rd Congress (1993–1995) and received assignments on three committees: Agriculture; Small Business; and Merchant Marine and Fisheries. He left the Small Business Committee in the 104th Congress (1995–1997), and Merchant Marine and Fisheries was disbanded in that same Congress. Thompson left the Agriculture Committee in the 108th Congress (2003–2005). In the 104th Congress, Thompson joined the Budget Committee, and remained there until the 107th Congress (2001–2003). In 2004, he won a seat on the newly created Select Committee on Homeland Security.[12] In the 110th Congress (2007–2009), Thompson became the first Democratic chair of the committee and served as chair in the following Congress. In the 116th and 117th Congresses (2019–2023), Thompson chaired the committee again. In 2021, Thompson became chair of the Select Committee to Investigate the January 6th Attack on the United States Capitol.

As ranking member of the Homeland Security Committee, Thompson was in a key position to serve his district after Hurricane Katrina devastated the Gulf Coast in August 2005. Thompson was critical of the lack of post-hurricane contracts that the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) awarded to Mississippi businesses. In response, he drafted legislation to create a database of small and minority owned businesses for FEMA to contact for future disaster-related contracts.[13] A month later, he introduced the Small Business Disaster Relief and Recovery Participation Act that required a portion of government funds be dedicated to local, small, and minority businesses in emergencies.[14] Neither bill was reported out of committee. In the district, Thompson set up job fairs and seminars for his constituents to learn how to apply for government contracts or get in touch with companies that offered recovery-related jobs.[15]

As chair of the Homeland Security Committee in 2007, Thompson introduced the Implementing Recommendations of the 9/11 Commission Act, which sought to enact some of the 41 recommendations the independent National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States (known as the 9/11 Commission) made. Signed into law in August 2007, the bill designated federal funds to high-risk areas and first responders, required the scanning of foreign container ships for nuclear weapons, and included a lawsuit immunity provision for citizens reporting suspected terrorist activity.[16]

Several other of Thompson's homeland security bills became law, including the Aviation Security Stakeholder Participation Act of 2014, which required the Aviation Security Advisory Committee to consult stakeholders—including aircraft manufactures, labor organizations, and passenger groups—when aviation security changes occur.[17]

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Lauren Underwood

1986–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

2019–

Democrat from Illinois



Image courtesy of the Member

In November 2018, Lauren Underwood won election as a Democrat to the U.S. House of Representatives from Illinois's Fourteenth Congressional District. Underwood became the youngest Black woman elected to Congress when she defeated a Republican incumbent. As a registered nurse, she has prioritized issues of national health care and has focused specifically on veterans' health, shepherding a bill to prevent veteran suicide into law in her first term.

Lauren Underwood was born on October 4, 1986, in Mayfield Heights, Ohio. In 2004, she graduated from Neuqua Valley High School in Naperville, Illinois. While attending the University of Michigan, she interned for then Senator Barack Obama in 2006.[1] In 2008, she graduated with a bachelor's degree in nursing. She earned advanced degrees in nursing and public health from Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland, in 2009. From 2014 to 2016, Underwood worked as a special assistant at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) under President Obama. From 2016 to 2017, she was a senior advisor at HHS. From 2013 to 2017, she taught virtual classes at Georgetown University in Washington, DC, as an adjunct instructor. Afterwards, she worked for a healthcare company in Chicago from 2017 to 2018.[2]

Underwood announced she would run in the 2018 Democratic primary in the Fourteenth District in August 2017.[3] The district incorporated Chicago suburbs and farms from the Wisconsin border to Kendall County. Its population was 87 percent White.[4] Underwood faced six Democrats in the March primary but won by a wide margin, earning 57 percent of the vote.[5] She then defeated Republican incumbent Representative Randy Hultgren in the November general election with 52.5 percent of the vote. In her 2020 re-election, Underwood won with 50.6 percent of the vote but her Republican challenger, former state senator Jim Oberweis, contested the election.[6] In May 2021, the Committee on House Administration dismissed the challenge.[7]

In the 116th Congress (2019–2021), Underwood received assignments on the Education and Labor Committee, Homeland Security Committee, and Veterans' Affairs Committee. In September 2020, Underwood was named chair of Homeland Security's Cybersecurity, Infrastructure Protection, and Innovation Subcommittee for the remainder of the 116th Congress.[8] In the 117th Congress (2021–2023), she remained on Veterans' Affairs but left her other two assignments as required to serve on the Appropriations Committee.

Concerned with mental health issues and high rates of suicide among veterans, Underwood introduced the Veterans' Care Quality Transparency Act in April 2019. The bill directed the Government Accountability Office to examine partnerships between the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and mental health organizations that provide services to former service members. Staffing, data security protocols, results tracking, and outreach to women and minorities were among the aspects to be studied.[9] President Donald J. Trump signed the bill into law on October 20, 2020.[10] In 2021, Underwood's measure to expand veteran scholarships in science, technology, engineering, and math fields of study passed as part of the Veterans Health Care and Benefits Improvement Act.[11]

In December 2019, Underwood introduced the Lower Insulin Costs Now Act, citing the high price of insulin and other prescriptions. The bill extended the timeline for applications to be submitted to the Food and Drug Administration to develop generic biologic products—including insulin. The bill was enacted as part of the 2020 appropriations law.[12]

As a member of the Homeland Security Committee, Underwood visited detention centers along the U.S.–Mexico border in 2019 and took issue with the quality of medical care for the migrants. In response, she introduced the U.S. Border Patrol Medical Screening Standards Act, which directed the Department of Homeland Security to utilize an electronic health care system to create health records for each detained individual that could be sent to other centers, especially for children. The House passed the bill in September 2019 by a vote of 230 to 184. One portion of that bill, to provide an electronic health record for U.S. Customs and Border Protection, was enacted as part of an appropriations bill for 2020.[13]

In 2019, Underwood and North Carolina Representative Alma S. Adams founded the Black Maternal Health Caucus.[14] In that Congress and the following one, Underwood introduced the Protecting Moms Who Served Act. Her measure directed funds to maternity care programs, which offer trainings and support to non-Veterans Affairs care providers. President Joseph R. Biden Jr. signed the bill into law on November 30, 2021.[15] In the 116th and 117th Congresses, Underwood introduced the Black Maternal Health Momnibus Act, which packaged several Black maternal health bills into one bill. In May 2021, Underwood testified before the House Oversight Committee during a hearing on Black maternal health. "At the heart of these investments," Underwood said, "is the principle that in America, every family has the right to thrive, a principle that begins with a safe and healthy pregnancy and birth."[16] The 2021 bill was referred to several committees for consideration.[17]

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Marc A. Veasey

1971–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

2013–

Democrat from Texas



Image courtesy of the Member

In November 2012, Marc A. Veasey won election to the U.S. House of Representatives in a newly created Texas district. As a member of the Armed Services Committee, he has played an active role in shaping annual defense spending bills.

Marc Veasey was born on January 3, 1971, in Fort Worth, Texas. He graduated from Arlington Heights High School in Fort Worth in 1990. In 1995, he earned a bachelor's degree from Texas Wesleyan University in Fort Worth. He worked in journalism and real estate and was also an aide to Texas U.S. Representative Jonas Martin Frost for six years.[1] In 2004, he won election to the Texas state house of representatives. As a state legislator, he supported reduced electricity rates for low-income residents, advocated for fairer mineral lease negotiations in neighborhoods of color, and fought against state voter ID laws.[2] Veasey and his wife, Tonya, have one son: Adam.[3]

As a result of the 2010 Census, Texas added four congressional districts in 2012. The newly drawn Thirty-Third District encompassed parts of Fort Worth and Dallas. In the district, Latinos and African Americans made up a majority of the voters.[4] In the May primary, Veasey was the top vote-getter with 37 percent of the vote, and former state representative Domingo Garcia finished second with 25 percent.[5] Because no candidate received a majority, the state scheduled a runoff between Veasey and Garcia. Veasey mobilized Black voters and received endorsements from the area's two major newspapers.[6] After winning the runoff with 57 percent of the vote, he defeated Republican Chuck Bradley with 76 percent in the general election.[7] Veasey has won his four re-elections with more than 67 percent each time.[8]

In the 113th (2013–2015) Congress, Veasey received assignments to the Armed Services Committee and the Science, Space, and Technology Committee. In the 116th Congress (2019–2021), he left his previous assignments for spots on the Energy and Commerce Committee and the Small Business Committee. In the 117th Congress (2021–2023), he left Small Business and returned to Armed Services.

As a member of Armed Services, Veasey was well-positioned to shape the panel's annual funding bill known as the National Defense Authorization Act. In 2020, the bill included a provision Veasey first introduced as the Capturing All Small Businesses Act. The measure allowed growing small businesses to remain categorized as such for longer, extending access to financial benefits.[9] The House passed Veasey's bill in January 2020 and it was included in the final defense bill, which overcame a presidential veto on

January 1, 2021.[10] Another of Veasey's bills, the Emergency Broadband Connections Act, became law as part of the coronavirus relief bill Congress passed in December 2020.[11] It provided reimbursements to laid-off and furloughed workers for their internet service fees, allowing them to continue their schooling, manage their health, and look for jobs online.[12]

Recognizing the dangers of "notarios publicos"—or people posing as professional immigration consultants—in his district, Veasey introduced the Notario Victim Relief Act in the 116th Congress, as he had done during the three previous Congresses.[13] The bill would remove the time limit an immigrant has to re-file documents after experiencing fraudulent services. In conjunction with the bill, Veasey hosted a workshop in Fort Worth to warn his constituents of the predatory practice.[14]

Building off his work in the state legislature, Veasey founded and co-chaired the Voting Rights Caucus in 2016 with his congressional colleagues. As the lead plaintiff in a 2011 case against Texas's strict voting laws, he sought to end voter ID requirements.[15] "They must be done away with immediately so that everyone can have full access to the ballot box," Veasey said while introducing the caucus.[16] Later in 2016, he introduced the Poll Tax Prohibition Act, which would end election centers' requirement of providing documentation with an associated cost in order to vote. The measure did not come to the floor for a vote.[17]

In 2014, Veasey started visiting and working in businesses across his district as part of his "Marc Means Business" initiative. The effort led Veasey to drive for a ride-hailing app, work in a cafe, and stock grocery store shelves.[18] In 2016, Veasey co-founded the Blue Collar Caucus with Pennsylvania Representative Brendan Francis Boyle after that year's presidential election. The group aimed to connect the Democratic Party with working-class voters.[19]

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Maxine Waters

1938–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

1991–

Democrat from California



Image courtesy of the Member

Since 1991, Maxine Waters has represented a Southern California district in the U.S. House of Representatives. During her public service career, including time in California's state assembly, Waters has prioritized women, children, people of color, and the poor. At the start of the 116th Congress (2019–2021), Waters became the first woman and first African American to chair the Financial Services Committee.

Maxine Waters was born in St. Louis, Missouri, on August 15, 1938, the fifth of 13 children. Early in her career, Waters worked as an assistant teacher and volunteer coordinator for a Head Start program.[1] In 1977, she married Sidney Williams, a former NFL player and U.S. Ambassador to the Commonwealth of the Bahamas.[2] She is the mother of two children: Edward and Karen.

Maxine Waters won a seat in the California state assembly in 1976. Before becoming Democratic caucus chair in 1984, she served as the assembly's majority whip.[3] In the state assembly, she authored landmark legislation on affirmative action, child abuse prevention, police reform and more. In addition, Waters fought for the passage of a bill that forced California to divest $12 billion in state pension funds tied to the apartheid regime in South Africa.[4] After anti-apartheid leader Nelson Mandela was released from prison in South Africa, Waters chaired a committee that brought over 90,000 people together in the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum to welcome him into the United States.

When Augustus F. "Gus" Hawkins announced his retirement from the House in January 1990, he asked Waters to enter the race.[5] In the general election she won handily, capturing 79 percent of the vote. Waters captured similar percentages in her 15 re-elections.[6]

From the 102nd Congress through the 104th Congress (1991–1997), Waters served on the Veterans' Affairs Committee. During the 103rd (1993–1995) and 104th (1995–1997) Congresses she also served on the Small Business Committee. From 1996 to 2013, she served on the Judiciary Committee, where she fought to end mandatory minimum sentences for nonviolent drug users and led national public policy discussions to eliminate the crack cocaine sentencing disparities.[7]

Waters has served on the Financial Services Committee since 1991. In the 110th and 111th Congresses (2007–2011), she chaired Financial Services's Housing and Community Opportunity Subcommittee. In the 116th and 117th Congresses (2019–2023), Waters has chaired the full

Financial Services Committee. In 2020, Waters joined the Select Oversight Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis.

Waters chaired the Congressional Black Caucus in the 105th Congress (1997–1999) and led the development of the Minority AIDS Initiative.[8] In addition, Waters co-chaired the bipartisan Congressional Task Force on Alzheimer's Disease.[9] Early in her career, Waters was chosen to serve on the Democratic Steering and Policy Committee in the House, which develops the party's agenda.[10]

From her seat on the Financial Services Committee, Waters advocated for reforms following the Great Recession and financial crisis of the late 2000s, including a measure in the Housing and Economic Recovery Act that awarded grants to nonprofits and local municipalities to redevelop vacant properties.[11] In 2010, Waters was a member of the conference committee for the Dodd–Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act.[12] Through her efforts, the law also established the Office of Minority and Women Inclusion.[13]

In Waters's first Congress as chair of the Financial Services Committee, the panel took several steps to address the nation's financial and housing emergencies caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. As part of the COVID-19 relief bill, Waters obtained $25 billion for rental assistance. Furthermore, she secured $77 billion in the American Rescue Plan, including an additional $21.6 billion for rental assistance for struggling families. Waters is also a champion for Minority Depository Institutions (MDIs) and Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs) and successfully secured $12 billion in capital investments and grants to support these institutions in serving disadvantaged communities. Waters also helped pass $60 billion for CDFIs, MDIs, and other community financial institutions to deliver Paycheck Protection Program loans to small and minority-owned businesses that missed out of the first round when megabanks prioritized wealthier clients. Additionally, one of Waters' first actions as chair was creating the Diversity and Inclusion Subcommittee to focus on diversity in the financial industry. Waters also established the first ever task forces on Artificial Intelligence and Financial Technology to examine financial technologies such as cryptocurrency.[14]

Waters has been an advocate for peace and justice in developing countries. From 1999 to 2000, she was a leader of congressional efforts to cancel poor country debts, offering an amendment that tripled funding for poor country debt cancellation. In response to the earthquake that devastated Haiti in 2010, Waters secured the passage of legislation that canceled all debt owed by Haiti to the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.[15] In honor of South African President Nelson Mandela's 95th birthday, she organized a celebration of his life and legacy in the Emancipation Hall of the United States Capitol Visitor Center. She also cofounded the Out of Iraq Caucus in 2005 and co-chaired the Congressional Caribbean Caucus.[16]

Waters is one of the two longest-serving African-American women in House history.

Notes

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Bonnie Watson Coleman

1945–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

2015–

Democrat from New Jersey



Image courtesy of the Member

The daughter of a prominent assemblyman, Bonnie Watson Coleman grew up within New Jersey's dynamic political environment. Watson Coleman made history by becoming the first African-American woman to serve as majority leader of the state assembly, and again when, in 2014, she won election to the U.S. House of Representatives, becoming the first African-American woman elected to Congress from New Jersey.

Bonnie Watson Coleman was born Bonnie Watson in Camden, New Jersey, on February 6, 1945, to Marie Watson and John S. Watson. Her father served in the New Jersey state assembly for six terms. Watson Coleman and her three brothers grew up in Ewing Township, where she attended local schools and graduated from Ewing High School. She attended Rutgers University, and then earned a bachelor's degree from Thomas Edison State College in 1985.[1] In 1995, Bonnie Watson married William E. Coleman Jr., a minister and former New York City detective; the couple has three children from their previous marriages and several grandchildren.[2]

Watson Coleman's public service career began in 1966 when she started working in the civil rights division of New Jersey's department of law and public safety. She then served as director of the office of civil rights, contract compliance, and affirmative action in the state department of transportation from 1974 to 1980. In 1980, she moved to the state department of community affairs and eventually became its assistant commissioner.[3] In 1997, Watson Coleman won election to the state assembly. She served in the state capital, Trenton, for 16 years, including as the assembly's majority leader from 2006 to 2009.[4] Watson Coleman became the first Black woman to lead the state party when she was elected chair of New Jersey's Democratic state committee in 2002.[5]

When eight-term Democratic incumbent Rush Holt decided to retire from the U.S. House in 2014, Watson Coleman ran for the open seat. Situated in the middle of the state, the majority-White district included Trenton and Princeton.[6] With large workforces that support Princeton and Rutgers Universities, the district also had an established health care sector anchored by local hospitals. Watson Coleman won the Democratic primary with 36 percent of the vote against four opponents.[7] She won the general election with 61 percent of the vote. She won re-election with 62 percent of the vote in 2016, 68 percent of the vote in 2018, and 66 percent of the vote in 2020.[8]

In the 114th and 115th Congresses (2015–2019), Watson Coleman had seats on the Committee on Homeland Security and the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform. In the 116th Congress (2019–2021), Watson Coleman remained on Homeland Security, but dropped Oversight for a seat on the prestigious Appropriations Committee. She remained on both panels in the 117th Congress (2021–2023), and chaired Homeland Security's Subcommittee on Transportation and Maritime Security.

In the House, Watson Coleman's legislative interests have included criminal justice reform and health care. Her bill, the End For-Profit Prisons Act, called on the Justice Department to phase out existing contracts with private prison companies and to prevent the Bureau of Prisons from entering into or maintaining similar contracts. It also required federal officials to create guidelines for reintegrating recently released prisoners into society.[9] One of her health care-related bills, the Healthy MOM Act, would require health insurers, health insurance exchanges, and group health plans to offer a special enrollment period for women whenever a pregnancy is reported.[10] Another, the Pursuing Equity in Mental Health Act, which Watson Coleman introduced in the 116th and 117th Congresses, set out to establish grants for research into the mental health needs of people of color.[11] The bill passed the House in both Congresses.

On the Homeland Security Committee, Watson Coleman focused on preparedness and strategy documentation. Her bill, the Quadrennial Homeland Security Act, which aimed to revise the Department of Homeland Security's long-term strategy document, passed the House four times.[12] As chair of the Transportation and Maritime Security Subcommittee, she held a number of hearings regarding the Transportation Security Administration (TSA). In March 2021, she introduced the Transportation and Security Preparedness Act. The bill passed the House in July and, if enacted into law, will direct the TSA to create a preparedness strategy regarding disease outbreaks.[13]

Notes

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Frederica S. Wilson

1942–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

2011–

Democrat from Florida



Image courtesy of the Member

In 2010, Frederica S. Wilson was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives after 12 years in the Florida legislature. Congresswoman Wilson has drawn from her experience as an educator and school principal to become an outspoken champion for Black families, marginalized communities, workers, students, and immigrants—winning her broad support in her district.

