Carlottia Scott
Chief of Staff, Representatives Ronald V. Dellums and Barbara Lee of California

Special Exhibit: A Century of Women in Congress

Challenge to Institutional Structure
Carlottia Scott discusses the obstacles she faced in the House as an African-American woman.
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I think the primary obstacles were ingrained in the history of the system, given U.S. history. When I came in, I was met with that double whammy, both race and gender. It was a long road. The hard part was trying to get folk to understand that you knew just as much as everybody else. That was the obstacle. One of the things that I used to cringe about is that, if I made a statement as a black woman in a specific position, either another Member's staff person or the Member would go ask somebody else the same question to double-check that I was right in my answer. Used to piss me off, okay? But anyway, that was part of kind of the double whammy. It's always a long road, and one of the struggles was to break the codes, because in the overall institution, there was this code that women really didn't need to progress as professionals on the Hill. Pat Schroeder taught me, early on, that a woman's place is also in the House and the Senate, and wherever she wants to be. I want to say one of the things that folk got to know me for is that I would stand my ground, both as an African American and as a woman. I was trying to be a person of increase and change for any new folks that were potentially going to follow in our footsteps. Particularly for minority staff arriving on Hill, because the challenges were as much about being African American as it was about being a woman. Then, in terms of being a woman, having to balance that family life with professional life was really, really rough. Then having to prove yourself among, for lack of a better term, the guys was doubly hard. It was both a challenge to the institutional structure and the authority that had been kind of developed, given the history of the institution.