

The Honorable Yvonne Brathwaite Burke
U.S. Representative of California (1973–1979)

Special Exhibit: A Century of Women in Congress

Diversity in the Congressional Black Caucus

Congresswoman Burke recalls the different constituencies the Black Caucus represented.
Interview recorded July 22, 2015

You have to realize that certainly in the Black Caucus—as I suspect it is today—we came from different communities. I came from a community where there were aircraft factories and—Hughes Aircraft—and where I had to really be out front in terms of bringing money to my district from defense money. Ron Dellums was from Berkeley, where he had to be out front in preventing defense money from coming through and being allocated. So, my experience was different. Many of the Members came from heavily African-American districts. I did not come from a heavily African-American district. So, we all had different approaches. Our Members from the South—Andy Young, he had to have a different approach than someone from New York or from California. So, the, the Black Caucus was a unique coming together of people from different regions with different kinds of districts, but we could come together on those issues that affect African Americans. And coming from California, when people would ask me, “Who do you represent? Do you represent the black community, even though your district is different? Or do you represent the women?” And I would say to them, “I have to represent everyone. I have to represent women, I have to represent African Americans, but primarily, I have to represent my district.” So, we were different in terms of our orientation, but we came together on those big issues. And because we had people from all of these communities, it was very important. And that’s, of course, today continues to be the strength of the Black Caucus.