Frederica Smith Wilson was born November 5, 1942, in Miami, Florida. She graduated from Miami Northwestern Senior High in 1959 and attended Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee, graduating with a bachelor's degree in childhood education in 1963. She earned her master's degree in elementary education from the University of Miami in 1972 and taught elementary school before leaving the classroom to raise three children: Nicole, LaKesha, and Paul. She returned to work as a school principal before running for the Miami-Dade County school board in 1992.[1] As an educator at Skyway Elementary School, it became apparent to her that young boys were disproportionately being incarcerated, entering the drug trade, or dropping out of school leading to the founding of a program to intervene in the lives of at-risk youth: The 500 Role Models of Excellence Project.

In 1998, Wilson was elected to the state house, and, in 2002, to the state senate.[2] While in the Florida legislature, Wilson fought to successfully remove the Confederate flag from the Florida state capitol. She also fought to mandate HIV/AIDS testing for newly released prisoners, opposed standardized testing, pushed to ban the term "illegal alien" in state records, and partnered with the then governor to restore voting rights for returning citizens.[3]

In 2010, Wilson won in a crowded primary for an open seat in the U.S. House and went on to win an overwhelming majority of the vote in the general election.[4] Her constituency spans parts of Miami-Dade and Broward counties and includes a large immigrant population, particularly from Haiti. The district is overwhelmingly working-class, Black, and Latino.[5] In five re-election bids Wilson ran unopposed three times and won with large margins in 2014 and 2020.[6]

During her first term, Wilson served on the Foreign Affairs and the Science, Space, and Technology committees, and joined the Congressional Black Caucus. In the 113th Congress (2013–2015), she left Foreign Affairs and joined the Committee on Education and the Workforce. In the 115th Congress (2017–2019), Wilson left Science, Space,

and Technology to join Transportation and Infrastructure. For the 116th Congress (2019–2021), Wilson was named chair of the Education Committee's Health, Employment, Labor, and Pensions Subcommittee. In the 117th Congress (2021–2023), she chaired the Education Committee's Subcommittee on Higher Education and Workforce Investment.

On Capitol Hill, Wilson has criticized income inequality and called for a more active federal role in anti-poverty efforts, introducing bills to expand access to education and training, increase the minimum wage, and fund infrastructure projects to create jobs. She reintroduced the American Jobs Act in 2013, which aimed to reform unemployment insurance, allocate tax credits for low- and middle-income workers, and establish infrastructure grants.[7]

Wilson has also fought against injustice at home and abroad. In 2012, she was a vocal advocate for Trayvon Martin, an African-American teenager and constituent of hers who was shot and killed in an act of racism. Wilson spoke on the House Floor to denounce racial profiling and violence against Black youth.[8] She also focused attention on the 2014 kidnapping of 276 Nigerian girls by Boko Haram, a militant Islamist group from West Africa, and wrote legislation calling for a five-year plan to combat Boko Haram, which the Senate passed and President Barack Obama signed into law in December 2016.[9]

Wilson has been an advocate for the Haitian community since the 1980s.[10] She has traveled to Haiti and raised awareness for issues such as women's rights and the hardships faced by the nation following the 2010 earthquake.[11] Wilson has also campaigned for a family reunification program for Haitian immigrants and the rights of migrants and refugees in the United States.[12] She has also fought for the extension of the Temporary Protected Status designation for Haitian nationals and introduced the Haitian Deportation Relief Act, which sought to suspend the removal of Haitian migrants from the United States during the COVID-19 pandemic.[13]

Congresswoman Wilson has long demonstrated a willingness to find support across the aisle to improve the conditions of her community and its residents. In 2020, she worked with Senator Marco Rubio and the Donald J. Trump administration to establish the Commission on the Social Status of Black Men and Boys, which will study disparities in education, criminal justice, health, employment, fatherhood, and violence and produce an annual report with recommendations to improve the social conditions and reduce racial disparities. The bipartisan and bicameral Caucus on the Social Status of Black Men and Boys, which Congresswoman Wilson founded and co-chairs, will craft legislation to implement these recommendations and meaningfully improve experiences and pathways available to young Black men.

Notes

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Image courtesy of the Member

Jamaal Bowman

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE
Democrat from New York

Congressional Committees: Education and Labor; Science, Space, and Technology

Born: April 1, 1976, Manhattan, New York

Family: Spouse: Melissa Oppenheimer; three children

Education: Graduated from Sayreville War Memorial High School, Sayreville, New Jersey; attended Potomac State Junior College, West Virginia University, Keyser, West Virginia; BA, University of New Haven, West Haven, Connecticut, 1999; MA, Mercy College, Dobbs Ferry, New York, 2006; Ed.D., Manhattanville College, Harrison, New York, 2019

Military: N/A

Prior Elected Office: N/A

Professional Career: Teacher; principal

Publications: N/A



Image courtesy of the Member

Shontel M. Brown

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE
Democrat from Ohio

Congressional Committees: Agriculture; Oversight and Government Reform

Born: June 24, 1975, Cleveland, Ohio

Family: Unmarried

Education: Graduated from John Adams High School, Cleveland, Ohio; A.B., Cuyahoga Community College, Cleveland, Ohio; B.S., Wilberforce University, Wilberforce, Ohio

Military: N/A

Prior Elected Office: Member of the Warrensville Heights, Ohio, city council, 2012–2015; member of the Cuyahoga County, Ohio, council, 2015–2021; chair, Cuyahoga County, Ohio, Democratic Party, 2017–present

Professional Career: Marketing professional; business owner

Publications: N/A



Image courtesy of the Member

Cori Bush

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE
Democrat from Missouri

Congressional Committees: Judiciary; Oversight and Reform

Born: July 21, 1976, St. Louis, Missouri

Family: two children

Education: Graduated from Cardinal Ritter College Prep High School, St. Louis, Missouri, 1994; attended Harris-Stowe State University, St. Louis, Missouri, 1995–1996; RN Diploma, Lutheran School of Nursing, St. Louis, Missouri, 2008

Military: N/A

Prior Elected Office: N/A

Professional Career: Early childhood teacher and administrator; nurse; pastor; community organizer

Publications: N/A



Image courtesy of the Member

Troy A. Carter

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE
Democrat from Louisiana

Congressional Committees: Small Business; Transportation and Infrastructure

Born: October 26, 1963, New Orleans, Louisiana

Family: Spouse: Andreé Navarro-Carter; two sons

Education: Graduated from O. Perry Walker High School, New Orleans, Louisiana; BA, Xavier University, New Orleans, Louisiana, 1986

Military: N/A

Prior Elected Office: Member of the Louisiana state house of representatives, 1992–1994; member of the New Orleans, Louisiana, city council, 1994–2002; member of the Louisiana state senate, 2016–2021

Professional Career: Entrepreneur; business consultant

Publications: N/A



Image courtesy of the Member

Sheila Cherfilus-McCormick

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

Democrat from Florida

Congressional Committees: Education and Labor; Veterans' Affairs

Born: January 25, 1979, Brooklyn, New York

Family: Spouse: Corlie McCormick; two children

Education: Graduated from Chaminade-Madonna College Preparatory, Hollywood, Florida, 1997; B.A., Howard University, Washington DC, 2001; attended University of Maryland Global Campus, Adelphi, Maryland, 2005–2007; J.D., St. Thomas University College of Law, Miami Gardens, Florida, 2010

Military: N/A

Prior Elected Office: N/A

Professional Career: Health care executive

Publications: N/A



Image courtesy of the Member

Byron Donalds

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

Republican from Florida

Congressional Committees: Budget; Oversight and Reform; Small Business; Select Committee on Economic Disparity and Fairness in Growth

Born: October 28, 1978, Brooklyn, New York

Family: Spouse: Erika Donalds; three children

Education: Graduated from Nazareth Regional High School, Brooklyn, New York, 1996; attended Florida Agricultural & Mechanical University, Tallahassee, Florida, 1996–1999; BA, Florida State University, Tallahassee, Florida, 2002

Military: N/A

Prior Elected Office: Member of the Florida state house of representatives, 2016–2020

Professional Career: Financial advisor

Publications: N/A



Image courtesy of the Member

Mondaire Jones

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

Democrat from New York

Congressional Committees: Education and Labor; Ethics; Judiciary

Born: May 18, 1987, Nyack, New York

Family: Unmarried

Education: Graduated from Spring Valley High School, Spring Valley, New York, 2005; BA, Stanford University, Stanford, California, 2009; JD, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2013

Military: N/A

Prior Elected Office: N/A

Professional Career: Attorney, Westchester County Law Department, White Plains, New York, 2018–2019; attorney, Davis Polk & Wardwell LLP, 2015–2018, 2013–2014; law clerk, United States District Court for the Southern District of New York, 2014–2015; John Gardner Public Service Fellow, 2009–2010

Publications: N/A



Image courtesy of the Member

Burgess Owens

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

Republican from Utah

Congressional Committees: Education and Labor; Judiciary

Born: August 2, 1951, Columbus, Ohio

Family: Six children and 16 grandchildren

Education: Graduated from James S. Rickards High School, Tallahassee, Florida, 1969; B.S., in biology and chemistry, University of Miami, Coral Gables, Florida, 1975

Military: N/A

Prior Elected Office: N/A

Professional Career: NFL Super Bowl champion; business executive; nonprofit executive; entrepreneur

Publications: *Liberalism or How to Turn Good Men into Whiners, Weenies and Wimps* (New York: Post Hill Press, 2016); *Why I Stand: From Freedom to the Killing Fields of Socialism* (New York: Post Hill Press, 2018)



Image courtesy of the Member

Marilyn Strickland

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

Democrat from Washington

Congressional Committees: Armed Services; Transportation and Infrastructure

Born: September 25, 1962, Seoul, South Korea

Family: Spouse: Patrick Erwin; two stepchildren

Education: Graduated from Mount Tahoma High School, Tacoma, Washington, 1980; B.A., University of Washington, Seattle, Washington, 1984; M.B.A., Clark Atlanta University, Atlanta, Georgia, 1992

Military: N/A

Prior Elected Office: Member of the Tacoma, Washington, city council, 2008–2009; mayor of Tacoma, 2010–2017

Professional Career: Business executive; development officer, Tacoma, Washington, public library

Publications: N/A



Image courtesy of the Member

Ritchie Torres

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

Democrat from New York

Congressional Committees: Homeland Security; Financial Services

Born: March 12, 1988, New York, New York

Family: Unmarried

Education: Graduated from Herbert H. Lehman High School, New York, New York, 2006; attended New York University, New York, New York, 2006–2007

Military: N/A

Prior Elected Office: New York city council, 2014–2020

Professional Career: Civil servant; community organizer; staff, New York city council member Jimmy Vacca

Publications: N/A



Image courtesy of the Member

Raphael Warnock

UNITED STATES SENATOR

Democrat from Georgia

Congressional Committees: Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry; Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs; Commerce, Science, and Transportation; Special Committee on Aging; Joint Economic Committee

Born: July 23, 1969, Savannah, Georgia

Family: Two children

Education: Graduated from Sol C. Johnson High School, Savannah, Georgia, 1987; B.A., Morehouse College, 1991; M.Div., Union Theological Seminary, New York, New York, 1994; M.Phil., Union Theological Seminary, New York, New York; Ph.D., Union Theological Seminary, New York, New York, 2006

Military: N/A

Prior Elected Office: N/A

Professional Career: Pastor

Publications: *The Divided Mind of the Black Church: Theology, Piety, and Public Witness* (New York: NYU Press, 2014)



Image courtesy of the Member

Nikema Williams

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

Democrat from Georgia

Congressional Committees: Financial Services; Transportation and Infrastructure; Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress

Born: July 30, 1978, Columbus, Georgia

Family: Spouse: Leslie Small; one son, Carter Small

Education: Graduated from Talladega High School, Talladega, Alabama, 1996; B.A. Talladega College, Talladega, Alabama, 2000

Military: N/A

Prior Elected Office: Vice-chair, Georgia Democratic Party, 2011–2013; acting chair, Georgia Democratic Party, 2013; member of the Georgia state senate, 2017–2021; chair, Georgia Democratic Party, 2019–2021

Professional Career: Nonprofit executive

Publications: N/A

PART THREE

Appendices

APPENDIX A

Black-American Members by Congress, 1870–2022

CONGRESS	TOTAL MEMBERSHIP	HOUSE	SENATE
41st (1869–1871)	3	Jefferson F. Long (R-GA)[1] Joseph H. Rainey (R-SC)[2]	Hiram R. Revels (R-MS)[3]
42nd (1871–1873)	5	Robert C. De Large (R-SC)[4] Robert Brown Elliott (R-SC) Joseph H. Rainey (R-SC) Benjamin Sterling Turner (R-AL) Josiah T. Walls (R-FL)[5]	N/A
43rd (1873–1875)	7	Richard H. Cain (R-SC) Robert Brown Elliott (R-SC)[6] John R. Lynch (R-MS) Joseph H. Rainey (R-SC) Alonzo J. Ransier (R-SC) James T. Rapier (R-AL) Josiah T. Walls (R-FL)	N/A
44th (1875–1877)	8	Jeremiah Haralson (R-AL) John Adams Hyman (R-NC) John R. Lynch (R-MS) Charles E. Nash (R-LA) Joseph H. Rainey (R-SC) Robert Smalls (R-SC) Josiah T. Walls (R-FL)[7]	Blanche K. Bruce (R-MS)
45th (1877–1879)	4	Richard H. Cain (R-SC) Joseph H. Rainey (R-SC) Robert Smalls (R-SC)	Blanche K. Bruce (R-MS)
46th (1879–1881)	1	N/A	Blanche K. Bruce (R-MS)
47th (1881–1883)	2	John R. Lynch (R-MS)[8] Robert Smalls (R-SC)[9]	N/A
48th (1883–1885)	2	James E. O'Hara (R-NC) Robert Smalls (R-SC)[10]	N/A
49th (1885–1887)	2	James E. O'Hara (R-NC) Robert Smalls (R-SC)	N/A
50th (1887–1889)	N/A	N/A	N/A
51st (1889–1891)	3	Henry Plummer Cheatham (R-NC) John M. Langston (R-VA)[11] Thomas E. Miller (R-SC)[12]	N/A

CONGRESS	TOTAL MEMBERSHIP	HOUSE	SENATE
52nd (1891–1893)	1	Henry Plummer Cheatham (R-NC)	N/A
53rd (1893–1895)	1	George Washington Murray (R-SC)	N/A
54th (1895–1897)	1	George Washington Murray (R-SC)[13]	N/A
55th (1897–1899)	1	George Henry White (R-NC)	N/A
56th (1899–1901)	1	George Henry White (R-NC)	N/A
From March 4, 1901, to March 3, 1929, no Black Americans served in Congress.			
71st (1929–1931)	1	Oscar De Priest (R-IL)	N/A
72nd (1931–1933)	1	Oscar De Priest (R-IL)	N/A
73rd (1933–1935)	1	Oscar De Priest (R-IL)	N/A
74th (1935–1937)	1	Arthur W. Mitchell (D-IL)	N/A
75th (1937–1939)	1	Arthur W. Mitchell (D-IL)	N/A
76th (1939–1941)	1	Arthur W. Mitchell (D-IL)	N/A
77th (1941–1943)	1	Arthur W. Mitchell (D-IL)	N/A
78th (1943–1945)	1	William L. Dawson (D-IL)	N/A
79th (1945–1947)	2	William L. Dawson (D-IL) Adam Clayton Powell Jr. (D-NY)	N/A
80th (1947–1949)	2	William L. Dawson (D-IL) Adam Clayton Powell Jr. (D-NY)	N/A
81st (1949–1951)	2	William L. Dawson (D-IL) Adam Clayton Powell Jr. (D-NY)	N/A
82nd (1951–1953)	2	William L. Dawson (D-IL) Adam Clayton Powell Jr. (D-NY)	N/A
83rd (1953–1955)	2	William L. Dawson (D-IL) Adam Clayton Powell Jr. (D-NY)	N/A
84th (1955–1957)	3	William L. Dawson (D-IL) Charles C. Diggs Jr. (D-MI) Adam Clayton Powell Jr. (D-NY)	N/A
85th (1957–1959)	4	William L. Dawson (D-IL) Charles C. Diggs Jr. (D-MI) Robert N.C. Nix Sr. (D-PA)[14] Adam Clayton Powell Jr. (D-NY)	N/A
86th (1959–1961)	4	William L. Dawson (D-IL) Charles C. Diggs Jr. (D-MI) Robert N.C. Nix Sr. (D-PA) Adam Clayton Powell Jr. (D-NY)	N/A

CONGRESS	TOTAL MEMBERSHIP	HOUSE	SENATE
87th (1961–1963)	4	William L. Dawson (D-IL) Charles C. Diggs Jr. (D-MI) Robert N.C. Nix Sr. (D-PA) Adam Clayton Powell Jr. (D-NY)	N/A
88th (1963–1965)	5	William L. Dawson (D-IL) Charles C. Diggs Jr. (D-MI) Augustus F. "Gus" Hawkins (D-CA) Robert N.C. Nix Sr. (D-PA) Adam Clayton Powell Jr. (D-NY)	N/A
89th (1965–1967)	6	John Conyers Jr. (D-MI) William L. Dawson (D-IL) Charles C. Diggs Jr. (D-MI) Augustus F. "Gus" Hawkins (D-CA) Robert N.C. Nix Sr. (D-PA) Adam Clayton Powell Jr. (D-NY)	N/A
90th (1967–1969)†	6	John Conyers Jr. (D-MI) William L. Dawson (D-IL) Charles C. Diggs Jr. (D-MI) Augustus F. "Gus" Hawkins (D-CA) Robert N.C. Nix Sr. (D-PA)	Edward W. Brooke (R-MA)
91st (1969–1971)	11	Shirley Chisholm (D-NY) William Lacy "Bill" Clay Sr. (D-MO) George W. Collins (D-IL)[15] John Conyers Jr. (D-MI) William L. Dawson (D-IL)[16] Charles C. Diggs Jr. (D-MI) Augustus F. "Gus" Hawkins (D-CA) Robert N.C. Nix Sr. (D-PA) Adam Clayton Powell Jr. (D-NY) Louis Stokes (D-OH)	Edward W. Brooke (R-MA)
92nd (1971–1973)	14	Shirley Chisholm (D-NY) William Lacy "Bill" Clay Sr. (D-MO) George W. Collins (D-IL)[17] John Conyers Jr. (D-MI) Ronald V. Dellums (D-CA) Charles C. Diggs Jr. (D-MI) Walter E. Fauntroy (D-DC)[18] Augustus F. "Gus" Hawkins (D-CA) Ralph H. Metcalfe (D-IL) Parren J. Mitchell (D-MD) Robert N.C. Nix Sr. (D-PA) Charles B. Rangel (D-NY) Louis Stokes (D-OH)	Edward W. Brooke (R-MA)

