The Honorable William Lacy Clay Sr.

U.S. Representative of Missouri (1969–2001)

Oral History Interview
Final Edited Transcript

September 10, 2019

Office of the Historian
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC

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Abstract

Born in St. Louis, Missouri, William Lacy Clay Sr. grew up facing racial discrimination and inequity. In this interview he describes the tenement houses and segregated playgrounds in his neighborhood. Clay discusses his early mentors and how their work to promote civil rights in St. Louis led to his own activism including organizing and participating in sit-ins and marches. His role in the movement precipitated his interest in politics when he realized the potential of making laws to end racial bias. Clay successfully ran for an alderman position in St. Louis—his five years in local politics and his work to integrate labor unions created a powerful base which helped him win election to the U.S. House in 1968.

A founding member of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC), Clay provides insight on the early days of the CBC and its mission to form a collective legislative voice for Black Americans. He also recalls how the CBC boycotted President Richard M. Nixon's State of the Union Address in 1971, the organization's outreach efforts in the Black community, and how members of the CBC worked to end apartheid in South Africa. Clay worked closely with many House colleagues, but he describes the special bond he shared with Congressmen Gus Hawkins of California and Lou Stokes of Ohio. Clay's spot on the Education and Labor Committee—one he held for each of his 16 terms and initially had to fight to secure—provided a potent vehicle to draft legislation to assist his district and to improve the plight of Black Americans.

Biography

CLAY, William Lacy Sr., (father of William Lacy Clay Jr.), a Representative from Missouri; born in St. Louis, St. Louis County, Mo., April 30, 1931; B.S., St. Louis University, 1953; United States Army, 1953–1955; real estate broker; manager, life insurance company, 1959–1961; alderman, St. Louis, Mo., 1959–1964; business representative, city employees union, 1961–1964; education coordinator, Steamfitters Local No. 562, 1966–1967; elected as a Democrat to the Ninety-first and to the fifteen succeeding Congresses (January 3, 1969–January 3, 2001); chairman, Committee on the Post Office and Civil Service (One Hundred Second and One Hundred Third Congresses); was not a candidate for reelection to the One Hundred Seventh Congress.

Read full biography

Editing Practices

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- As a primary rule, the editors aimed for fidelity to the spoken word and the conversational style in accord with generally accepted oral history practices.
- The editors made minor editorial changes to the transcripts in instances where they believed such changes would make interviews more accessible to readers. For instance, excessive false starts and filler words were removed when they did not materially affect the meaning of the ideas expressed by the interviewee.
- In accord with standard oral history practices, interviewees were allowed to review their transcripts, although they were encouraged to avoid making substantial editorial revisions and deletions that would change the conversational style of the transcripts or the ideas expressed therein.
- The editors welcomed additional notes, comments, or written observations that the interviewees wished to insert into the record and noted any substantial changes or redactions to the transcript.
- Copy-editing of the transcripts was based on the standards set forth in *The Chicago Manual of Style*.

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Interviewer Biographies

Matt Wasniewski is the Historian of the U.S. House of Representatives, a position he has held since 2010. He has worked in the House as a historical editor and manager since 2002. Matt served as the editor-in-chief of *Women in Congress, 1917–2006* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2006), *Black Americans in Congress, 1870–2007* (GPO, 2008), *Hispanic Americans in Congress, 1822–2012* (GPO, 2013), and *Asian and Pacific Islander Americans in Congress: 1900-2017* (GPO, 2017). He helped to create the House's first oral history program, focusing on collecting the institutional memory of current and former Members, longtime staff, and support personnel. Matt earned his Ph.D. in U.S. history from the University of Maryland, College Park. His prior work experience includes several years as the associate historian and communications director at the U.S. Capitol Historical Society, and, in the early 1990s, as the sports editor for a northern Virginia newspaper.

Kathleen Johnson is the Manager of Oral History for the Office of the Historian, U.S. House of Representatives. She earned a B.A. in history from Columbia University, where she also played basketball for four years, and holds two master's degrees from North Carolina State University in education and public history. In 2004, she helped to create the House's first oral history program, focusing on collecting the institutional memory of Members and staff. She co-authored two books: *Women in Congress: 1917–2006* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2006) and *Black Americans in Congress: 1870–2007* (GPO, 2008). Before joining the Office of the Historian, she worked as a high school history teacher and social studies curriculum consultant.

