

Cokie Roberts

The Changing Institution

Discussion of the changing nature of the House and Congress.

Interview recorded June 23, 2009

The institution is considerably less friendly than it was when I was growing up. Members of Congress used to talk about the fact that they could disagree without being disagreeable. Now people who agree seem to be disagreeable. And my last interview with President Ford before he died, he said to me, "You know Cokie, when I was Minority Leader of Congress and your father was Majority Leader we were such good friends. And, we would hop in a cab together and go someplace like the Press Club or something and say, "Okay, what are we going to argue about when we get there?" And it's not that that argument wasn't real. It was real. We really did disagree about means to an end, but then we would get back in the cab and be best of friends. And that just simply doesn't exist anymore. And it's for a variety of reasons. One has to do with the nature of family relationships. Families tended to come here much more to Washington. And so they saw each other outside of work, particularly a state delegation would hang out together. And, the kids all knew each other. And, the moms were all in the PTA together. And, we all went to church together. And, there were events for congressional families where we all saw each other and knew each other. So, there was much more of a familial atmosphere around the Congress.