CONGRESS	TOTAL MEMBERSHIP	HOUSE	SENATE
93rd (1973–1975)	17	Yvonne Brathwaite Burke (D-CA) Shirley Chisholm (D-NY) William Lacy "Bill" Clay Sr. (D-MO) Cardiss Collins (D-IL)[19] John Conyers Jr. (D-MI) Ronald V. Dellums (D-CA) Charles C. Diggs Jr. (D-MI) Walter E. Fauntroy (D-DC) Augustus F. "Gus" Hawkins (D-CA) Barbara Jordan (D-TX) Ralph H. Metcalfe (D-IL) Parren J. Mitchell (D-MD) Robert N.C. Nix Sr. (D-PA) Charles B. Rangel (D-NY) Louis Stokes (D-OH) Andrew Young (D-GA)	Edward W. Brooke (R-MA)
94th (1975–1977)	18	Yvonne Brathwaite Burke (D-CA) Shirley Chisholm (D-NY) William Lacy "Bill" Clay Sr. (D-MO) Cardiss Collins (D-IL) John Conyers Jr. (D-MI) Ronald V. Dellums (D-CA) Charles C. Diggs Jr. (D-MI) Walter E. Fauntroy (D-DC) Harold E. Ford (D-TN) Augustus F. "Gus" Hawkins (D-CA) Barbara Jordan (D-TX) Ralph H. Metcalfe (D-IL) Parren J. Mitchell (D-MD) Robert N.C. Nix Sr. (D-PA) Charles B. Rangel (D-NY) Louis Stokes (D-OH) Andrew Young (D-GA)	Edward W. Brooke (R-MA)
95th (1977–1979)	18	Yvonne Brathwaite Burke (D-CA) Shirley Chisholm (D-NY) William Lacy "Bill" Clay Sr. (D-MO) Cardiss Collins (D-IL) John Conyers Jr. (D-MI) Ronald V. Dellums (D-CA) Charles C. Diggs Jr. (D-MI) Walter E. Fauntroy (D-DC) Harold E. Ford (D-TN) Augustus F. "Gus" Hawkins (D-CA) Barbara Jordan (D-TX) Ralph H. Metcalfe (D-IL)[20]	Edward W. Brooke (R-MA)

CONGRESS	TOTAL MEMBERSHIP	HOUSE	SENATE
95th (1977–1979) *continued*		Parren J. Mitchell (D-MD) Robert N.C. Nix Sr. (D-PA) Charles B. Rangel (D-NY) Louis Stokes (D-OH) Andrew Young (D-GA)[21]	
96th (1979–1981)	18	Shirley Chisholm (D-NY) William Lacy "Bill" Clay Sr. (D-MO) Cardiss Collins (D-IL) John Conyers Jr. (D-MI) George W. Crockett Jr. (D-MI)[22] Ronald V. Dellums (D-CA) Charles C. Diggs Jr. (D-MI)[23] Julian C. Dixon (D-CA) Melvin H. Evans (R-VI) Walter E. Fauntroy (D-DC) Harold E. Ford (D-TN) William H. Gray III (D-PA) Augustus F. "Gus" Hawkins (D-CA) Mickey Leland (D-TX) Parren J. Mitchell (D-MD) Charles B. Rangel (D-NY) Bennett M. Stewart (D-IL) Louis Stokes (D-OH)	N/A
97th (1981–1983)	19	Shirley Chisholm (D-NY) William Lacy "Bill" Clay Sr. (D-MO) Cardiss Collins (D-IL) John Conyers Jr. (D-MI) George W. Crockett Jr. (D-MI) Ronald V. Dellums (D-CA) Julian C. Dixon (D-CA) Mervyn M. Dymally (D-CA) Walter E. Fauntroy (D-DC) Harold E. Ford (D-TN) William H. Gray III (D-PA) Katie Hall (D-IN)[24] Augustus F. "Gus" Hawkins (D-CA) Mickey Leland (D-TX) Parren J. Mitchell (D-MD) Charles B. Rangel (D-NY) Gus Savage (D-IL) Louis Stokes (D-OH) Harold Washington (D-IL)	N/A
98th (1983–1985)	22	William Lacy "Bill" Clay Sr. (D-MO) Cardiss Collins (D-IL)	N/A

CONGRESS	TOTAL MEMBERSHIP	HOUSE	SENATE
98th (1983–1985) *continued*		John Conyers Jr. (D-MI) George W. Crockett Jr. (D-MI) Ronald V. Dellums (D-CA) Julian C. Dixon (D-CA) Mervyn M. Dymally (D-CA) Walter E. Fauntroy (D-DC) Harold E. Ford (D-TN) William H. Gray III (D-PA) Katie Hall (D-IN) Augustus F. "Gus" Hawkins (D-CA) Charles A. Hayes (D-IL)[25] Mickey Leland (D-TX) Parren J. Mitchell (D-MD) Major R. Owens (D-NY) Charles B. Rangel (D-NY) Gus Savage (D-IL) Louis Stokes (D-OH) Edolphus Towns (D-NY) Harold Washington (D-IL)[26] Alan Wheat (D-MO)	
99th (1985–1987)	21	William Lacy "Bill" Clay Sr. (D-MO) Cardiss Collins (D-IL) John Conyers Jr. (D-MI) George W. Crockett Jr. (D-MI) Ronald V. Dellums (D-CA) Julian C. Dixon (D-CA) Mervyn M. Dymally (D-CA) Walter E. Fauntroy (D-DC) Harold E. Ford (D-TN) William H. Gray III (D-PA) Augustus F. "Gus" Hawkins (D-CA) Charles A. Hayes (D-IL) Mickey Leland (D-TX) Parren J. Mitchell (D-MD) Major R. Owens (D-NY) Charles B. Rangel (D-NY) Gus Savage (D-IL) Louis Stokes (D-OH) Edolphus Towns (D-NY) Alton R. Waldon Jr. (D-NY)[27] Alan Wheat (D-MO)	N/A
100th (1987–1989)	23	William Lacy "Bill" Clay Sr. (D-MO) Cardiss Collins (D-IL) John Conyers Jr. (D-MI) George W. Crockett Jr. (D-MI)	N/A

CONGRESS	TOTAL MEMBERSHIP	HOUSE	SENATE
100th (1987–1989) *continued*		Ronald V. Dellums (D-CA) Julian C. Dixon (D-CA) Mervyn M. Dymally (D-CA) Mike Espy (D-MS) Walter E. Fauntroy (D-DC) Floyd H. Flake (D-NY) Harold E. Ford (D-TN) William H. Gray III (D-PA) Augustus F. "Gus" Hawkins (D-CA) Charles A. Hayes (D-IL) Mickey Leland (D-TX) John Lewis (D-GA) Kweisi Mfume (D-MD) Major R. Owens (D-NY) Charles B. Rangel (D-NY) Gus Savage (D-IL) Louis Stokes (D-OH) Edolphus Towns (D-NY) Alan Wheat (D-MO)	
101st (1989–1991)	25	William Lacy "Bill" Clay Sr. (D-MO) Cardiss Collins (D-IL) John Conyers Jr. (D-MI) George W. Crockett Jr. (D-MI) Ronald V. Dellums (D-CA) Julian C. Dixon (D-CA) Mervyn M. Dymally (D-CA) Mike Espy (D-MS) Walter E. Fauntroy (D-DC) Floyd H. Flake (D-NY) Harold E. Ford (D-TN) William H. Gray III (D-PA) Augustus F. "Gus" Hawkins (D-CA) Charles A. Hayes (D-IL) Mickey Leland (D-TX)[28] John Lewis (D-GA) Kweisi Mfume (D-MD) Major R. Owens (D-NY) Donald M. Payne (D-NJ) Charles B. Rangel (D-NY) Gus Savage (D-IL) Louis Stokes (D-OH) Edolphus Towns (D-NY) Craig A. Washington (D-TX)[29] Alan Wheat (D-MO)	N/A

CONGRESS	TOTAL MEMBERSHIP	HOUSE	SENATE
102nd (1991–1993)	28	Lucien E. Blackwell (D-PA)[30] William Lacy "Bill" Clay Sr. (D-MO) Eva M. Clayton (D-NC)[31] Barbara-Rose Collins (D-MI) Cardiss Collins (D-IL) John Conyers Jr. (D-MI) Ronald V. Dellums (D-CA) Julian C. Dixon (D-CA) Mervyn M. Dymally (D-CA) Mike Espy (D-MS) Floyd H. Flake (D-NY) Harold E. Ford (D-TN) Gary A. Franks (R-CT) William H. Gray III (D-PA)[32] Charles A. Hayes (D-IL) William J. Jefferson (D-LA) John Lewis (D-GA) Kweisi Mfume (D-MD) Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC) Major R. Owens (D-NY) Donald M. Payne (D-NJ) Charles B. Rangel (D-NY) Gus Savage (D-IL) Louis Stokes (D-OH) Edolphus Towns (D-NY) Craig A. Washington (D-TX) Maxine Waters (D-CA) Alan Wheat (D-MO)	N/A
103rd (1993–1995)	41	Sanford D. Bishop Jr. (D-GA) Lucien E. Blackwell (D-PA) Corrine Brown (D-FL) William Lacy "Bill" Clay Sr. (D-MO) Eva M. Clayton (D-NC) James E. Clyburn (D-SC) Barbara-Rose Collins (D-MI) Cardiss Collins (D-IL) John Conyers Jr. (D-MI) Ronald V. Dellums (D-CA) Julian C. Dixon (D-CA) Mike Espy (D-MS)[33] Cleo Fields (D-LA) Floyd H. Flake (D-NY) Harold E. Ford (D-TN) Gary A. Franks (R-CT) Alcee L. Hastings (D-FL)	Carol Moseley Braun (D-IL)

CONGRESS	TOTAL MEMBERSHIP	HOUSE	SENATE
103rd (1993–1995) *continued*		Earl F. Hilliard (D-AL) William J. Jefferson (D-LA) Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX) John Lewis (D-GA) Cynthia A. McKinney (D-GA) Carrie P. Meek (D-FL) Kweisi Mfume (D-MD) Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC) Major R. Owens (D-NY) Donald M. Payne (D-NJ) Charles B. Rangel (D-NY) Mel Reynolds (D-IL) Bobby L. Rush (D-IL) Robert C. "Bobby" Scott (D-VA) Louis Stokes (D-OH) Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS)[34] Edolphus Towns (D-NY) Walter R. Tucker III (D-CA) Craig A. Washington (D-TX) Maxine Waters (D-CA) Melvin L. Watt (D-NC) Alan Wheat (D-MO) Albert Russell Wynn (D-MD)	
104th (1995–1997)	44	Sanford D. Bishop Jr. (D-GA) Corrine Brown (D-FL) William Lacy "Bill" Clay Sr. (D-MO) Eva M. Clayton (D-NC) James E. Clyburn (D-SC) Barbara-Rose Collins (D-MI) Cardiss Collins (D-IL) John Conyers Jr. (D-MI) Elijah E. Cummings (D-MD)[35] Ronald V. Dellums (D-CA) Julian C. Dixon (D-CA) Chaka Fattah (D-PA) Cleo Fields (D-LA) Floyd H. Flake (D-NY) Harold E. Ford (D-TN) Gary A. Franks (R-CT) Victor O. Frazer (I-VI) Alcee L. Hastings (D-FL) Earl F. Hilliard (D-AL) Jesse L. Jackson Jr. (D-IL)[36] Sheila Jackson Lee (D-TX) William J. Jefferson (D-LA)	Carol Moseley Braun (D-IL)

CONGRESS	TOTAL MEMBERSHIP	HOUSE	SENATE
104th (1995–1997) *continued*		Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX) John Lewis (D-GA) Cynthia A. McKinney (D-GA) Carrie P. Meek (D-FL) Kweisi Mfume (D-MD)[37] Juanita Millender-McDonald (D-CA)[38] Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC) Major R. Owens (D-NY) Donald M. Payne (D-NJ) Charles B. Rangel (D-NY) Mel Reynolds (D-IL)[39] Bobby L. Rush (D-IL) Robert C. "Bobby" Scott (D-VA) Louis Stokes (D-OH) Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) Edolphus Towns (D-NY) Walter R. Tucker III (D-CA)[40] Maxine Waters (D-CA) Melvin L. Watt (D-NC) J.C. Watts Jr. (R-OK) Albert Russell Wynn (D-MD)	
105th (1997–1999)	42	Sanford D. Bishop Jr. (D-GA) Corrine Brown (D-FL) Julia May Carson (D-IN) Donna M. Christensen (D-VI)[41] William Lacy "Bill" Clay Sr. (D-MO) Eva M. Clayton (D-NC) James E. Clyburn (D-SC) John Conyers Jr. (D-MI) Elijah E. Cummings (D-MD) Danny K. Davis (D-IL) Ronald V. Dellums (D-CA)[42] Julian C. Dixon (D-CA) Chaka Fattah (D-PA) Floyd H. Flake (D-NY)[43] Harold E. Ford Jr. (D-TN) Alcee L. Hastings (D-FL) Earl F. Hilliard (D-AL) Jesse L. Jackson Jr. (D-IL) Sheila Jackson Lee (D-TX) William J. Jefferson (D-LA) Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX) Carolyn C. Kilpatrick (D-MI) Barbara Lee (D-CA)[44] John Lewis (D-GA)	Carol Moseley Braun (D-IL)

CONGRESS	TOTAL MEMBERSHIP	HOUSE	SENATE
105th (1997–1999) *continued*		Cynthia A. McKinney (D-GA) Carrie P. Meek (D-FL) Gregory W. Meeks (D-NY)[45] Juanita Millender-McDonald (D-CA) Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC) Major R. Owens (D-NY) Donald M. Payne (D-NJ) Charles B. Rangel (D-NY) Bobby L. Rush (D-IL) Robert C. "Bobby" Scott (D-VA) Louis Stokes (D-OH) Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) Edolphus Towns (D-NY) Maxine Waters (D-CA) Melvin L. Watt (D-NC) J.C. Watts Jr. (R-OK) Albert Russell Wynn (D-MD)	
106th (1999–2001)	39	Sanford D. Bishop Jr. (D-GA) Corrine Brown (D-FL) Julia May Carson (D-IN) Donna M. Christensen (D-VI) William Lacy "Bill" Clay Sr. (D-MO) Eva M. Clayton (D-NC) James E. Clyburn (D-SC) John Conyers Jr. (D-MI) Elijah E. Cummings (D-MD) Danny K. Davis (D-IL) Julian C. Dixon (D-CA)[46] Chaka Fattah (D-PA) Harold E. Ford Jr. (D-TN) Alcee L. Hastings (D-FL) Earl F. Hilliard (D-AL) Jesse L. Jackson Jr. (D-IL) Sheila Jackson Lee (D-TX) William J. Jefferson (D-LA) Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX) Stephanie Tubbs Jones (D-OH) Carolyn C. Kilpatrick (D-MI) Barbara Lee (D-CA) John Lewis (D-GA) Cynthia A. McKinney (D-GA) Carrie P. Meek (D-FL) Gregory W. Meeks (D-NY) Juanita Millender-McDonald (D-CA) Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC)	N/A

CONGRESS	TOTAL MEMBERSHIP	HOUSE	SENATE
106th (1999–2001) *continued*		Major R. Owens (D-NY) Donald M. Payne (D-NJ) Charles B. Rangel (D-NY) Bobby L. Rush (D-IL) Robert C. "Bobby" Scott (D-VA) Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) Edolphus Towns (D-NY) Maxine Waters (D-CA) Melvin L. Watt (D-NC) J.C. Watts Jr. (R-OK) Albert Russell Wynn (D-MD)	
107th (2001–2003)	39	Sanford D. Bishop Jr. (D-GA) Corrine Brown (D-FL) Julia May Carson (D-IN) Donna M. Christensen (D-VI) William Lacy Clay Jr. (D-MO) Eva M. Clayton (D-NC) James E. Clyburn (D-SC) John Conyers Jr. (D-MI) Elijah E. Cummings (D-MD) Danny K. Davis (D-IL) Chaka Fattah (D-PA) Harold E. Ford Jr. (D-TN) Alcee L. Hastings (D-FL) Earl F. Hilliard (D-AL) Jesse L. Jackson Jr. (D-IL) Sheila Jackson Lee (D-TX) William J. Jefferson (D-LA) Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX) Stephanie Tubbs Jones (D-OH) Carolyn C. Kilpatrick (D-MI) Barbara Lee (D-CA) John Lewis (D-GA) Cynthia A. McKinney (D-GA) Carrie P. Meek (D-FL) Gregory W. Meeks (D-NY) Juanita Millender-McDonald (D-CA) Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC) Major R. Owens (D-NY) Donald M. Payne (D-NJ) Charles B. Rangel (D-NY) Bobby L. Rush (D-IL) Robert C. "Bobby" Scott (D-VA) Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) Edolphus Towns (D-NY)	N/A

CONGRESS	TOTAL MEMBERSHIP	HOUSE	SENATE
107th (2001–2003) *continued*		Maxine Waters (D-CA) Diane E. Watson (D-CA)[47] Melvin L. Watt (D-NC) J.C. Watts Jr. (R-OK) Albert Russell Wynn (D-MD)	
108th (2003–2005)	40	Frank W. Ballance Jr. (D-NC)[48] Sanford D. Bishop Jr. (D-GA) Corrine Brown (D-FL) G.K. Butterfield (D-NC)[49] Julia May Carson (D-IN) Donna M. Christensen (D-VI) William Lacy Clay Jr. (D-MO) James E. Clyburn (D-SC) John Conyers Jr. (D-MI) Elijah E. Cummings (D-MD) Artur Davis (D-AL) Danny K. Davis (D-IL) Chaka Fattah (D-PA) Harold E. Ford Jr. (D-TN) Alcee L. Hastings (D-FL) Jesse L. Jackson Jr. (D-IL) Sheila Jackson Lee (D-TX) William J. Jefferson (D-LA) Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX) Stephanie Tubbs Jones (D-OH) Carolyn C. Kilpatrick (D-MI) Barbara Lee (D-CA) John Lewis (D-GA) Denise L. Majette (D-GA) Kendrick B. Meek (D-FL) Gregory W. Meeks (D-NY) Juanita Millender-McDonald (D-CA) Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC) Major R. Owens (D-NY) Donald M. Payne (D-NJ) Charles B. Rangel (D-NY) Bobby L. Rush (D-IL) David Scott (D-GA) Robert C. “Bobby” Scott (D-VA) Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) Edolphus Towns (D-NY) Maxine Waters (D-CA) Diane E. Watson (D-CA) Melvin L. Watt (D-NC) Albert Russell Wynn (D-MD)	N/A