— THE HONORABLE WILLIAM LACY CLAY SR. OF MISSOURI —
INTERVIEW

WASNIEWSKI: I'm Matt Wasniewski. Today's date is September 10, 2019. I'm with Kathleen Johnson at the home of former Congressman Bill [William Lacy] Clay [Sr.], and we're here to talk to him about his career in the House and also his work with the CBC [Congressional Black Caucus]. This is for a project which we're doing with African-American Members of Congress and staff for a commemoration of the coming 150th anniversary of the first African American in the House, Joseph [Hayne] Rainey of South Carolina, which will be next year in December 2020.

CLAY: Right.

WASNIEWSKI: So you know that history as well as we do.

CLAY: Yes, well I do. {laughter} Well, there's 22 of them during those days.

WASNIEWSKI: That's right, that's right. That's a story that not a lot of people are familiar with.

CLAY: Right. Well, then I wrote the book *Just Permanent Interests,* incidentally which became the motto of the Congressional Black Caucus. In the speech I made early on, I said that Black people should have, "no permanent friends, no permanent enemies, just permanent interests," and that became the motto of the Congressional Black Caucus. It still is. That reference was directed to some of our friends in the labor movement, the white liberals, and elderly Black civil rights leaders, that we don't need in-between middle people to be our spokespersons. We will speak for ourselves. That became the mandate and the manifesto of the Congressional Black Caucus.

When we organized, there was opposition from a lot of sources that were our friends. Respecting their feelings, we found it necessary to make sure they understood that we were going to speak politically for Black America, and if they wanted to help, that would be fine. So we had to go about—in the early days—establishing our relationship with the Black bases of power and influence. In doing so, we held a series of seminars with Black medical people, Black legal people, the Black press, Black religious people, Blacks in the media. We let them know that we were here to speak for them, and we needed their support to give us that kind of credibility and legitimacy. We also made it clear to our other supporters that our intention was not to replace you.

To clarify our mode of operation, we announced in no unequitable terms that we are going to speak politically for Black people. We had to make it clear to labor union leaders who thought we were going to eliminate their influence in black communities, of course, that was not our desire. It would have been a possibility because organized labor didn't elect any of us to Congress. The original Blacks in the caucus all won their seats by defeating candidates endorsed by labor leaders.

In my instance, 30 unions supported my opponent. Well, I only had three unions. So they thought I was going to be anti-union when I got to Congress, but that wasn't so because that wasn't my DNA. I was pro-workers. And George Meany [president of the AFL-CIO] made it clear the first week I was in Congress: he gave a celebration for me, and he had all the big shots in town. He had John [William] McCormack, Tip [Thomas Philip] O'Neill [Jr.], all those Senators that they had supported at this reception, and he and I stood at the door, and he introduced me to all of them as "his man in the House of Representatives," even though 30 unions had opposed me.

But his union hadn't. That was one of the three. The plumbers and pipe fitters endorsed me because I was working for the pipe fitters union when I got elected. So we had a great relationship with labor.

WASNIEWSKI: We want to talk about your first election and the CBC, but we wanted to ask you a couple of background questions first about pre-Congress. First of all, when you were young, who were your role models growing up?

CLAY: Other than my father? Well, I had quite a few people who helped. We came out of a sordid, shameful ghetto in St. Louis for Black folks. We lived in a tenement house four blocks from downtown St. Louis, and we had outdoor toilets. My first 21 years of my life, I had to go outside except we all developed a habit of holding until we could get to school. {laughter} So it probably caused a whole lot of physical, medical problems, but we had people.

I tell great stories about one guy, and he came by the house when I helped to integrate St. Louis University. They took in 11 Blacks at one time. I was one of the 11, and I was having a little problem with my mathematics; and this one Black guy who lived a block or two away, he volunteered every Sunday morning to come to my house and help me because he was a very gifted mathematician. But he didn't finish college. He had to drop out because they didn't have any money. The family ran out of money. So those are the kind of people that helped coming up.

