

Cokie Roberts

Opening Day of the 81st Congress

Childhood memories of an opening day of Congress.

Interview recorded June 23, 2009

I remember the voting for Speaker. And it was Rayburn and Martin. And I thought that they were calling the roll. So people stood up and said, "Rayburn, Mr. Rayburn, Mr. Martin." And I finally tugged on my father and said, "There are an awful lot of Mr. Rayburns and Mr. Martins." And he didn't at first know what I was saying. And then he realized what my confusion was, and got a good giggle and explained it to me. And then, of course, when Sam Rayburn died, I remember writing to him and saying, "I was wrong, you know. There weren't a lot of Mr. Rayburns and Mr. Martins. There was only one of each." Years later, when I was covering the State of the Union message, the first time there was a camera looking down the aisle—the center aisle of the House of Representatives—and it was at knee-height, and I just had this incredible qualm of recognition, because of course that's how tall I was when I was five. And I just.... It was totally unexpected to have that moment of seeing the Congress from my child's eye vantage point again.