CONGRESS	TOTAL MEMBERSHIP	HOUSE	SENATE
109th (2005–2007)	43	Sanford D. Bishop Jr. (D-GA) Corrine Brown (D-FL) G.K. Butterfield (D-NC) Julia May Carson (D-IN) Donna M. Christensen (D-VI) William Lacy Clay Jr. (D-MO) Emanuel Cleaver II (D-MO) James E. Clyburn (D-SC) John Conyers Jr. (D-MI) Elijah E. Cummings (D-MD) Artur Davis (D-AL) Danny K. Davis (D-IL) Chaka Fattah (D-PA) Harold E. Ford Jr. (D-TN) Al Green (D-TX) Alcee L. Hastings (D-FL) Jesse L. Jackson Jr. (D-IL) Sheila Jackson Lee (D-TX) William J. Jefferson (D-LA) Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX) Stephanie Tubbs Jones (D-OH) Carolyn C. Kilpatrick (D-MI) Barbara Lee (D-CA) John Lewis (D-GA) Cynthia A. McKinney (D-GA) Kendrick B. Meek (D-FL) Gregory W. Meeks (D-NY) Juanita Millender-McDonald (D-CA) Gwen Moore (D-WI) Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC) Major R. Owens (D-NY) Donald M. Payne (D-NJ) Charles B. Rangel (D-NY) Bobby L. Rush (D-IL) David Scott (D-GA) Robert C. "Bobby" Scott (D-VA) Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) Edolphus Towns (D-NY) Maxine Waters (D-CA) Diane E. Watson (D-CA) Melvin L. Watt (D-NC) Albert Russell Wynn (D-MD)	Barack Obama (D-IL)
110th (2007–2009)	47	Sanford D. Bishop Jr. (D-GA) Corrine Brown (D-FL) G.K. Butterfield (D-NC)	Barack Obama (D-IL)[50]

CONGRESS	TOTAL MEMBERSHIP	HOUSE	SENATE
110th (2007–2009) *continued*		André Carson (D-IN)[51]	
		Julia May Carson (D-IN)[52]	
		Donna M. Christensen (D-VI)	
		Yvette D. Clarke (D-NY)	
		William Lacy Clay Jr. (D-MO)	
		Emanuel Cleaver II (D-MO)	
		James E. Clyburn (D-SC)	
		John Conyers Jr. (D-MI)	
		Elijah E. Cummings (D-MD)	
		Artur Davis (D-AL)	
		Danny K. Davis (D-IL)	
		Donna F. Edwards (D-MD)[53]	
		Keith Ellison (D-MN)	
		Chaka Fattah (D-PA)	
		Marcia L. Fudge (D-OH)[54]	
		Al Green (D-TX)	
		Alcee L. Hastings (D-FL)	
		Jesse L. Jackson Jr. (D-IL)	
		Sheila Jackson Lee (D-TX)	
		William J. Jefferson (D-LA)	
		Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX)	
		Henry C. "Hank" Johnson Jr. (D-GA)	
		Stephanie Tubbs Jones (D-OH)[55]	
		Carolyn C. Kilpatrick (D-MI)	
		Barbara Lee (D-CA)	
		John Lewis (D-GA)	
		Kendrick B. Meek (D-FL)	
		Gregory W. Meeks (D-NY)	
		Juanita Millender-McDonald (D-CA)[56]	
		Gwen Moore (D-WI)	
		Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC)	
		Donald M. Payne (D-NJ)	
		Charles B. Rangel (D-NY)	
		Laura Richardson (D-CA)[57]	
		Bobby L. Rush (D-IL)	
		David Scott (D-GA)	
		Robert C. "Bobby" Scott (D-VA)	
		Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS)	
		Edolphus Towns (D-NY)	
		Maxine Waters (D-CA)	
		Diane E. Watson (D-CA)	
		Melvin L. Watt (D-NC)	
		Albert Russell Wynn (D-MD)[58]	
111th (2009–2011)	42	Sanford D. Bishop Jr. (D-GA)	Roland Burris (D-IL)[59]
		Corrine Brown (D-FL)	

CONGRESS	TOTAL MEMBERSHIP	HOUSE	SENATE
111th (2009–2011) *continued*		G.K. Butterfield (D-NC) André Carson (D-IN) Donna M. Christensen (D-VI) Yvette D. Clarke (D-NY) William Lacy Clay Jr. (D-MO) Emanuel Cleaver II (D-MO) James E. Clyburn (D-SC) John Conyers Jr. (D-MI) Elijah E. Cummings (D-MD) Artur Davis (D-AL) Danny K. Davis (D-IL) Donna F. Edwards (D-MD) Keith Ellison (D-MN) Chaka Fattah (D-PA) Marcia L. Fudge (D-OH) Al Green (D-TX) Alcee L. Hastings (D-FL) Jesse L. Jackson Jr. (D-IL) Sheila Jackson Lee (D-TX) Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX) Henry C. "Hank" Johnson Jr. (D-GA) Carolyn C. Kilpatrick (D-MI) Barbara Lee (D-CA) John Lewis (D-GA) Kendrick B. Meek (D-FL) Gregory W. Meeks (D-NY) Gwen Moore (D-WI) Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC) Donald M. Payne (D-NJ) Charles B. Rangel (D-NY) Laura Richardson (D-CA) Bobby L. Rush (D-IL) David Scott (D-GA) Robert C. "Bobby" Scott (D-VA) Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) Edolphus Towns (D-NY) Maxine Waters (D-CA) Diane E. Watson (D-CA) Melvin L. Watt (D-NC)	
112th (2011–2013)	45	Karen Bass (D-CA) Sanford D. Bishop Jr. (D-GA) Corrine Brown (D-FL) G.K. Butterfield (D-NC) André Carson (D-IN) Donna M. Christensen (D-VI)	N/A

CONGRESS	TOTAL MEMBERSHIP	HOUSE	SENATE
112th (2011–2013) *continued*		Hansen Clarke (D-MI) Yvette D. Clarke (D-NY) William Lacy Clay Jr. (D-MO) Emanuel Cleaver II (D-MO) James E. Clyburn (D-SC) John Conyers Jr. (D-MI) Elijah E. Cummings (D-MD) Danny K. Davis (D-IL) Donna F. Edwards (D-MD) Keith Ellison (D-MN) Chaka Fattah (D-PA) Marcia L. Fudge (D-OH) Al Green (D-TX) Alcee L. Hastings (D-FL) Jesse L. Jackson Jr. (D-IL)[60] Sheila Jackson Lee (D-TX) Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX) Henry C. "Hank" Johnson Jr. (D-GA) Barbara Lee (D-CA) John Lewis (D-GA) Gregory W. Meeks (D-NY) Gwen Moore (D-WI) Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC) Donald M. Payne (D-NJ)[61] Donald M. Payne Jr. (D-NJ)[62] Charles B. Rangel (D-NY) Laura Richardson (D-CA) Cedric L. Richmond (D-LA) Bobby L. Rush (D-IL) David Scott (D-GA) Robert C. "Bobby" Scott (D-VA) Tim Scott (R-SC)[63] Terri A. Sewell (D-AL) Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) Edolphus Towns (D-NY) Maxine Waters (D-CA) Melvin L. Watt (D-NC) Allen West (R-FL) Frederica S. Wilson (D-FL)	
113th (2013–2015)	47	Alma S. Adams (D-NC)[64] Karen Bass (D-CA) Joyce Beatty (D-OH) Sanford D. Bishop Jr. (D-GA) Corrine Brown (D-FL) G.K. Butterfield (D-NC)	Cory A. Booker (D-NJ)[65] William "Mo" Cowan (D-MA)[66] Tim Scott (R-SC)

CONGRESS	TOTAL MEMBERSHIP	HOUSE	SENATE
113th (2013–2015) *continued*		André Carson (D-IN) Donna M. Christensen (D-VI) Yvette D. Clarke (D-NY) William Lacy Clay Jr. (D-MO) Emanuel Cleaver II (D-MO) James E. Clyburn (D-SC) John Conyers Jr. (D-MI) Elijah E. Cummings (D-MD) Danny K. Davis (D-IL) Donna F. Edwards (D-MD) Keith Ellison (D-MN) Chaka Fattah (D-PA) Marcia L. Fudge (D-OH) Al Green (D-TX) Alcee L. Hastings (D-FL) Steven A. Horsford (D-NV) Sheila Jackson Lee (D-TX) Hakeem S. Jeffries (D-NY) Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX) Henry C. "Hank" Johnson Jr. (D-GA) Robin L. Kelly (D-IL)[67] Barbara Lee (D-CA) John Lewis (D-GA) Gregory W. Meeks (D-NY) Gwen Moore (D-WI) Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC) Donald M. Payne Jr. (D-NJ) Charles B. Rangel (D-NY) Cedric L. Richmond (D-LA) Bobby L. Rush (D-IL) David Scott (D-GA) Robert C. "Bobby" Scott (D-VA) Terri A. Sewell (D-AL) Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) Marc A. Veasey (D-TX) Maxine Waters (D-CA) Melvin L. Watt (D-NC)[68] Frederica S. Wilson (D-FL)	
114th (2015–2017)	49	Alma S. Adams (D-NC) Karen Bass (D-CA) Joyce Beatty (D-OH) Sanford D. Bishop Jr. (D-GA) Corrine Brown (D-FL) G.K. Butterfield (D-NC) André Carson (D-IN)	Cory A. Booker (D-NJ) Tim Scott (R-SC)

CONGRESS	TOTAL MEMBERSHIP	HOUSE	SENATE
114th (2015–2017) *continued*		Yvette D. Clarke (D-NY) William Lacy Clay Jr. (D-MO) Emanuel Cleaver II (D-MO) James E. Clyburn (D-SC) John Conyers Jr. (D-MI) Elijah E. Cummings (D-MD) Danny K. Davis (D-IL) Donna F. Edwards (D-MD) Keith Ellison (D-MN) Dwight Evans (D-PA)[69] Chaka Fattah (D-PA)[70] Marcia L. Fudge (D-OH) Al Green (D-TX) Alcee L. Hastings (D-FL) Will Hurd (R-TX) Sheila Jackson Lee (D-TX) Hakeem S. Jeffries (D-NY) Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX) Henry C. "Hank" Johnson Jr. (D-GA) Robin L. Kelly (D-IL) Brenda L. Lawrence (D-MI) Barbara Lee (D-CA) John Lewis (D-GA) Mia B. Love (R-UT) Gregory W. Meeks (D-NY) Gwen Moore (D-WI) Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC) Donald M. Payne Jr. (D-NJ) Stacey E. Plaskett (D-VI) Charles B. Rangel (D-NY) Cedric L. Richmond (D-LA) Bobby L. Rush (D-IL) David Scott (D-GA) Robert C. "Bobby" Scott (D-VA) Terri A. Sewell (D-AL) Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) Marc A. Veasey (D-TX) Maxine Waters (D-CA) Bonnie Watson Coleman (D-NJ) Frederica S. Wilson (D-FL)	
115th (2017–2019)	52	Alma S. Adams (D-NC) Karen Bass (D-CA) Joyce Beatty (D-OH) Sanford D. Bishop Jr. (D-GA) Lisa Blunt Rochester (D-DE)	Cory A. Booker (D-NJ) Kamala D. Harris (D-CA) Tim Scott (R-SC)

CONGRESS	TOTAL MEMBERSHIP	HOUSE	SENATE
115th (2017–2019) *continued*		Anthony G. Brown (D-MD) G.K. Butterfield (D-NC) André Carson (D-IN) Yvette D. Clarke (D-NY) William Lacy Clay Jr. (D-MO) Emanuel Cleaver II (D-MO) James E. Clyburn (D-SC) John Conyers Jr. (D-MI)[71] Elijah E. Cummings (D-MD) Danny K. Davis (D-IL) Val Butler Demings (D-FL) Keith Ellison (D-MN) Dwight Evans (D-PA) Marcia L. Fudge (D-OH) Al Green (D-TX) Alcee L. Hastings (D-FL) Will Hurd (R-TX) Sheila Jackson Lee (D-TX) Hakeem S. Jeffries (D-NY) Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX) Henry C. "Hank" Johnson Jr. (D-GA) Brenda Jones (D-MI)[72] Robin L. Kelly (D-IL) Brenda L. Lawrence (D-MI) Al Lawson Jr. (D-FL) Barbara Lee (D-CA) John Lewis (D-GA) Mia B. Love (R-UT) A. Donald McEachin (D-VA) Gregory W. Meeks (D-NY) Gwen Moore (D-WI) Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC) Donald M. Payne Jr. (D-NJ) Stacey E. Plaskett (D-VI) Cedric L. Richmond (D-LA) Bobby L. Rush (D-IL) David Scott (D-GA) Robert C. "Bobby" Scott (D-VA) Terri A. Sewell (D-AL) Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) Marc A. Veasey (D-TX) Maxine Waters (D-CA) Bonnie Watson Coleman (D-NJ) Frederica S. Wilson (D-FL)	

CONGRESS	TOTAL MEMBERSHIP	HOUSE	SENATE
116th (2019–2021)	59	Alma S. Adams (D-NC) Colin Allred (D-TX) Karen Bass (D-CA) Joyce Beatty (D-OH) Sanford D. Bishop Jr. (D-GA) Lisa Blunt Rochester (D-DE) Anthony G. Brown (D-MD) G.K. Butterfield (D-NC) André Carson (D-IN) Yvette D. Clarke (D-NY) William Lacy Clay Jr. (D-MO) Emanuel Cleaver II (D-MO) James E. Clyburn (D-SC) Elijah E. Cummings (D-MD)[73] Danny K. Davis (D-IL) Antonio Delgado (D-NY) Val Butler Demings (D-FL) Dwight Evans (D-PA) Marcia L. Fudge (D-OH) Al Green (D-TX) Kwanza Hall (D-GA)[74] Alcee L. Hastings (D-FL) Jahana Hayes (D-CT) Steven A. Horsford (D-NV) Will Hurd (R-TX) Sheila Jackson Lee (D-TX) Hakeem S. Jeffries (D-NY) Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX) Henry C. “Hank” Johnson Jr. (D-GA) Robin L. Kelly (D-IL) Brenda L. Lawrence (D-MI) Al Lawson Jr. (D-FL) Barbara Lee (D-CA) John Lewis (D-GA)[75] Lucy McBath (D-GA) A. Donald McEachin (D-VA) Gregory W. Meeks (D-NY) Kweisi Mfume (D-MD)[76] Gwen Moore (D-WI) Joe Neguse (D-CO) Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC) Ilhan Omar (D-MN) Donald M. Payne Jr. (D-NJ) Stacey E. Plaskett (D-VI) Ayanna Pressley (D-MA) Cedric L. Richmond (D-LA)	Cory A. Booker (D-NJ) Kamala D. Harris (D-CA) Tim Scott (R-SC)

CONGRESS	TOTAL MEMBERSHIP	HOUSE	SENATE
116th (2019–2021) *continued*		Bobby L. Rush (D-IL) David Scott (D-GA) Robert C. "Bobby" Scott (D-VA) Terri A. Sewell (D-AL) Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) Lauren Underwood (D-IL) Marc A. Veasey (D-TX) Maxine Waters (D-CA) Bonnie Watson Coleman (D-NJ) Frederica S. Wilson (D-FL)	
117th (2021–2023)	66	Alma S. Adams (D-NC) Colin Allred (D-TX) Karen Bass (D-CA) Joyce Beatty (D-OH) Sanford D. Bishop Jr. (D-GA) Lisa Blunt Rochester (D-DE) Jamaal Bowman (D-NY) Anthony G. Brown (D-MD) Shontel M. Brown (D-OH)[79] Cori Bush (D-MO) G.K. Butterfield (D-NC) André Carson (D-IN) Troy A. Carter (D-LA)[80] Sheila Cherfilus-McCormick (D-FL)[81] Yvette D. Clarke (D-NY) Emanuel Cleaver II (D-MO) James E. Clyburn (D-SC) Danny K. Davis (D-IL) Antonio Delgado (D-NY)[82] Val Butler Demings (D-FL) Byron Donalds (R-FL) Dwight Evans (D-PA) Marcia L. Fudge (D-OH)[83] Al Green (D-TX) Alcee L. Hastings (D-FL)[84] Jahana Hayes (D-CT) Steven A. Horsford (D-NV) Sheila Jackson Lee (D-TX) Hakeem S. Jeffries (D-NY) Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX) Henry C. "Hank" Johnson Jr. (D-GA) Mondaire Jones (D-NY) Robin L. Kelly (D-IL) Brenda L. Lawrence (D-MI) Al Lawson Jr. (D-FL)	Cory A. Booker (D-NJ) Kamala D. Harris (D-CA)[77] Tim Scott (R-SC) Raphael Warnock (D-GA)[78]

CONGRESS	TOTAL MEMBERSHIP	HOUSE	SENATE
117th (2021–2023) *continued*		Barbara Lee (D-CA) Lucy McBath (D-GA) A. Donald McEachin (D-VA) Gregory W. Meeks (D-NY) Kweisi Mfume (D-MD) Gwen Moore (D-WI) Joe Neguse (D-CO) Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC) Ilhan Omar (D-MN) Burgess Owens (R-UT) Donald M. Payne Jr. (D-NJ) Stacey E. Plaskett (D-VI) Ayanna Pressley (D-MA) Cedric L. Richmond (D-LA)[85] Bobby L. Rush (D-IL) David Scott (D-GA) Robert C. "Bobby" Scott (D-VA) Terri A. Sewell (D-AL) Marilyn Strickland (D-WA) Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) Ritchie Torres (D-NY) Lauren Underwood (D-IL) Marc A. Veasey (D-TX) Maxine Waters (D-CA) Bonnie Watson Coleman (D-NJ) Nikema Williams (D-GA) Frederica S. Wilson (D-FL)	

The closing date for this volume was June 1, 2022.

Source: History, Art & Archives, U.S. House of Representatives, "Black-American Members by Congress," https://history.house.gov/Exhibitions-and-Publications/BAIC/Historical-Data/Black-American-Representatives-and-Senators-by-Congress/.

†Adam Clayton Powell Jr. (D-NY) was elected to the 90th Congress (1967–1969), but the House refused to seat him. He was subsequently elected to that Congress in a special election to fill the vacancy, but he did not take his seat.