We had lots of people because I was one of the first in our area to finish college, so everybody was pulling for me. Then afterwards, there were several others that did finish, but I was the first in my family to finish, and I come from a big family. That's how I got elected to Congress because I think

everybody in the family voted, and that's all we needed was their votes. {laughter}

But my mother came from a family in Missouri, and my daddy was from Union, Missouri, which is maybe 40 miles outside of the city, and our family's still there, most of them. My father sat out there in the rural areas, country areas. The slave owner that set them free gave them all land. But what with the deed not clear that it would be their land as long as they stayed on it, but if they left, it would revert back to his relatives. Well, the Clays have never given up anything easily, so they're still out there on lots and lots of land out there.

And then my mother, she grew up—and I told Matt [Wasniewski] the story—in Blackjack, Missouri, where they didn't have a school for Black kids. And St. Louis county never had a school for Black kids, so she had to move into St. Louis with relatives to go to elementary school. But she finished elementary school, so that's sort of the background.

Now, I grew up in an integrated neighborhood. Everybody had their own tenement houses, only ours had outdoor toilets. We had Italians; they lived in one tenement. And we had the Irish in another, and the Polish in a fourth, so that was a general kind of neighborhood. The playground across the street from where we lived, it was really comical. It was half white and half Black. They had a set of swings for the Blacks, set of swings for the whites, a swimming pool for the whites, a wading pool for the Blacks. They had two softball diamonds, two—what do you call them?

WASNIEWSKI: Volleyball?

CLAY: Volleyball. They had two horseshoe pits. The playground would close at 5:00, so after 5:00, we all played together. I don't know why between 9:00 to

5:00 we couldn't play together. So that was the kind of neighborhood that I grew up in.

WASNIEWSKI: As you grew older, was there anyone that you looked to as you became more—you're still a young man, but as your interest in politics grew, anyone you looked to in politics?

CLAY: Well, my interest was in civil rights, and that led into politics. And in civil rights, it was an elderly guy, Henry Winfield Wheeler, who was a retired postal worker, and he was what we called in St. Louis, "Mr. Civil Rights." He had picket lines everywhere for everything. He picketed baseball games because they wouldn't seat Blacks in the grandstands. They had to be in the bleachers in the sunshine. For years, he picketed movie houses until he got them to integrate and let Blacks come, and he picketed the live theaters down there, live theaters. But even when in 1925, when he was working for the post office, he organized sit ins in the restaurants and the post office. So that was the kind of guy—he was one of my heroes.

And I didn't meet him until after my first picket line. I had organized an NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People] youth council, and we picked White Castle as our first target, and so it was very successful. I had a couple of hundred young kids—when I say young, 18 to 25, and some Black lady came up to me and said, "My daddy is disappointed with you." I said, "Well, who is your daddy?" And she said, "Henry Winfield Wheeler." She gave the whole name. I said, "Well why would he be disappointed with me?" I knew his reputation. I had never met him. And I said, "This is what his life has been." She said, "But you didn't ask his permission to set up this picket line." {laughter} So the next day, I went to the house. She came and got me and took me to meet Mr. Wheeler,

and he was one of my heroes. By that time, he was like in his mid-70s, which was very old in those days.

Then what happened from the civil rights movement was there was a charter fight where people wanted to merge the city of St. Louis into the county—the city of St. Louis is independent of the county. In fact, that's still a major issue this year. So I got involved because the Black folks with influence would lose their political influence if you mixed them with a million white folks from out in the suburban area. So I got involved in that, and we were successful in defeating the charter provision, and from there after, walking picket lines at lots of places—downtown stores and sit ins and all of that—it dawned on me that we can pass some legislation that would eliminate all of this walking and sitting and all of that. And so I decided to run for the board of aldermen and city council.

I ran into the same kind of opposition that I ran into when I ran for Congress. The elderly people in the civil rights movement didn't support me. In fact, it's comical when you look back on it. We were an embarrassment to them because they were issuing press releases and counting on the white establishment to give us some rights. Well, the young Blacks that came along were much more militant, and we were saying, "We don't have to beg for our rights. We're going to take our rights."

