

The Honorable Kendrick B. Meek

U.S. Representative of Florida (2003–2011) and Son of Representative Carrie P. Meek of Florida

Special Exhibit: A Century of Women in Congress

Sharing Experiences of Segregation

Representative Meek remembers his mother sharing her experiences growing up in the segregated South with her family.

Interview recorded March 19, 2019

She talked about how when she was a Girl Scout that she would bake brownies along with her, you know, Scout participants, and that they could not take it into the capitol. They would have to stop at the sidewalk, the sergeant at arms would come and pick up the brownies for them as they watched their white little girls take the brownies to the senators and to the members of the legislature at the time. She remembers that vividly because, you know, of course the old capitol is maintained in front of the old capitol. So she later became, you know, the first female black senator and the second female black senator in the history of the state. You know, for her to have that background as a public policymaker, to be an educator in Tallahassee—she went to the University of Michigan for her master's at the age of 19 because she could not go to the all-girls school at Florida State because she was black. Coming back, traveling the highways and byways of Tallahassee on to Pensacola due to some of the programs, recruitment programs for the various universities where she served, she could not use certain bathrooms. She could not, you know, use, you know, lunch counters, things of that nature. So with her being born in north Florida and working in north and central Florida during segregation, she experienced quite a bit of that. She shared those experiences, you know, 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 that experience as a policymaker, and I think that's what made her so powerful.