1 Jefferson F. Long was elected on December 20, 1870, by special election, upon the readmission of Georgia to the Union.
2 Joseph H. Rainey was elected on November 8, 1870, by special election, to fill the vacancy caused by the resignation of Benjamin Franklin Whittemore.
3 Hiram R. Revels was elected on January 20, 1870, and presented his credentials before the Senate on February 23, 1870, upon the readmission of Mississippi to the Union.
4 Robert C. De Large served until January 24, 1873, when the House declared the seat vacant, following an election contest by Christopher Columbus Bowen.
5 Josiah T. Walls served until January 29, 1873, and was succeeded by Silas Leslie Niblack, who contested the election.
6 Robert Brown Elliott resigned on November 1, 1874, and was succeeded in a special election by Lewis Cass Carpenter on November 3, 1874.
7 Josiah T. Walls served until April 19, 1876, and was succeeded by Jesse Johnson Finley, who contested the election.
8 John R. Lynch took his seat on April 29, 1882, having successfully contested the election of James Ronald Chalmers.
9 Robert Smalls took his seat on July 19, 1882, having successfully contested the election of George Dionysius Tillman.
10 Robert Smalls was elected on March 18, 1884, by special election, to fill the vacancy caused by the death of Edmund William McGregor Mackey.
11 John M. Langston took his seat on September 23, 1890, having successfully contested the election of Edward Carrington Venable.
12 Thomas E. Miller took his seat on September 24, 1890, having successfully contested the election of William Elliott.
13 George Washington Murray took his seat on June 4, 1896, having successfully contested the election of William Elliott.
14 Robert N.C. Nix Sr. was elected on May 20, 1958, by special election, to fill the vacancy caused by the resignation of Earl Chudoff.

15 George W. Collins was elected on November 3, 1970, by special election, to fill the vacancy caused by the death of Daniel John Ronan.

16 William L. Dawson died on November 9, 1970. A vacancy existed through the remainder of the Congress.

17 George W. Collins died on December 8, 1972. A vacancy existed through the remainder of the Congress.

18 Walter E. Fauntroy was elected on March 23, 1971, by special election, upon the approval of Public Law 91-405, the District of Columbia Delegate Act.

19 Cardiss Collins was elected on June 5, 1973, by special election, to fill the vacancy caused by the death of her husband, Representative-elect George W. Collins, before the start of the 93rd Congress (1973–1975).

20 Ralph H. Metcalfe died on October 10, 1978. A vacancy existed through the remainder of the Congress.

21 Andrew Young resigned on January 29, 1977, and was succeeded in a special election by Wyche Fowler Jr. on April 5, 1977.

22 George W. Crockett Jr. was elected on November 4, 1980, by special election, to fill the vacancy caused by the resignation of Charles C. Diggs Jr.

23 Charles C. Diggs Jr. resigned on June 3, 1980, and was succeeded in a special election by George W. Crockett Jr. on November 4, 1980.

24 Katie Hall was elected on November 2, 1982, by special election, to fill the vacancy caused by the death of Adam Benjamin Jr.

25 Charles A. Hayes was elected on August 23, 1983, by special election, to fill the vacancy caused by the resignation of Harold Washington.

26 Harold Washington resigned on April 30, 1983, and was succeeded in a special election by Charles A. Hayes on August 23, 1983.

27 Alton R. Waldon Jr. was elected on June 10, 1986, by special election, to fill the vacancy caused by the death of Joseph Patrick Addabbo.

28 Mickey Leland died on August 7, 1989, and was succeeded in a special election by Craig A. Washington on December 9, 1989.

29 Craig A. Washington was elected on December 9, 1989, by special election, to fill the vacancy caused by the death of Mickey Leland.

30 Lucien E. Blackwell was elected on November 5, 1991, by special election, to fill the vacancy caused by the resignation of William H. Gray III.

31 Eva M. Clayton was elected on November 3, 1992, by special election, to fill the vacancy caused by the death of Walter Beaman Jones Sr.

32 William H. Gray III resigned on September 11, 1991, and was succeeded in a special election by Lucien E. Blackwell on November 5, 1991.

33 Mike Espy resigned on January 22, 1993, and was succeeded in a special election by Bennie G. Thompson on April 13, 1993.

34 Bennie G. Thompson was elected on April 13, 1993, by special election, to fill the vacancy caused by the resignation of Mike Espy.

35 Elijah E. Cummings was elected on April 16, 1996, by special election, to fill the vacancy caused by the resignation of Kweisi Mfume.

36 Jesse L. Jackson Jr. was elected on December 12, 1995, by special election, to fill the vacancy caused by the resignation of Mel Reynolds.

37 Kweisi Mfume resigned on February 18, 1996, and was succeeded in a special election by Elijah E. Cummings on April 16, 1996.

38 Juanita Millender-McDonald was elected on March 26, 1996, by special election, to fill the vacancy caused by the resignation of Walter R. Tucker III.

39 Mel Reynolds resigned on October 1, 1995, and was succeeded in a special election by Jesse L. Jackson Jr. on December 12, 1995.

40 Walter R. Tucker III resigned on December 15, 1995, and was succeeded in a special election by Juanita Millender-McDonald on March 26, 1996.

41 Donna M. Christensen served under the name Donna Christian-Green in the 105th and 106th Congresses (1997–2001).

42 Ronald V. Dellums resigned on February 6, 1998, and was succeeded in a special election by Barbara Lee on April 7, 1998.

43 Floyd H. Flake resigned on November 17, 1997, and was succeeded in a special election by Gregory W. Meeks on February 3, 1998.

44 Barbara Lee was elected on April 7, 1998, by special election, to fill the vacancy caused by the resignation of Ronald V. Dellums.

45 Gregory W. Meeks was elected on February 3, 1998, by special election, to fill the vacancy caused by the resignation of Floyd H. Flake.

46 Julian C. Dixon died on December 8, 2000. A vacancy existed through the remainder of the Congress.

47 Diane E. Watson was elected on June 5, 2001, by special election, to fill the vacancy caused by the death of Representative-elect Julian C. Dixon, before the start of the 107th Congress (2001–2003).

48 Frank W. Ballance Jr. resigned on June 11, 2004, and was succeeded in a special election by G.K. Butterfield on July 20, 2004.

49 G.K. Butterfield was elected on July 20, 2004, by special election, to fill the vacancy caused by the resignation of Frank W. Ballance Jr.

50 Barack Obama resigned on November 16, 2008, having been elected President of the United States. Barack Obama was succeeded by Roland Burris, who was appointed to the seat on December 31, 2008.

51 André Carson was elected on March 11, 2008, by special election, to fill the vacancy caused by the death of his grandmother, Julia May Carson.

52 Julia May Carson died on December 15, 2007, and was succeeded in a special election by her grandson André Carson on March 11, 2008.

53 Donna F. Edwards was elected on June 17, 2008, by special election, to fill the vacancy caused by the resignation of Albert Russell Wynn.

54 Marcia L. Fudge was elected on November 18, 2008, by special election, to fill the vacancy caused by the death of Stephanie Tubbs Jones.

55 Stephanie Tubbs Jones died on August 20, 2008, and was succeeded in a special election by Marcia L. Fudge on November 18, 2008.

56 Juanita Millender-McDonald died on April 21, 2007, and was succeeded in a special election by Laura Richardson on August 21, 2007.

57 Laura Richardson was elected on August 21, 2007, by special election, to fill the vacancy caused by the death of Juanita Millender-McDonald.

58 Albert Russell Wynn resigned on May 31, 2008, and was succeeded in a special election by Donna F. Edwards on June 17, 2008.

59 Roland Burris was appointed to the Senate on December 31, 2008, to fill the vacancy caused by the resignation of Barack Obama, but his credentials were not in order until January 12, 2009. Roland Burris was not a candidate in the special election for the remainder of the term and served until November 29, 2010.

60 Jesse L. Jackson Jr. resigned on November 21, 2012. A vacancy existed through the remainder of the Congress.

61 Donald M. Payne died on March 6, 2012, and was succeeded in a special election by his son, Donald M. Payne Jr., on November 6, 2012.

62 Donald M. Payne Jr. was elected on November 6, 2012, by special election, to fill the vacancy caused by the death of his father, Donald M. Payne.

63 Tim Scott was appointed to the Senate on January 2, 2013, to fill the vacancy caused by the resignation of James W. DeMint. Tim Scott was subsequently elected in a special election on November 4, 2014, to the remainder of the term. Tim Scott resigned from the House of Representatives on January 2, 2013.

64 Alma S. Adams was elected on November 4, 2014, by special election, to fill the vacancy caused by the resignation of Melvin L. Watt.

65 Cory A. Booker was elected on October 16, 2013, by special election, to fill the vacancy caused by the death of Frank Raleigh Lautenberg, succeeding Jeffrey Scott Chiesa, who had been appointed to fill the seat and did not run in the special election.

66 William "Mo" Cowan was appointed to the Senate on February 1, 2013, to fill the vacancy caused by the resignation of John Forbes Kerry. Cowan was not a candidate in the special election for the remainder of the term and served until July 15, 2013.

67 Robin L. Kelly was elected on April 9, 2013, by special election, to fill the vacancy caused by the resignation of Representative-elect Jesse L. Jackson Jr., who declined to take his seat in the 113th Congress (2013–2015).

68 Melvin L. Watt resigned on January 6, 2014, and was succeeded in a special election by Alma S. Adams on November 4, 2014.

69 Dwight Evans was elected on November 8, 2016, by special election, to fill the vacancy caused by the resignation of Chaka Fattah.

70 Chaka Fattah resigned on June 23, 2016, and was succeeded in a special election by Dwight Evans on November 8, 2016.

71 John Conyers Jr. resigned on December 5, 2017, and was succeeded in a special election by Brenda Jones on November 6, 2018.

72 Brenda Jones was elected on November 6, 2018, by special election, to fill the vacancy caused by the resignation of John Conyers Jr.

73 Elijah E. Cummings died on October 17, 2019, and was succeeded in a special election by Kweisi Mfume on April 28, 2020.

74 Kwanza Hall was elected on December 1, 2020, by special election, to fill the vacancy caused by the death of John Lewis.

75 John Lewis died on July 17, 2020, and was succeeded in a special election by Kwanza Hall on December 1, 2020.

76 Kweisi Mfume was elected on April 28, 2020, by special election, to fill the vacancy caused by the death of Elijah E. Cummings.

77 Kamala D. Harris resigned on January 18, 2021, having been elected Vice President of the United States. Kamala Harris was succeeded by Alejandro "Alex" Padilla, who was appointed to the seat on January 18, 2021.

78 Raphael Warnock was elected on January 5, 2021, by special election, to fill the vacancy caused by the resignation of Johnny Isakson, succeeding Kelly Loeffler, who had been appointed to fill the seat and ran in the special election.

79 Shontel M. Brown was elected on November 2, 2021, by special election, to fill the vacancy caused by the resignation of Marcia L. Fudge.

80 Troy A. Carter was elected on April 24, 2021, by special election, to fill the vacancy caused by the resignation of Cedric L. Richmond.

81 Sheila Cherfilus-McCormick was elected on January 11, 2022, by special election, to fill the vacancy caused by the death of Alcee L. Hastings.

82 Antonio Delgado resigned on May 25, 2022.

83 Marcia L. Fudge resigned on March 10, 2021, and was succeeded in a special election by Shontel M. Brown on November 2, 2021.

84 Alcee L. Hastings died on April 6, 2021, and was succeeded in a special election by Sheila Cherfilus-McCormick on January 11, 2022.

85 Cedric L. Richmond resigned on January 15, 2021, and was succeeded in a special election by Troy A. Carter on April 24, 2021.

APPENDIX B

Black-American Members by State and Territory, 1870–2022

States and territories are listed in descending order according to the number of African Americans that each has sent to Congress.

STATE/TERRITORY	MEMBER	OFFICE	YEAR MEMBER TOOK OFFICE (in chronological order)
Illinois (19)	Oscar De Priest	House	1929
	Arthur W. Mitchell	House	1935
	William L. Dawson	House	1943
	George W. Collins	House	1970
	Ralph H. Metcalfe	House	1971
	Cardiss Collins	House	1973
	Bennett M. Stewart	House	1979
	Gus Savage	House	1981
	Harold Washington	House	1981
	Charles A. Hayes	House	1983
	Carol Moseley Braun	Senate	1993
	Mel Reynolds	House	1993
	Bobby L. Rush	House	1993
	Jesse L. Jackson Jr.	House	1995
	Danny K. Davis	House	1997
	Barack Obama	Senate	2005
	Roland Burris	Senate	2009
	Robin L. Kelly	House	2013
	Lauren Underwood	House	2019
New York (14)	Adam Clayton Powell Jr.	House	1945
	Shirley Chisholm	House	1969
	Charles B. Rangel	House	1971
	Major R. Owens	House	1983
	Edolphus Towns	House	1983
	Alton R. Waldon Jr.	House	1986
	Floyd H. Flake	House	1987
	Gregory W. Meeks	House	1998
	Yvette D. Clarke	House	2007
	Hakeem S. Jeffries	House	2013
	Antonio Delgado	House	2019
	Jamaal Bowman	House	2021
	Mondaire Jones	House	2021
	Ritchie Torres	House	2021
California (13)	Augustus F. “Gus” Hawkins	House	1963
	Ronald V. Dellums	House	1971
	Yvonne Brathwaite Burke	House	1973
	Julian C. Dixon	House	1979
	Mervyn M. Dymally	House	1981
	Maxine Waters	House	1991

STATE/TERRITORY	MEMBER	OFFICE	YEAR MEMBER TOOK OFFICE (in chronological order)
California (13) *continued*	Walter R. Tucker III	House	1993
	Juanita Millender-McDonald	House	1996
	Barbara Lee	House	1998
	Diane E. Watson	House	2001
	Laura Richardson	House	2007
	Karen Bass	House	2011
	Kamala D. Harris	Senate	2017
Georgia (12)	Jefferson F. Long	House	1870
	Andrew Young	House	1973
	John Lewis	House	1987
	Sanford D. Bishop Jr.	House	1993
	Cynthia A. McKinney	House	1993
	Denise L. Majette	House	2003
	David Scott	House	2003
	Henry C. "Hank" Johnson Jr.	House	2007
	Lucy McBath	House	2019
	Kwanza Hall	House	2020
	Raphael Warnock	Senate	2021
	Nikema Williams	House	2021
Florida (11)	Josiah T. Walls	House	1871
	Corrine Brown	House	1993
	Alcee L. Hastings	House	1993
	Carrie P. Meek	House	1993
	Kendrick B. Meek	House	2003
	Allen West	House	2011
	Frederica S. Wilson	House	2011
	Val Butler Demings	House	2017
	Al Lawson Jr.	House	2017
	Byron Donalds	House	2021
	Sheila Cherfilus-McCormick	House	2022
South Carolina (10)	Joseph H. Rainey	House	1870
	Robert C. De Large	House	1871
	Robert Brown Elliott	House	1871
	Richard H. Cain	House	1873
	Alonzo J. Ransier	House	1873
	Robert Smalls	House	1875
	Thomas E. Miller	House	1890
	George Washington Murray	House	1893
	James E. Clyburn	House	1993
	Tim Scott	House and Senate	2011
North Carolina (9)	John Adams Hyman	House	1875
	James E. O'Hara	House	1883
	Henry Plummer Cheatham	House	1889
	George Henry White	House	1897

STATE/TERRITORY	MEMBER	OFFICE	YEAR MEMBER TOOK OFFICE (in chronological order)
North Carolina (9) *continued*	Eva M. Clayton	House	1992
	Melvin L. Watt	House	1993
	Frank W. Ballance Jr.	House	2003
	G.K. Butterfield	House	2004
	Alma S. Adams	House	2014
Texas (9)	Barbara Jordan	House	1973
	Mickey Leland	House	1979
	Craig A. Washington	House	1989
	Eddie Bernice Johnson	House	1993
	Sheila Jackson Lee	House	1995
	Al Green	House	2005
	Marc A. Veasey	House	2013
	Will Hurd	House	2015
	Colin Allred	House	2019
Michigan (8)	Charles C. Diggs Jr.	House	1955
	John Conyers Jr.	House	1965
	George W. Crockett Jr.	House	1980
	Barbara-Rose Collins	House	1991
	Carolyn C. Kilpatrick	House	1997
	Hansen Clarke	House	2011
	Brenda L. Lawrence	House	2015
	Brenda Jones	House	2018
Alabama (6)	Benjamin Sterling Turner	House	1871
	James T. Rapier	House	1873
	Jeremiah Haralson	House	1875
	Earl F. Hilliard	House	1993
	Artur Davis	House	2003
	Terri A. Sewell	House	2011
Maryland (6)	Parren J. Mitchell	House	1971
	Kweisi Mfume	House	1987
	Albert Russell Wynn	House	1993
	Elijah E. Cummings	House	1996
	Donna F. Edwards	House	2008
	Anthony G. Brown	House	2017
Louisiana (5)	Charles E. Nash	House	1875
	William J. Jefferson	House	1991
	Cleo Fields	House	1993
	Cedric L. Richmond	House	2011
	Troy A. Carter	House	2021
Mississippi (5)	Hiram R. Revels	Senate	1870
	John R. Lynch	House	1873
	Blanche K. Bruce	Senate	1875

STATE/TERRITORY	MEMBER	OFFICE	YEAR MEMBER TOOK OFFICE (in chronological order)
Mississippi (5) *continued*	Mike Espy	House	1987
	Bennie G. Thompson	House	1993
Missouri (5)	William Lacy "Bill" Clay Sr.	House	1969
	Alan Wheat	House	1983
	William Lacy Clay Jr.	House	2001
	Emanuel Cleaver II	House	2005
	Cori Bush	House	2021
Ohio (5)	Louis Stokes	House	1969
	Stephanie Tubbs Jones	House	1999
	Marcia L. Fudge	House	2008
	Joyce Beatty	House	2013
	Shontel M. Brown	House	2021
Pennsylvania (5)	Robert N.C. Nix Sr.	House	1958
	William H. Gray III	House	1979
	Lucien E. Blackwell	House	1991
	Chaka Fattah	House	1995
	Dwight Evans	House	2016
New Jersey (4)	Donald M. Payne	House	1989
	Donald M. Payne Jr.	House	2012
	Cory A. Booker	Senate	2013
	Bonnie Watson Coleman	House	2015
U.S. Virgin Islands (4)	Melvin H. Evans	House	1979
	Victor O. Frazer	House	1995
	Donna M. Christensen	House	1997
	Stacey E. Plaskett	House	2015
Indiana (3)	Katie Hall	House	1982
	Julia May Carson	House	1997
	André Carson	House	2008
Massachusetts (3)	Edward W. Brooke	Senate	1967
	William "Mo" Cowan	Senate	2013
	Ayanna Pressley	House	2019
Virginia (3)	John M. Langston	House	1890
	Robert C. "Bobby" Scott	House	1993
	A. Donald McEachin	House	2017
Connecticut (2)	Gary A. Franks	House	1991
	Jahana Hayes	House	2019
District of Columbia (2)	Walter E. Fauntroy	House	1971
	Eleanor Holmes Norton	House	1991
Minnesota (2)	Keith Ellison	House	2007
	Ilhan Omar	House	2019

STATE/TERRITORY	MEMBER	OFFICE	YEAR MEMBER TOOK OFFICE (in chronological order)
Tennessee (2)	Harold E. Ford	House	1975
	Harold E. Ford Jr.	House	1997
Utah (2)	Mia B. Love	House	2015
	Burgess Owens	House	2021
Colorado (1)	Joe Neguse	House	2019
Delaware (1)	Lisa Blunt Rochester	House	2017
Nevada (1)	Steven A. Horsford	House	2013
Oklahoma (1)	J.C. Watts Jr.	House	1995
Washington (1)	Marilyn Strickland	House	2021
Wisconsin (1)	Gwen Moore	House	2005

The closing date for this volume was June 1, 2022.