So we had picket lines every day of the week, sit-ins. I mean, at Parkmore, which was a drive in with a whole lot of car hops that held 100 cars, we would get there early with 100 cars so they didn't have—nobody else could come. Those are the kind of things, and so they caved in, and they had to appease us. And that was what paint stores and department stores and all of that, and it was an embarrassment to the elderly community that had established relationships with good people who owned the businesses, but the

businesses that they were protecting were denying us our right of jobs. They'd hire two or three custodians. To us, that wasn't any progress. Hell, in the ghetto, with our ghetto economy, [expletive], we could outdo that in 10 minutes. {laughter}

And I've written about the ghetto economy. See, it was sanctioned by the white establishment as long as you didn't infringe on certain white businesses. But they didn't care about sharing the profits. I mean, the prosecutors protected us. The police protected us. The judges protected us, but they all got their hands out, and they all made money off of that economy. I mean, shoplifting, hell. All of that was—illegal gambling houses, illegal rooming houses, selling liquor after hours. They kind of looked the other way; as long as you gave the captain of the district and the sergeant on the beat their cut, they don't give a damn. But that's neither here nor there.

JOHNSON: How did that experience in local politics, when you were an alderman and a committeeman, how did that prepare you for Congress, or did it teach you any lessons that helped you in the House?

CLAY: Well, I have always been an organizer, and the reason I got elected the first time was I had, like, 125 home meetings every day and night. I had a job where I could, selling insurance—I was the manager of an insurance company, so my time was my time after that. Agents working for me came in the morning, made their reports and turned in collections from the day before. I gave them a pep rally and then sent them out. I didn't have to see them again until the next morning.

So, but anyhow, I had these teas and coffees, what they were, and we identified what we called the centers of influence, and we asked them to give a meeting at their home, just with coffee and tea and cookies, and would

invite people in the neighborhood, and then ask somebody there that they trusted to have one at their house, which would have a different kind of people. So I had a hundred and some of those, and so that meant that the Black preachers who didn't support me, I didn't care because I had the deacons, and I had the ladies in the church. And they said to the preachers, "To hell with you. This is who we want. This man's been out here fighting for us," because I already had the reputation. I had made a whole lot of friends—not just me, but the people I surrounded myself with. I had a hundred of those kinds of meetings, and then that got me elected to the board of aldermen.

And what happened there was I hooked up with a Republican, which was unheard of—a guy by the name of Harold Elbert. He was running when I was running at the same time. He was running in an adjacent ward, and the white Democrat that all of the Democratic Party was supporting, he was saying if he got elected, he was going to vote against the public accommodations bill. We only needed like three more votes, and so I just said, "Well you aren't going to get elected," and I took hundreds of people out there, and we switched the Black vote from him to the Republican, and Harold Elbert got elected. Well Harold and I were very close, and we introduced the first fair employment bill in the city of St. Louis. It was the first civil rights bill ever passed in the state of Missouri—a Republican and myself. So that was the kind of activity I involved myself in. A few years later, with Elbert's support, we passed the public accommodations bill.

And campaigning for Congress, I knew the labor unions weren't going to support me because my drive was to integrate the all-white locals, and I was successful in doing a lot of that. Well, the leadership of those locals didn't appreciate it, but I didn't give a damn. In fact, how I got the job with the

pipe fitters was I drew up a plan to integrate their union. They had a thousand members in the union, all white—one of the smallest unions in the city because the other unions, teamsters and all, they had thousands of people. So we agreed on a thing that would bring in 10 apprentice pipe fitters and five—I mean 10 journeymen and five apprentices. Blacks were doing jobs, so they already were journeymen, but they just weren't in the union. And this was one of the best things that ever happened to me because when I ran for Congress, I didn't have a money problem because they only had a thousand members, but they were the richest union not only in the state of Missouri, but in the surrounding states.

What they did is, they had negotiated these contracts, and they had supported all the elected officials, local and state, and so they were a powerhouse, but they didn't take in new members. They had the highest pay scale of all other unions. They would bring people from Oklahoma, Illinois, all of that, who wanted to be members, but they wouldn't let them join as members. They would give them associate memberships, and they didn't have to pay dues. They paid $2 a day to the political fund, and they had thousands of people paying $2 a day. In fact, one of the largest contributions was $200,000 to Lyndon Baines Johnson. So that's the kind of money they had, when the other unions were giving you $25.

We thought we were going to have problems when we integrated their union, but we had talked to the supervisors. I mean, that was my job, to try and mitigate whatever the opposition would be. Well after the newspaper announcement taking in the 10 Black journeymen and the five apprentices, the next day I came to the union hall, and all these white people were out in front. I said, "Oh Lord. Here we go." So I get inside, and again they had in charge Larry Callanan. I said, "Larry, what the hell is going on?" He said,

"It's a damn shame, Clay." He said, "They heard that—" and one of the ways we kind of softened the blow was we made a deal that every time we take in a Black, we would take in a white from the list because they had a long list of people whose relatives had wanted to get into this. So these people were out there saying—they were protesting that we only took in 10 Blacks. They wanted us to take in a hundred so that they could get a hundred off of that list. He said, "Can you imagine?" I said, "No I can't, but it's good news." {laughter} So that's the kind of activity.

But other unions like the teamsters, they hated my behavior because we forced the bakery drivers, the milk drivers—because they had all of them organized—and we forced them to integrate, see. And they didn't like that. But who in the hell cared? The department stores, we forced them into hiring Black salespeople. They used to have—the only job other than custodian in the department stores were the elevator operators. But we said, "No, no. We're going to go past that." Those were the kind of activities that we participated in.

So I knew I had the Black vote. What happened when they—the state legislature created a district that was like 53 percent Black, and so the Democratic Party—the white Democratic Party—they opposed it. Even though all of these Black folks had been Democrats, all the way until from 1932 was when they switched over in St. Louis from Republican because that was another racial issue. But what happened was they filed, Democrats filed a lawsuit to try and block a district that a Black could possibly win. Well they lost the lawsuit, and the Democratic governor filed a lawsuit and was out campaigning against the thing, but the courts rejected their contention.

Then I filed, and four other Blacks filed—and they were all credible candidates. One was on the city board of aldermen, one was in the state

legislature, one was the head of the NAACP, and one was the pastor of a very large Black church. But I looked at that list and said, "Oh. Oh, this is my game." And what was happening was people in the know—the politicians—they were saying, "Well, no Black can win because it's going to split the Black vote." My position was, "I'm going to get 51 percent of the total vote. They can split whatever they want to split," which is really what happened because the head of the NAACP would not get out of the primary. So that left two Blacks—all of the white candidates pulled out and endorsed one white, and so they said that I didn't have a chance then. I said, "Well, I can tell you one thing. I've got the mobilizing impetus," because the white they were endorsing is the one that owned the Howard Johnson's that we marched for six months to force him to serve our people. I said, "Hold on. So I know what's going to happen to him in my community; he's not going to get any." And the head of the NAACP—you can look at him now and say what the other people were going to say, "That's a 'Tomish' move, isn't it, {laughter} to split the Black vote?" And he said he didn't give a damn about splitting the vote. He would rather see the white candidate get elected than me, but that's okay.

But that's the kind of stuff that we had to run into. I wasn't alone; that was happening across the country in the '60s. The Blacks were sitting in on the buses, and the Black students were protesting in the restaurants. They weren't going along with this theory of gradualism. They said, "We want our rights, and we want them now." And that's what the 300,000 people who marched on Washington [in 1963] was about. "We're not going to wait. Wait for what?" And so I knew that I was going to win that election.

WASNIEWSKI: Were you approached by anyone to run, or did anyone give you support or recruit you at all?

CLAY: No, what happened was I was in my car coming from the city hall, and on the radio, they announced that the court had finalized the district boundaries. I pulled over to the side. I called my wife first and said, "I'm getting ready to file for Congress." And she said, "Right on." Then I called one of the Black elected officials that was close to me, to make sure he was on board, and then he said he would call some others, and I would call some, and then from that day, that was, oh I guess maybe six, eight months before the election, that's when we started—already had the apparatus added that got me elected to the board of aldermen, and got a whole lot of other people elected in subsequent years, so that's the way I got into the national scene.

JOHNSON: Was there a key moment in that campaign, maybe a turning point, but at some point where you knew for sure you were going to be able to win the election?

CLAY: Well, yes. After all of the whites pulled out and endorsed one [candidate], Fred Weathers, the major Black politician in St. Louis, called together the Blacks who had some influence. It was about 12 people, and the three Blacks who were still in the race, and one of them was Ernest Calloway, the head of the NAACP whom he was supporting. But he said to the three of them, "Look, we got to get you guys out." Weathers and I very seldom agreed on anything, but he said, "Clay has the best chance of winning, and we can't let this go down that we defeated a man like him."