Note: The following states and territories have never elected or appointed an African American to Congress: Alaska, American Samoa, Arizona, Arkansas, Guam, Hawaii, Idaho, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Maine, Montana, Nebraska, New Hampshire, New Mexico, North Dakota, Northern Mariana Islands, Oregon, Puerto Rico, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Vermont, West Virginia, and Wyoming.

Source: History, Art & Archives, U.S. House of Representatives, "Black-American Members by State and Territory," https://history.house.gov/Exhibitions-and-Publications/BAIC/Historical-Data/Black-American-Representatives-and-Senators-by-State-and-Territory/.

APPENDIX C

Black-American Chairs of Congressional Committees, 1877–2022

CONGRESS	MEMBER (PARTY-STATE)	HOUSE COMMITTEE
81st–82nd (1949–1953)	William L. Dawson (D-IL)	Expenditures in the Executive Departments
84th–91st (1955–1971)	William L. Dawson (D-IL)	Government Operations
87th–89th (1961–1967)	Adam Clayton Powell Jr. (D-NY)	Education and Labor
93rd–95th (1973–1979)	Charles C. Diggs Jr. (D-MI)	District of Columbia
94th (1975–1977)	Yvonne Brathwaite Burke (D-CA)	Select Committee on the House Beauty Shop
95th (1977–1979)	Robert N.C. Nix Sr. (D-PA)	Post Office and Civil Service
95th (1977–1979)	Louis Stokes (D-OH)	Select Committee on Assassinations
96th–102nd (1979–1993)	Ronald V. Dellums (D-CA)	District of Columbia
97th–98th (1981–1985)	Augustus F. "Gus" Hawkins (D-CA)	House Administration
97th–99th (1981–1987)	Parren J. Mitchell (D-MD)	Small Business
97th–98th, 102nd (1981–1985; 1991–1993)	Louis Stokes (D-OH)	Standards of Official Conduct
98th–101st (1983–1991)	Augustus F. "Gus" Hawkins (D-CA)	Education and Labor
98th–101st (1983–1991)	Mickey Leland (D-TX)	Select Committee on Hunger
98th–102nd (1983–1993)	Charles B. Rangel (D-NY)	Select Committee on Narcotics Abuse and Control
99th–100th (1985–1989)	William H. Gray III (D-PA)	Budget
99th–101st (1985–1991)	Julian C. Dixon (D-CA)	Standards of Official Conduct
100th (1987–1989)	Louis Stokes (D-OH)	Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence
101st–103rd (1989–1995)	John Conyers Jr. (D-MI)	Government Operations
102nd–103rd (1991–1995)	William Lacy "Bill" Clay Sr. (D-MO)	Post Office and Civil Service
103rd (1993–1995)	Ronald V. Dellums (D-CA)	Armed Services
110th (2007–2009)	Stephanie Tubbs Jones (D-OH)	Standards of Official Conduct
110th (2007–2009)	Juanita Millender-McDonald (D-CA)	House Administration
110th–111th (2007–2011)	John Conyers Jr. (D-MI)	Judiciary
110th–111th (2007–2011)	Charles B. Rangel (D-NY)	Ways and Means

CONGRESS/YEAR	MEMBER (PARTY-STATE)	HOUSE COMMITTEE
110th–111th, 116th–117th (2007–2011; 2019–2023)	Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS)	Homeland Security
111th (2009–2011)	Edolphus Towns (D-NY)	Oversight and Government Reform
116th (2019–2021)	Elijah E. Cummings (D-MD)	Oversight and Reform
116th–117th (2019–2023)	Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX)	Science, Space, and Technology
116th–117th (2019–2023)	Robert C. "Bobby" Scott (D-VA)	Education and Labor
116th–117th (2019–2023)	Maxine Waters (D-CA)	Financial Services
117th (2021–2023)	Gregory W. Meeks (D-NY)	Foreign Affairs
117th (2021–2023)	David Scott (D-GA)	Agriculture
117th (2021–2023)	Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS)	Select Committee to Investigate the January 6th Attack on the United States Capitol

CONGRESS/YEAR	MEMBER (PARTY-STATE)	SENATE COMMITTEE
45th (1877–1879)	Blanche K. Bruce (R-MS)	Select Committee on the Levees of the Mississippi River
46th (1879–1881)	Blanche K. Bruce (R-MS)	Select Committee to Investigate the Freedman's Savings and Trust Company

CONGRESS/YEAR	MEMBER (PARTY-STATE)	JOINT COMMITTEE
96th, 98th (1979–1981; 1983–1985)	Augustus F. "Gus" Hawkins (D-CA)	Joint Committee on Printing
97th (1981–1983)	Augustus F. "Gus" Hawkins (D-CA)	Joint Committee on the Library
99th–100th (1985–1989)	William H. Gray III (D-PA)	Temporary Joint Committee on Deficit Reduction
103rd (1993–1995)	Kweisi Mfume (D-MD)	Joint Economic Committee
110th–111th (2007–2011)	Charles B. Rangel (D-NY)	Joint Committee on Taxation

The closing date for this volume was June 1, 2022.

Sources: History, Art & Archives, U.S. House of Representatives, "Black Americans Who Have Chaired Standing Committees in the U.S. House," https://history.house.gov/Exhibitions-and-Publications/BAIC/Historical-Data/Black-American-Chairs-of-Congressional-Committees/; U.S. Senate Historical Office, https://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/common/generic/Senate_Historical_Office.htm.

APPENDIX D

Black-American Chairs of Congressional Subcommittees, 1949–2022

CONGRESS	MEMBER (PARTY-STATE)	HOUSE COMMITTEE	SUBCOMMITTEE
HOUSE SUBCOMMITTEES			
81st (1949–1951)	Adam Clayton Powell Jr. (D-NY)	Education and Labor	Special Subcommittee on Fair Employment Practice Act
82nd–83rd (1951–1955)	N/A		
84th (1955–1957)	William L. Dawson (D-IL)	Government Operations	Executive and Legislative Reorganization
85th (1957–1959)	William L. Dawson (D-IL)	Government Operations	Executive and Legislative Reorganization
86th (1959–1961)	William L. Dawson (D-IL)	Government Operations	Executive and Legislative Reorganization
	Adam Clayton Powell Jr. (D-NY)	Interior and Insular Affairs	Mines and Mining
87th (1961–1963)	William L. Dawson (D-IL)	Government Operations	Executive and Legislative Reorganization
	Adam Clayton Powell Jr. (D-NY)	Education and Labor	Labor-Management Irregularities
88th (1963–1965)	William L. Dawson (D-IL)	Government Operations	Executive and Legislative Reorganization
	Adam Clayton Powell Jr. (D-NY)	Education and Labor	Ad Hoc Subcommittee on the International Labor Organization
	Adam Clayton Powell Jr. (D-NY)	Education and Labor	Ad Hoc Subcommittee on the War on Poverty Program
89th (1965–1967)	William L. Dawson (D-IL)	Government Operations	Executive and Legislative Reorganization
	Robert N.C. Nix Sr. (D-PA)	Post Office and Civil Service	Census and Statistics
	Adam Clayton Powell Jr. (D-NY)	Education and Labor	Ad Hoc Subcommittee on De Facto School Segregation
	Adam Clayton Powell Jr. (D-NY)	Education and Labor	Ad Hoc Subcommittee on the International Labor Organization
	Adam Clayton Powell Jr. (D-NY)	Education and Labor	Ad Hoc Subcommittee on the War on Poverty Program
90th (1967–1969)	William L. Dawson (D-IL)	Government Operations	Special Studies
	Charles C. Diggs Jr. (D-MI)	District of Columbia	Subcommittee No. 2
	Robert N.C. Nix Sr. (D-PA)	Post Office and Civil Service	Postal Operations
91st (1969–1971)	Charles C. Diggs Jr. (D-MI)	District of Columbia	Subcommittee No. 2
	Charles C. Diggs Jr. (D-MI)	Foreign Affairs	Africa
	Robert N.C. Nix Sr. (D-PA)	Foreign Affairs	Foreign Economic Policy
	Robert N.C. Nix Sr. (D-PA)	Post Office and Civil Service	Postal Operations
92nd (1971–1973)	Charles C. Diggs Jr. (D-MI)	Foreign Affairs	Africa
	Augustus F. "Gus" Hawkins (D-CA)	House Administration	Contracts
	Robert N.C. Nix Sr. (D-PA)	Post Office and Civil Service	Postal Facilities and Mail
93rd (1973–1975)	John Conyers Jr. (D-MI)	Judiciary	Crime
	Ronald V. Dellums (D-CA)	District of Columbia	Education

CONGRESS	MEMBER (PARTY-STATE)	HOUSE COMMITTEE	SUBCOMMITTEE
93rd (1973–1975) *continued*	Charles C. Diggs Jr. (D-MI)	Foreign Affairs	Africa
	Walter E. Fauntroy (D-DC)	District of Columbia	Judiciary
	Augustus F. "Gus" Hawkins (D-CA)	Education and Labor	Equal Opportunities
	Augustus F. "Gus" Hawkins (D-CA)	House Administration	Electrical and Mechanical Office Equipment
	Robert N.C. Nix Sr. (D-PA)	Foreign Affairs	Asian and Pacific Affairs
94th (1975–1977)	William Lacy "Bill" Clay Sr. (D-MO)	Post Office and Civil Service	Employee Political Rights and Intergovernmental Programs
	John Conyers Jr. (D-MI)	Judiciary	Crime
	Ronald V. Dellums (D-CA)	District of Columbia	Education, Labor and Social Services
	Charles C. Diggs Jr. (D-MI)	International Relations	International Resources, Food, and Energy
	Walter E. Fauntroy (D-DC)	District of Columbia	Government Operations
	Augustus F. "Gus" Hawkins (D-CA)	Education and Labor	Equal Opportunities
	Augustus F. "Gus" Hawkins (D-CA)	House Administration	Electrical and Mechanical Office Equipment
	Ralph H. Metcalfe (D-IL)	Merchant Marine and Fisheries	Panama Canal
	Parren J. Mitchell (D-MD)	Budget	Task Force on Human Resources
	Robert N.C. Nix Sr. (D-PA)	International Relations	International Economic Policy
	Louis Stokes (D-OH)	Budget	Task Force on Community Resources and General Government
95th (1977–1979)	William Lacy "Bill" Clay Sr. (D-MO)	Post Office and Civil Service	Civil Service
	Cardiss Collins (D-IL)	Government Operations	Manpower and Housing
	John Conyers Jr. (D-MI)	Judiciary	Crime
	Ronald V. Dellums (D-CA)	District of Columbia	Fiscal and Government Affairs
	Charles C. Diggs Jr. (D-MI)	International Relations	Africa
	Walter E. Fauntroy (D-DC)	Banking, Finance, and Urban Affairs	Historic Preservation and Coinage
	Walter E. Fauntroy (D-DC)	Select Committee on Assassinations	Assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr.
	Augustus F. "Gus" Hawkins (D-CA)	Education and Labor	Employment Opportunities
	Augustus F. "Gus" Hawkins (D-CA)	House Administration	Printing
	Ralph H. Metcalfe (D-IL)	Merchant Marine and Fisheries	Panama Canal
	Parren J. Mitchell (D-MD)	Banking, Finance, and Urban Affairs	Domestic Monetary Policy
	Parren J. Mitchell (D-MD)	Budget	Task Force on Human Resources
	Robert N.C. Nix Sr. (D-PA)	Post Office and Civil Service	Investigations
	Louis Stokes (D-OH)	Budget	Task Force on Community and Physical Resources
96th (1979–1981)	William Lacy "Bill" Clay Sr. (D-MO)	Post Office and Civil Service	Postal Personnel and Modernization
	Cardiss Collins (D-IL)	Government Operations	Manpower and Housing
	John Conyers Jr. (D-MI)	Judiciary	Crime
	Ronald V. Dellums (D-CA)	District of Columbia	Fiscal Affairs and Health
	Julian C. Dixon (D-CA)	Appropriations	District of Columbia Appropriations
	Walter E. Fauntroy (D-DC)	District of Columbia	Government Affairs and Budget
	Augustus F. "Gus" Hawkins (D-CA)	Education and Labor	Employment Opportunities
	Augustus F. "Gus" Hawkins (D-CA)	House Administration	Printing
	Parren J. Mitchell (D-MD)	Banking, Finance, and Urban Affairs	Domestic Monetary Policy
	Charles B. Rangel (D-NY)	Ways and Means	Health

CONGRESS	MEMBER (PARTY-STATE)	HOUSE COMMITTEE	SUBCOMMITTEE
96th (1979–1981) *continued*	Louis Stokes (D-OH)	Budget	Task Force on Human and Community Resources
97th (1981–1983)	William Lacy "Bill" Clay Sr. (D-MO)	Post Office and Civil Service	Postal Operations and Services
	Cardiss Collins (D-IL)	Government Operations	Manpower and Housing
	John Conyers Jr. (D-MI)	Judiciary	Criminal Justice
	Ronald V. Dellums (D-CA)	District of Columbia	Fiscal Affairs and Health
	Julian C. Dixon (D-CA)	Appropriations	District of Columbia Appropriations
	Mervyn M. Dymally (D-CA)	District of Columbia	Judiciary and Education
	Walter E. Fauntroy (D-DC)	Banking, Finance, and Urban Affairs	Domestic Monetary Policy
	Harold E. Ford (D-TN)	Ways and Means	Public Assistance and Unemployment Compensation
	William H. Gray III (D-PA)	District of Columbia	Government Operations and Metropolitan Affairs
	Augustus F. "Gus" Hawkins (D-CA)	Education and Labor	Employment Opportunities
	Mickey Leland (D-TX)	Post Office and Civil Service	Postal Personnel and Modernization
	Parren J. Mitchell (D-MD)	Small Business	SBA and SBIC Authority, Minority Enterprise and General Small Business Problems
	Charles B. Rangel (D-NY)	Ways and Means	Oversight
98th (1983–1985)	William Lacy "Bill" Clay Sr. (D-MO)	Education and Labor	Labor-Management Relations
	William Lacy "Bill" Clay Sr. (D-MO)	Post Office and Civil Service	Postal Operations and Services
	Cardiss Collins (D-IL)	Government Operations	Government Activities and Transportation
	John Conyers Jr. (D-MI)	Judiciary	Criminal Justice
	Ronald V. Dellums (D-CA)	Armed Services	Military Installations and Facilities
	Julian C. Dixon (D-CA)	Appropriations	District of Columbia Appropriations
	Mervyn M. Dymally (D-CA)	District of Columbia	Judiciary and Education
	Walter E. Fauntroy (D-DC)	Banking, Finance, and Urban Affairs	Domestic Monetary Policy
	Walter E. Fauntroy (D-DC)	District of Columbia	Fiscal Affairs and Health
	Harold E. Ford (D-TN)	Ways and Means	Public Assistance and Unemployment Compensation
	William H. Gray III (D-PA)	District of Columbia	Government Operations and Metropolitan Affairs
	Katie Hall (D-IN)	Post Office and Civil Service	Census and Population
	Augustus F. "Gus" Hawkins (D-CA)	Education and Labor	Employment Opportunities
	Mickey Leland (D-TX)	Post Office and Civil Service	Postal Personnel and Modernization
	Parren J. Mitchell (D-MD)	Joint Economic Committee	Investment, Jobs, and Prices
	Parren J. Mitchell (D-MD)	Small Business	SBA and SBIC Authority, Minority Enterprise and General Small Business Problems
	Charles B. Rangel (D-NY)	Ways and Means	Oversight
99th (1985–1987)	William Lacy "Bill" Clay Sr. (D-MO)	Education and Labor	Labor-Management Relations
	Cardiss Collins (D-IL)	Government Operations	Government Activities and Transportation
	John Conyers Jr. (D-MI)	Judiciary	Criminal Justice
	Ronald V. Dellums (D-CA)	Armed Services	Military Installations and Facilities
	Julian C. Dixon (D-CA)	Appropriations	District of Columbia Appropriations
	Mervyn M. Dymally (D-CA)	District of Columbia	Judiciary and Education

CONGRESS	MEMBER (PARTY-STATE)	HOUSE COMMITTEE	SUBCOMMITTEE
99th (1985–1987) *continued*	Mervyn M. Dymally (D-CA)	Post Office and Civil Service	Postal Personnel and Modernization
	Walter E. Fauntroy (D-DC)	Banking, Finance, and Urban Affairs	Domestic Monetary Policy
	Walter E. Fauntroy (D-DC)	District of Columbia	Fiscal Affairs and Health
	Harold E. Ford (D-TN)	Ways and Means	Public Assistance and Unemployment Compensation
	Augustus F. "Gus" Hawkins (D-CA)	Education and Labor	Elementary, Secondary, and Vocational Education
	Mickey Leland (D-TX)	Post Office and Civil Service	Postal Operations and Services
	Parren J. Mitchell (D-MD)	Joint Economic Committee	Investment, Jobs, and Prices
	Parren J. Mitchell (D-MD)	Small Business	SBA and SBIC Authority, Minority Enterprise and General Small Business Problems
	Charles B. Rangel (D-NY)	Ways and Means	Select Revenue Measures
	Louis Stokes (D-OH)	Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence	Program and Budget Authorization
100th (1987–1989)	William Lacy "Bill" Clay Sr. (D-MO)	Education and Labor	Labor-Management Relations
	Cardiss Collins (D-IL)	Government Operations	Government Activities and Transportation
	John Conyers Jr. (D-MI)	Judiciary	Criminal Justice
	George W. Crockett Jr. (D-MI)	Foreign Affairs	Western Hemisphere Affairs
	Ronald V. Dellums (D-CA)	Armed Services	Military Installations and Facilities
	Julian C. Dixon (D-CA)	Appropriations	District of Columbia Appropriations
	Mervyn M. Dymally (D-CA)	District of Columbia	Judiciary and Education
	Mervyn M. Dymally (D-CA)	Post Office and Civil Service	Census and Population
	Walter E. Fauntroy (D-DC)	Banking, Finance, and Urban Affairs	International Development Institutions and Finance
	Walter E. Fauntroy (D-DC)	District of Columbia	Fiscal Affairs and Health
	Harold E. Ford (D-TN)	Ways and Means	Public Assistance and Unemployment Compensation
	Augustus F. "Gus" Hawkins (D-CA)	Education and Labor	Elementary, Secondary, and Vocational Education
	Augustus F. "Gus" Hawkins (D-CA)	Joint Economic Committee	Investment, Jobs, and Prices
	Mickey Leland (D-TX)	Post Office and Civil Service	Postal Operations and Services
	Major R. Owens (D-NY)	Education and Labor	Select Education
	Charles B. Rangel (D-NY)	Ways and Means	Select Revenue Measures
	Gus Savage (D-IL)	Public Works and Transportation	Economic Development
	Louis Stokes (D-OH)	Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence	Program and Budget Authorization
	Alan Wheat (D-MO)	District of Columbia	Government Operations and Metropolitan Affairs
101st (1989–1991)	William Lacy "Bill" Clay Sr. (D-MO)	Education and Labor	Labor-Management Relations
	William Lacy "Bill" Clay Sr. (D-MO)	House Administration	Libraries and Memorials
	Cardiss Collins (D-IL)	Government Operations	Government Activities and Transportation
	John Conyers Jr. (D-MI)	Government Operations	Legislation and National Security
	George W. Crockett Jr. (D-MI)	Foreign Affairs	Western Hemisphere Affairs
	Ronald V. Dellums (D-CA)	Armed Services	Research and Development
	Julian C. Dixon (D-CA)	Appropriations	District of Columbia Appropriations

CONGRESS	MEMBER (PARTY-STATE)	HOUSE COMMITTEE	SUBCOMMITTEE
101st (1989–1991) *continued*	Mervyn M. Dymally (D-CA)	District of Columbia	Judiciary and Education
	Mervyn M. Dymally (D-CA)	Foreign Affairs	International Operations
	Mike Espy (D-MS)	Select Committee on Hunger	Domestic Task Force
	Walter E. Fauntroy (D-DC)	Banking, Finance, and Urban Affairs	International Development, Finance, Trade and Monetary Policy
	Walter E. Fauntroy (D-DC)	District of Columbia	Fiscal Affairs and Health
	Harold E. Ford (D-TN)	Ways and Means	Human Resources
	Augustus F. "Gus" Hawkins (D-CA)	Education and Labor	Elementary, Secondary, and Vocational Education
	Augustus F. "Gus" Hawkins (D-CA)	Joint Economic Committee	Investment, Jobs, and Prices
	Charles A. Hayes (D-IL)	Post Office and Civil Service	Postal Personnel and Modernization
	Mickey Leland (D-TX)	Post Office and Civil Service	Postal Operations and Services
	Major R. Owens (D-NY)	Education and Labor	Select Education
	Charles B. Rangel (D-NY)	Ways and Means	Select Revenue Measures
	Gus Savage (D-IL)	Public Works and Transportation	Economic Development
	Alan Wheat (D-MO)	District of Columbia	Government Operations and Metropolitan Affairs
102nd (1991–1993)	William Lacy "Bill" Clay Sr. (D-MO)	House Administration	Libraries and Memorials
	William Lacy "Bill" Clay Sr. (D-MO)	Post Office and Civil Service	Investigations
	Cardiss Collins (D-IL)	Energy and Commerce	Commerce, Consumer Protection, and Competitiveness
	John Conyers Jr. (D-MI)	Government Operations	Legislation and National Security
	Ronald V. Dellums (D-CA)	Armed Services	Research and Development
	Julian C. Dixon (D-CA)	Appropriations	District of Columbia Appropriations
	Mervyn M. Dymally (D-CA)	District of Columbia	Judiciary and Education
	Mervyn M. Dymally (D-CA)	Foreign Affairs	Africa
	Mike Espy (D-MS)	Budget	Task Force on Community Development and Natural Resources
	Mike Espy (D-MS)	Select Committee on Hunger	Domestic Task Force
	Harold E. Ford (D-TN)	Ways and Means	Human Resources
	Charles A. Hayes (D-IL)	Post Office and Civil Service	Postal Personnel and Modernization
	Major R. Owens (D-NY)	Education and Labor	Select Education
	Charles B. Rangel (D-NY)	Ways and Means	Select Revenue Measures
	Gus Savage (D-IL)	Public Works and Transportation	Public Buildings and Grounds
	Alan Wheat (D-MO)	District of Columbia	Government Operations and Metropolitan Affairs
103rd (1993–1995)	William Lacy "Bill" Clay Sr. (D-MO)	House Administration	Libraries and Memorials
	William Lacy "Bill" Clay Sr. (D-MO)	Post Office and Civil Service	Oversight and Investigations
	Barbara-Rose Collins (D-MI)	Post Office and Civil Service	Postal Operations and Services
	Cardiss Collins (D-IL)	Energy and Commerce	Commerce, Consumer Protection, and Competitiveness
	John Conyers Jr. (D-MI)	Government Operations	Legislation and National Security
	Ronald V. Dellums (D-CA)	Armed Services	Military Acquisition
	Julian C. Dixon (D-CA)	Appropriations	District of Columbia Appropriations
	Floyd H. Flake (D-NY)	Banking, Finance, and Urban Affairs	General Oversight, Investigations, and the Resolution of Failed Financial Institutions

CONGRESS	MEMBER (PARTY-STATE)	HOUSE COMMITTEE	SUBCOMMITTEE
103rd (1993–1995) *continued*	Harold E. Ford (D-TN)	Ways and Means	Human Resources
	Kweisi Mfume (D-MD)	Small Business	Minority Enterprise, Finance, and Urban Development
	Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC)	District of Columbia	Judiciary and Education
	Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC)	Post Office and Civil Service	Compensation and Employee Benefits
	Major R. Owens (D-NY)	Education and Labor	Select Education and Civil Rights
	Charles B. Rangel (D-NY)	Ways and Means	Select Revenue Measures
	Louis Stokes (D-OH)	Appropriations	VA, HUD, and Independent Agencies
	Edolphus Towns (D-NY)	Government Operations	Human Resources and Intergovernmental Relations
	Alan Wheat (D-MO)	District of Columbia	Government Operations and Metropolitan Affairs
104th–109th (1995–2007)	N/A		
110th (2007–2009)	Corrine Brown (D-FL)	Transportation and Infrastructure	Railroads, Pipelines, and Hazardous Materials
	Donna M. Christensen (D-VI)	Natural Resources	Insular Affairs
	William Lacy Clay Jr. (D-MO)	Oversight and Government Reform	Information Policy, Census, and National Archives
	Elijah E. Cummings (D-MD)	Transportation and Infrastructure	Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation
	Danny K. Davis (D-IL)	Oversight and Government Reform	Federal Workforce, Postal Service, and the District of Columbia
	Alcee L. Hastings (D-FL)	Rules	Legislative and Budget Process
	Sheila Jackson Lee (D-TX)	Homeland Security	Transportation Security and Infrastructure Protection
	Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX)	Transportation and Infrastructure	Water Resources and Environment
	John Lewis (D-GA)	Ways and Means	Oversight
	Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC)	Transportation and Infrastructure	Economic Development, Public Buildings, and Emergency Management
	Donald M. Payne (D-NJ)	Foreign Affairs	Africa and Global Health
	Bobby L. Rush (D-IL)	Energy and Commerce	Commerce, Trade, and Consumer Protection
	Robert C. "Bobby" Scott (D-VA)	Judiciary	Crime, Terrorism, and Homeland Security
	Edolphus Towns (D-NY)	Oversight and Government Reform	Government Management, Organization, and Procurement
	Maxine Waters (D-CA)	Financial Services	Housing and Community Opportunity
	Melvin L. Watt (D-NC)	Financial Services	Oversight and Investigations
	Albert Russell Wynn (D-MD)	Energy and Commerce	Environment and Hazardous Materials
111th (2009–2011)	Corrine Brown (D-FL)	Transportation and Infrastructure	Railroads, Pipelines, and Hazardous Materials
	Yvette D. Clarke (D-NY)	Homeland Security	Emerging Threats, Cybersecurity, and Science and Technology
	William Lacy Clay Jr. (D-MO)	Oversight and Government Reform	Information Policy, Census, and National Archives
	Elijah E. Cummings (D-MD)	Transportation and Infrastructure	Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation
	Alcee L. Hastings (D-FL)	Rules	Legislative and Budget Process
	Sheila Jackson Lee (D-TX)	Homeland Security	Transportation Security and Infrastructure Protection

CONGRESS	MEMBER (PARTY-STATE)	HOUSE COMMITTEE	SUBCOMMITTEE
111th (2009–2011) *continued*	Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX)	Transportation and Infrastructure	Water Resources and Environment
	Henry C. "Hank" Johnson Jr. (D-GA)	Judiciary	Courts and Competition Policy
	John Lewis (D-GA)	Ways and Means	Oversight
	Gregory W. Meeks (D-NY)	Financial Services	International Monetary Policy and Trade
	Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC)	Transportation and Infrastructure	Economic Development, Public Buildings, and Emergency Management
	Donald M. Payne (D-NJ)	Foreign Affairs	Africa and Global Health
	Laura Richardson (D-CA)	Homeland Security	Emergency Communications, Preparedness, and Response
	Bobby L. Rush (D-IL)	Energy and Commerce	Commerce, Trade, and Consumer Protection
	David Scott (D-GA)	Agriculture	Livestock, Dairy, and Poultry
	Robert C. "Bobby" Scott (D-VA)	Judiciary	Crime, Terrorism, and Homeland Security
	Maxine Waters (D-CA)	Financial Services	Housing and Community Opportunity
	Diane E. Watson (D-CA)	Oversight and Government Reform	Government Management, Organization, and Procurement
	Melvin L. Watt (D-NC)	Financial Services	Domestic Monetary Policy and Technology
112th–113th (2011–2015)	N/A		
114th (2015–2017)	Will Hurd (R-TX)	Oversight and Government Reform	Information Technology
115th (2017–2019)	Will Hurd (R-TX)	Oversight and Government Reform	Information Technology
116th (2019–2021)	Alma S. Adams (D-NC)	Education and Labor	Workforce Protections
	Karen Bass (D-CA)	Foreign Affairs	Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights, and International Organizations
	Karen Bass (D-CA)	Judiciary	Crime, Terrorism, and Homeland Security
	Joyce Beatty (D-OH)	Financial Services	Diversity and Inclusion
	Sanford D. Bishop Jr. (D-GA)	Appropriations	Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies
	André Carson (D-IN)	Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence	Counterterrorism, Counterintelligence, and Counterproliferation
	William Lacy Clay Jr. (D-MO)	Financial Services	Housing, Community Development, and Insurance
	Emanuel Cleaver II (D-MO)	Financial Services	National Security, International Development and Monetary Policy
	James E. Clyburn (D-SC)	Oversight and Reform	Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis
	Danny K. Davis (D-IL)	Ways and Means	Worker and Family Support
	Marcia L. Fudge (D-OH)	Agriculture	Nutrition, Oversight, and Department Operations
	Marcia L. Fudge (D-OH)	House Administration	Elections
	Al Green (D-TX)	Financial Services	Oversight and Investigations
	Alcee L. Hastings (D-FL)	Rules	Legislative and Budget Process
	Henry C. "Hank" Johnson Jr. (D-GA)	Judiciary	Courts, Intellectual Property, and the Internet
	John Lewis (D-GA)	Ways and Means	Oversight

CONGRESS	MEMBER (PARTY-STATE)	HOUSE COMMITTEE	SUBCOMMITTEE
116th (2019–2021) *continued*	Gregory W. Meeks (D-NY)	Financial Services	Consumer Protection and Financial Institutions
	Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC)	Transportation and Infrastructure	Highways and Transit
	Donald M. Payne Jr. (D-NJ)	Homeland Security	Emergency Preparedness, Response, and Recovery
	Stacey E. Plaskett (D-VI)	Agriculture	Biotechnology, Horticulture, and Research
	Cedric L. Richmond (D-LA)	Homeland Security	Cybersecurity, Infrastructure Protection, and Innovation
	Bobby L. Rush (D-IL)	Energy and Commerce	Energy
	David Scott (D-GA)	Agriculture	Commodity Exchanges, Energy, and Credit
	Terri A. Sewell (D-AL)	Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence	Defense Intelligence and Warfighter Support
	Lauren Underwood (D-IL)	Homeland Security	Cybersecurity, Infrastructure Protection, and Innovation
	Frederica S. Wilson (D-FL)	Education and Labor	Health, Employment, Labor, and Pensions
117th (2021–2023)	Alma S. Adams (D-NC)	Education and Labor	Workforce Protections
	Karen Bass (D-CA)	Foreign Affairs	Africa, Global Health, and Global Human Rights
	Joyce Beatty (D-OH)	Financial Services	Diversity and Inclusion
	Sanford D. Bishop Jr. (D-GA)	Appropriations	Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies
	Jamaal Bowman (D-NY)	Science, Space, and Technology	Energy
	G.K. Butterfield (D-NC)	House Administration	Elections
	André Carson (D-IN)	Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence	Counterterrorism, Counterintelligence, and Counterproliferation
	Yvette D. Clarke (D-NY)	Homeland Security	Cybersecurity, Infrastructure Protection, and Innovation
	Emanuel Cleaver II (D-MO)	Financial Services	Housing, Community Development, and Insurance
	James E. Clyburn (D-SC)	Oversight and Reform	Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis
	Danny K. Davis (D-IL)	Ways and Means	Worker and Family Support
	Antonio Delgado (D-NY)	Agriculture	Commodity Exchanges, Energy, and Credit
	Val Butler Demings (D-FL)	Homeland Security	Emergency Preparedness, Response, and Recovery
	Al Green (D-TX)	Financial Services	Oversight and Investigations
	Alcee L. Hastings (D-FL)	Rules	Legislative and Budget Process
	Jahana Hayes (D-CT)	Agriculture	Nutrition, Oversight, and Department Operations
	Sheila Jackson Lee (D-TX)	Judiciary	Crime, Terrorism, and Homeland Security
	Henry C. "Hank" Johnson Jr. (D-GA)	Judiciary	Courts, Intellectual Property, and the Internet
	Barbara Lee (D-CA)	Appropriations	State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs
	Kweisi Mfume (D-MD)	Small Business	Contracting and Infrastructure
	Joe Neguse (D-CO)	Natural Resources	National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands

CONGRESS	MEMBER (PARTY-STATE)	SENATE COMMITTEE	SUBCOMMITTEE
117th (2021–2023) *continued*	Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC)	Transportation and Infrastructure	Highways and Transit
	Donald M. Payne Jr. (D-NJ)	Transportation and Infrastructure	Railroads, Pipelines, and Hazardous Materials
	Stacey E. Plaskett (D-VI)	Agriculture	Biotechnology, Horticulture, and Research
	Bobby L. Rush (D-IL)	Energy and Commerce	Energy
	Bonnie Watson Coleman (D-NJ)	Homeland Security	Transportation and Maritime Security
	Frederica S. Wilson (D-FL)	Education and Labor	Higher Education and Workforce Investment

CONGRESS	MEMBER (PARTY-STATE)	SENATE COMMITTEE	SUBCOMMITTEE
SENATE SUBCOMMITTEES			
110th (2007–2009)	Barack Obama (D-IL)	Foreign Relations	European Affairs
111th–112th (2009–2013)	N/A		
113th (2013–2015)	Cory A. Booker (D-NJ)	Environment and Public Works	Oversight
	William "Mo" Cowan (D-MA)	Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry	Nutrition, Specialty Crops, Food and Agricultural Research
114th (2015–2017)	Tim Scott (R-SC)	Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs	Housing, Transportation, and Community Development
115th (2017–2019)	Tim Scott (R-SC)	Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs	Housing, Transportation, and Community Development
	Tim Scott (R-SC)	Finance	Fiscal Responsibility and Economic Growth
116th (2019–2021)	Tim Scott (R-SC)	Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs	Financial Institutions and Consumer Protection
	Tim Scott (R-SC)	Finance	Energy, Natural Resources, and Infrastructure
117th (2021–2023)	Cory A. Booker (D-NJ)	Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry	Food and Nutrition, Specialty Crops, Organics, and Research
	Cory A. Booker (D-NJ)	Judiciary	Criminal Justice and Counterterrorism
	Raphael Warnock (D-GA)	Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry	Commodities, Risk Management, and Trade
	Raphael Warnock (D-GA)	Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs	Financial Institutions and Consumer Protection

The closing date for this volume was June 1, 2022.

Sources: History, Art & Archives, U.S. House of Representatives, "Black Americans Who Have Chaired Subcommittees of Standing Committees in the U.S. House," https://history.house.gov/Exhibitions-and-Publications/BAIC/Historical-Data/Black-American-Chairs-of-Subcommittees/; U.S. Senate Historical Office, https://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/common/generic/Senate_Historical_Office.htm.

Note: Information on subcommittees before the Legislative Reorganization Act of 1946 is not available in the published record. A complete analysis of the period before 1947 awaits a thorough study of committee minute books, which are deposited at the Center for Legislative Archives, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA). Not all committee records for this period are complete because the House and Senate did not have a formal process for transferring committee records to NARA until the Legislative Reorganization Act of 1946 took effect.

APPENDIX E

Black Americans in Party Leadership Positions, 1975–2022

CONGRESS	MEMBER (PARTY-STATE)	CAUCUS/CONFERENCE	POSITION
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES			
94th (1975–1977)	Shirley Chisholm (D-NY)	Democratic Caucus	Assistant Secretary
95th (1977–1979)	Shirley Chisholm (D-NY)	Democratic Caucus	Secretary
96th (1979–1981)	Shirley Chisholm (D-NY)	Democratic Caucus	Secretary
101st (1989–1991)	William H. Gray III (D-PA)	Democratic Caucus	Chair
	William H. Gray III (D-PA)	Democratic Caucus	Majority Whip
102nd (1991–1993)	William H. Gray III (D-PA)	Democratic Caucus	Majority Whip
	John Lewis (D-GA)	Democratic Caucus	Chief Deputy Whip
103rd (1993–1995)	John Lewis (D-GA)	Democratic Caucus	Chief Deputy Whip
104th (1995–1997)	John Lewis (D-GA)	Democratic Caucus	Chief Deputy Whip
105th (1997–1999)	John Lewis (D-GA)	Democratic Caucus	Chief Deputy Whip
106th (1999–2001)	John Lewis (D-GA)	Democratic Caucus	Chief Deputy Whip
	Maxine Waters (D-CA)	Democratic Caucus	Chief Deputy Whip
	J.C. Watts Jr. (R-OK)	Republican Conference	Chair
107th (2001–2003)	John Lewis (D-GA)	Democratic Caucus	Chief Deputy Whip
	Maxine Waters (D-CA)	Democratic Caucus	Chief Deputy Whip
	J.C. Watts Jr. (R-OK)	Republican Conference	Chair
108th (2003–2005)	James E. Clyburn (D-SC)	Democratic Caucus	Vice Chair
	John Lewis (D-GA)	Democratic Caucus	Senior Chief Deputy Whip
	Maxine Waters (D-CA)	Democratic Caucus	Chief Deputy Whip
109th (2005–2007)	James E. Clyburn (D-SC)	Democratic Caucus	Vice Chair
	James E. Clyburn (D-SC)	Democratic Caucus	Chair
	John Lewis (D-GA)	Democratic Caucus	Senior Chief Deputy Whip
	Maxine Waters (D-CA)	Democratic Caucus	Chief Deputy Whip
110th (2007–2009)	G.K. Butterfield (D-NC)	Democratic Caucus	Chief Deputy Whip
	James E. Clyburn (D-SC)	Democratic Caucus	Majority Whip
	John Lewis (D-GA)	Democratic Caucus	Senior Chief Deputy Whip
	Maxine Waters (D-CA)	Democratic Caucus	Chief Deputy Whip
111th (2009–2011)	G.K. Butterfield (D-NC)	Democratic Caucus	Chief Deputy Whip
	James E. Clyburn (D-SC)	Democratic Caucus	Majority Whip
	John Lewis (D-GA)	Democratic Caucus	Senior Chief Deputy Whip
	Maxine Waters (D-CA)	Democratic Caucus	Chief Deputy Whip
112th (2011–2013)	G.K. Butterfield (D-NC)	Democratic Caucus	Chief Deputy Whip
	James E. Clyburn (D-SC)	Democratic Caucus	Assistant Leader

CONGRESS	MEMBER (PARTY-STATE)	CAUCUS/CONFERENCE	POSITION
112th (2011–2013) *continued*	John Lewis (D-GA)	Democratic Caucus	Senior Chief Deputy Whip
	Maxine Waters (D-CA)	Democratic Caucus	Chief Deputy Whip
113th (2013–2015)	G.K. Butterfield (D-NC)	Democratic Caucus	Chief Deputy Whip
	James E. Clyburn (D-SC)	Democratic Caucus	Assistant Leader
	Keith Ellison (D-MN)	Democratic Caucus	Chief Deputy Whip
	John Lewis (D-GA)	Democratic Caucus	Senior Chief Deputy Whip
	Terri A. Sewell (D-AL)	Democratic Caucus	Chief Deputy Whip
114th (2015–2017)	G.K. Butterfield (D-NC)	Democratic Caucus	Chief Deputy Whip
	James E. Clyburn (D-SC)	Democratic Caucus	Assistant Leader
	Keith Ellison (D-MN)	Democratic Caucus	Chief Deputy Whip
	John Lewis (D-GA)	Democratic Caucus	Senior Chief Deputy Whip
	Terri A. Sewell (D-AL)	Democratic Caucus	Chief Deputy Whip
115th (2017–2019)	G.K. Butterfield (D-NC)	Democratic Caucus	Chief Deputy Whip
	James E. Clyburn (D-SC)	Democratic Caucus	Assistant Leader
	Keith Ellison (D-MN)	Democratic Caucus	Chief Deputy Whip
	John Lewis (D-GA)	Democratic Caucus	Senior Chief Deputy Whip
	Terri A. Sewell (D-AL)	Democratic Caucus	Chief Deputy Whip
116th (2019–2021)	G.K. Butterfield (D-NC)	Democratic Caucus	Chief Deputy Whip
	James E. Clyburn (D-SC)	Democratic Caucus	Majority Whip
	Sheila Jackson Lee (D-TX)	Democratic Caucus	Chief Deputy Whip
	Hakeem S. Jeffries (D-NY)	Democratic Caucus	Chair
	John Lewis (D-GA)	Democratic Caucus	Senior Chief Deputy Whip
	Terri A. Sewell (D-AL)	Democratic Caucus	Chief Deputy Whip
117th (2021–2023)	G.K. Butterfield (D-NC)	Democratic Caucus	Senior Chief Deputy Whip
	James E. Clyburn (D-SC)	Democratic Caucus	Majority Whip
	Sheila Jackson Lee (D-TX)	Democratic Caucus	Chief Deputy Whip
	Hakeem S. Jeffries (D-NY)	Democratic Caucus	Chair
	Terri A. Sewell (D-AL)	Democratic Caucus	Chief Deputy Whip

CONGRESS	MEMBER (PARTY-STATE)	CAUCUS/CONFERENCE	POSITION
SENATE			
115th (2017–2019)	Cory A. Booker (D-NJ)	Democratic Caucus	Chief Deputy Whip
117th (2021–2023)	Kamala D. Harris (D)	U.S. Senate	President of the Senate

The closing date for this volume was June 1, 2022.

Sources: History, Art & Archives, U.S. House of Representatives, "Black Americans in Party Leadership Positions," https://history.house.gov/Exhibitions-and-Publications/BAIC/Historical-Data/Black-Americans-in-Party-Leadership-Positions/; U.S. Senate Historical Office, https://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/common/generic/Senate_Historical_Office.htm.

APPENDIX F

Chairs of the Congressional Black Caucus, 1971–2022

The Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) was created in 1971 at the start of the 92nd Congress (1971–1973). The CBC became a focal point for addressing issues important to Black Americans nationally by acting as an advocacy group within Congress and organizing as a bloc to push legislative items.

CONGRESS	MEMBER (PARTY-STATE)
92nd, 1st Session (1971–1972)	Charles C. Diggs Jr. (D-MI)
92nd, 2nd Session (1972–1973)	Louis Stokes (D-OH)
93rd, 1st Session (1973–1974)	Louis Stokes (D-OH)
93rd, 2nd Session (1974–1975)	Charles B. Rangel (D-NY)
94th, 1st Session (1975–1976)	Charles B. Rangel (D-NY)
94th, 2nd Session (1976–1977)	Yvonne Brathwaite Burke (D-CA)
95th (1977–1979)	Parren J. Mitchell (D-MD)
96th (1979–1981)	Cardiss Collins (D-IL)
97th (1981–1983)	Walter E. Fauntroy (D-DC)
98th (1983–1985)	Julian C. Dixon (D-CA)
99th (1985–1987)	Mickey Leland (D-TX)
100th (1987–1989)	Mervyn M. Dymally (D-CA)
101st (1989–1991)	Ronald V. Dellums (D-CA)
102nd (1991–1993)	Edolphus Towns (D-NY)
103rd (1993–1995)	Kweisi Mfume (D-MD)
104th (1995–1997)	Donald M. Payne (D-NJ)
105th (1997–1999)	Maxine Waters (D-CA)
106th (1999–2001)	James E. Clyburn (D-SC)
107th (2001–2003)	Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX)
108th (2003–2005)	Elijah E. Cummings (D-MD)
109th (2005–2007)	Melvin L. Watt (D-NC)
110th (2007–2009)	Carolyn C. Kilpatrick (D-MI)
111th (2009–2011)	Barbara Lee (D-CA)
112th (2011–2013)	Emanuel Cleaver II (D-MO)
113th (2013–2015)	Marcia L. Fudge (D-OH)
114th (2015–2017)	G.K. Butterfield (D-NC)
115th (2017–2019)	Cedric L. Richmond (D-LA)
116th (2019–2021)	Karen Bass (D-CA)
117th (2021–2023)	Joyce Beatty (D-OH)

The closing date for this volume was June 1, 2022.

Research materials for the Congressional Black Caucus can be found in the Congressional Black Caucus Collection, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington, DC, https://library.howard.edu/MSRC.

Source: History, Art & Archives, U.S. House of Representatives, "Chairs of the Congressional Black Caucus," https://history.house.gov/Exhibitions-and-Publications/BAIC/Historical-Data/Congressional-Black-Caucus/.

Constitutional Amendments and Major Legislation

TITLE	CITATION: PUBLIC LAW (PL) AND STATUTE (STAT.)	MAIN PROVISIONS
Thirteenth Amendment	13 Stat. 567; 13 Stat. 774	Abolished slavery and involuntary servitude, except as punishment for a crime. Approved by the 38th Congress (1863–1865) as S.J. Res. 16; ratified by the states on December 6, 1865.
Civil Rights Act of 1866	14 Stat. 27	Declared all persons born or naturalized in the United States to be citizens, with the exception of Native American members of tribes not taxed by the U.S. government. Prohibited discrimination and guaranteed the rights of all citizens to make and enforce contracts and to purchase, sell, or lease property. Passed by the 39th Congress (1865–1867) as S. 61.
Fourteenth Amendment	14 Stat. 358; 15 Stat. 706	Declared that all persons born or naturalized in the United States were citizens and guaranteed due process and equal protection of the law. Any state that denied or abridged the voting rights of men over the age of 21 would be subject to proportional reductions in representation in the U.S. House of Representatives. Approved by the 39th Congress (1865–1867) as H.J. Res. 127; ratified by the states on July 9, 1868.
First Reconstruction Act	14 Stat. 428	Divided the former Confederate states (except Tennessee) into five military districts, each administered by a general charged with maintaining law and order. Required the former Confederate states to adopt new constitutions, ratify the Fourteenth Amendment, and allow African-American suffrage as conditions for readmission to the Union. Passed by the 39th Congress (1865–1867) as H.R. 1143.
Second Reconstruction Act	15 Stat. 2	Provided for the election of delegates to participate in constitutional conventions in each of the former Confederate states. Required the governors of each military district to register all male citizens to vote, provided that they were at least 21 years old, had taken an oath of loyalty, and had not been disenfranchised for participating in rebellion against the United States. Required drafts of state constitutions to be submitted to Congress for approval. Passed by the 40th Congress (1867–1869) as H.R. 33.
Third Reconstruction Act	15 Stat. 14	Granted the governors of each military district established in the former Confederate states absolute authority over all civilian and military officials at the state and local level. Granted the governors of each military district the power to determine the eligibility of voters. Passed by the 40th Congress (1867–1869) as H.R. 123.
Fourth Reconstruction Act	15 Stat. 41	Specified that any election to select the delegates to the constitutional conventions of each of the former Confederate states, as well as any election to adopt a new constitution in said states, must be decided by a majority of the votes actually cast, not by a majority of the number of registered voters. Passed by the 40th Congress (1867–1869) as H.R. 214.
Fifteenth Amendment	15 Stat. 346; 16 Stat. 1131	Prohibited states from depriving citizens of the right to vote because of "race, color, or previous condition of servitude." Approved by the 40th Congress (1867–1869) as S.J. Res. 8; ratified by the states on February 3, 1870.

TITLE	CITATION: PUBLIC LAW (PL) AND STATUTE (STAT.)	MAIN PROVISIONS
First Enforcement Act	16 Stat. 140	Prohibited discrimination in voter registration on the basis of "race, color, or previous condition of servitude." Established penalties for interfering with a person's right to vote. Gave federal courts the power to enforce the act and to employ the use of federal marshals and the U.S. military to uphold it. Passed by the 41st Congress (1869–1871) as H.R. 1293.
Second Enforcement Act	16 Stat. 433	Allowed federal circuit judges to appoint supervisors to monitor federal elections. Authorized federal marshals to employ deputies to maintain order at polling places. Passed by the 41st Congress (1869–1871) as H.R. 2634.
Third Enforcement Act or Ku Klux Klan Act	17 Stat. 13	Enforced the Fourteenth Amendment by guaranteeing all citizens of the United States the rights afforded by the Constitution and providing equal protection under the law. Held state governments liable for failure to provide all citizens with equal protection under the law. Empowered the President to deploy federal troops and suspend habeas corpus in areas deemed to be in rebellion against the government. Passed by the 42nd Congress (1871–1873) as H.R. 320.
Civil Rights Act of 1875	18 Stat. 335	Barred discrimination in public accommodations, public transportation, and jury selection. Passed by the 43rd Congress (1873–1875) as H.R. 796.
Nineteenth Amendment	41 Stat. 362; 41 Stat. 1823	Enshrined the voting rights of women in the Constitution. Approved by the 66th Congress (1919–1921) as H.J. Res. 1; ratified by the states on August 18, 1920.
Civil Rights Act of 1957	PL 85-315; 71 Stat. 634	Created the six-member U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. The Commission was ordered to document cases in which certain citizens were deprived of their right to vote, and to report on the effectiveness of existing federal law with respect to the Fourteenth Amendment's equal protection clause. Established the Civil Rights Division in the U.S. Department of Justice. Authorized the U.S. Attorney General to seek court injunctions against deprivation and obstruction of voting rights by state officials. Passed by the 85th Congress (1957–1959) as H.R. 6127.
Civil Rights Act of 1960	PL 86-449; 74 Stat. 86	Expanded the enforcement powers of the Civil Rights Act of 1957 regarding voting rights and introduced criminal penalties for obstructing the implementation of federal court orders. Required that voting and registration records for federal elections be preserved. Passed by the 86th Congress (1959–1961) as H.R. 8601.
Twenty-fourth Amendment	76 Stat. 1259; 78 Stat. 1117	Outlawed the poll tax as a requirement in federal elections. Approved by the 87th Congress (1961–1963) as S.J. Res. 29; ratified by the states on January 23, 1964.
Civil Rights Act of 1964	PL 88-352; 78 Stat. 241	Prohibited discrimination in public accommodations, facilities, and schools. Outlawed discrimination in federally funded projects. Prohibited employment discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, or national origin. Created the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission to monitor employment discrimination. Provided additional capacities to enforce voting rights. Extended the Commission on Civil Rights for four years. Passed by the 88th Congress (1963–1965) as H.R. 7152.

TITLE	CITATION: PUBLIC LAW (PL) AND STATUTE (STAT.)	MAIN PROVISIONS
Voting Rights Act of 1965	PL 89-110; 79 Stat. 437	Suspended the use of literacy tests as a requirement to vote. Authorized the use of federal examiners to supervise voter registration in states that used literacy tests or in which less than half of the voting-eligible residents registered or voted. Established preclearance requirements in certain jurisdictions that prohibited changes in voting procedures without permission from the U.S. Attorney General or the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia. Directed the U.S. Attorney General to institute proceedings against use of poll taxes. Passed by the 89th Congress (1965–1967) as S. 1564.
Civil Rights Act of 1968 or Fair Housing Act	PL 90-284; 82 Stat. 73	Established the first federal hate crimes statute. Prohibited the use of force to injure, intimidate, or otherwise interfere with any person on account of their race, color, religion, or national origin. Prohibited discrimination in the sale, rental, or financing of housing. Passed by the 90th Congress (1967–1969) as H.R. 2516.
Voting Rights Act Amendments of 1970	PL 91-285; 84 Stat. 314	Extended the provisions of the Voting Rights Act for five years. Passed by the 91st Congress (1969–1971) as H.R. 4249.
Equal Employment Opportunity Act of 1972	PL 92-261; 86 Stat. 103	Provided the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission with the authority to bring federal lawsuits against employers accused of engaging in discriminatory employment practices. Expanded the anti-employment discrimination provisions of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to cover educational institutions, state and local governments, and private employers with at least 15 employees. Passed by the 92nd Congress (1971–1973) as H.R. 1746.
Voting Rights Act Amendments of 1975	PL 94-73; 89 Stat. 400	Extended the provisions of the Voting Rights Act for seven years. Permanently banned literacy tests. Provided for bilingual election materials in jurisdictions with significant language-minority populations. Passed by the 94th Congress (1975–1977) as H.R. 6219.
Voting Rights Act Amendments of 1982	PL 97-205; 96 Stat. 131	Extended the provisions of the Voting Rights Act for 25 years. Allowed jurisdictions that could provide evidence of maintaining a clean voting rights record for at least 10 years to avoid preclearance requirements. Prohibited state and local voting laws that resulted in a discriminatory outcome regardless of the intention of the law. Provided for aid and instruction to disabled or illiterate voters. Extended the requirement for bilingual election materials in jurisdictions with significant language-minority populations. Passed by the 97th Congress (1981–1983) as H.R. 3112.
Civil Rights Restoration Act of 1987	PL 100-259; 102 Stat. 28	Established that antidiscrimination laws are applicable to an entire organization if any part of the organization receives federal funds. Passed by the 100th Congress (1987–1989) as S. 557.
Fair Housing Amendments Act of 1988	PL 100-430; 102 Stat. 1619	Strengthened the powers of enforcement granted to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development in the Civil Rights Act of 1968. Passed by the 100th Congress (1987–1989) as H.R. 1158.

TITLE	CITATION: PUBLIC LAW (PL) AND STATUTE (STAT.)	MAIN PROVISIONS
Civil Rights Act of 1991	PL 102-166; 105 Stat. 1071	Responded to a series of U.S. Supreme Court decisions rendered in the 1980s that weakened existing civil rights laws prohibiting employment discrimination. Returned the burden to the employer to prove the "business necessity" of employment practices that resulted in disparate impact or indirect discrimination. Provided for relief to plaintiffs if discrimination was a factor in an employment decision, even if it was not the sole factor. Provided for plaintiffs to receive monetary damages in cases of harassment or discrimination based on sex, religion, or disability. Passed by the 102nd Congress (1991–1993) as S. 1745.
Voting Rights Act of 2006	PL 109-246; 120 Stat. 577	Extended the provisions of the Voting Rights Act and bilingual election requirements for 25 years. Directed the U.S. Comptroller General to study and report to Congress on the implementation, effectiveness, and efficiency of bilingual voting materials requirements. Passed by the 109th Congress (2005–2007) as H.R. 9.
Emmett Till Antilynching Act	PL 117-107; 136 Stat. 1125	Specified lynching as a federal hate crime. Established new criminal penalties for any hate crime that results in death, serious injury, kidnapping, or aggravated sexual abuse. Passed by the 117th Congress (2021–2023) as H.R. 55.

APPENDIX H

Oral Histories of Black Members of Congress

The following interviews of current and former Black Members of Congress provide firsthand accounts of congressional campaigns, committee service, and legislative efforts on a range of topics, including civil rights, voting rights, and foreign policy.

Oral Histories Conducted by the Office of the Historian, U.S. House of Representatives

To access these interview transcripts, visit https://history.house.gov/Oral-History/.

Yvonne Brathwaite Burke, U.S. Representative of California

William Lacy "Bill" Clay Sr., U.S. Representative of Missouri

Eva M. Clayton, U.S. Representative of North Carolina

Ronald V. Dellums, U.S. Representative of California

Donna F. Edwards, U.S. Representative of Maryland

Eddie Bernice Johnson, U.S. Representative of Texas

John Lewis, U.S. Representative of Georgia

Kendrick B. Meek, U.S. Representative of Florida

Eleanor Holmes Norton, Delegate of the District of Columbia

Terri A. Sewell, U.S. Representative of Alabama

Albert Russell Wynn, U.S. Representative of Maryland

Oral Histories Conducted by the Senate Historical Office, U.S. Senate

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Carol Moseley Braun, U.S. Senator of Illinois

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