So the guy who was on the board of aldermen, he didn't say anything. Another one had—from the state legislature, who had pushed the bill through to create the district. He said he would pull out and support me. The guy from the NAACP, he said, "No. I'm staying in." This is where he made the statement, "I don't give a damn if the white man wins." And so at that point, Fred Weathers, who was the most powerful politician in town, he

said, “Oh, if that’s your attitude,” he said, “I’m withdrawing my support from you. I’m throwing it to Bill Clay.” Now here’s a guy that came out of Mississippi, Fred Weathers. He had gone to Yale—I guess it was Yale or one of those Ivy League schools and got his master’s degree because Mississippi had to pay his tuition. See back then, most of the Blacks in St. Louis who also had advanced degrees got them from Harvard and Princeton and those [schools] because Missouri didn’t have a school that provided them some degree that whites were getting. The law was if the state doesn’t provide you, then they’ve got to pay to send you somewhere that does.

So Weathers was on his way to Chicago, and he met Jordan Chambers who was really the biggest Black politician, probably in the country. He was powerful as hell. In fact, [Harry S.] Truman gives him the credit for him getting elected to the Senate because he took the Black vote in St. Louis and he threw it to Truman, and Truman just barely won the election. But see, the odd thing is in Missouri, even though it was a slave state, they never tried to keep Blacks from voting after they were freed. They didn’t join the permanent resisters. They didn’t sign the manifesto and all of that.

And so we had, like in 1919, the Black leadership—which was Republican—they called the meeting, and they were disgusted with the Republicans that they were giving their votes to, and so they sent out a list of like 15 demands. “This is what our community wants, and we want them now. We want it now.” And so one of them was, “We want a Black in the state legislature.” They got that. They elected him in 1920, and there were only four Blacks in the country who were in state legislatures, and he was one of them. Then they said—and this was 1919—and the next year, if women are given the right to vote, we want a Black committeewoman in this town. Then they wanted a Black magistrate. They wanted a Black person undertaker to bury

the paupers, and they wanted a Black on the school board. They wanted a Black on the police force, a Black high-ranking officer, and they wanted a Black in Congress. And they got most of these things.

In 1932 what happened—the reason they switched from the Republican Party—they put in 1930—'30 or '31—they got enough signatures to put on the ballot to build a black hospital, and they passed it. They passed it with language reading "a million dollars to build a hospital for Blacks, staffed entirely by Blacks." Well, the Republican mayor and the Republican board of aldermen, they took the million dollars, and they put in streetlights, sidewalks, [expletive] like that. Well, the Blacks in St. Louis say, "Uh oh. Uh oh." Then [Franklin D.] Roosevelt got elected in '32. Well, the Blacks elected a Democratic mayor for the first time in the history of St. Louis, and so he got Roosevelt, or the Secretary of the Interior, whatever his name was. I can't even remember. He and Eleanor Roosevelt were friends.

WASNIEWSKI: Oh, was it [Harold] Ickes?

CLAY: Ickes.

WASNIEWSKI: The first one?

CLAY: Yes. He got Ickes to give him a million dollars to build this Black hospital. According to the bond issue, under the provisions it said it would be for Blacks, by Blacks, and Blacks will have every job in that hospital. Well it was a 600-bed hospital with a nursing school attached to it. And Black medical students coming out of Howard and Meharry had no place to intern, and they had to leave the country to intern because it was only little small hospitals around, but a 600-bed hospital was probably one of the biggest in the country.

For the next 20 years—it opened in ’37—the next 20 years Homer G. Phillips trained 74 percent of all of the Black doctors in the country, and Homer G. Phillips was the economic anchor for Black St. Louis. You had a thousand employees there, and every one of them was Black, from the hospital administrator to every other job there, was Black. So that became the economic anchor for Black St. Louisans, and it was because of their political power.

And in fact, they’ve got stories like when [James] Strom Thurmond and them were kicked out of the party; it was a black St. Louisan lawyer who had gone to the Supreme Court to argue *Shelley v. Kraemer*. He went over there and successfully argued the case for making restrictive covenants illegal and then left there and went to the Democratic National Convention. He’s the one who made the motion to kick the Dixiecrats out of the Democratic Party if they didn’t support the candidate. Well, they raised all kind of hell about him, and so he couldn’t even finish his statement. However, that night, some white Democrats got together and convinced Hubert [Horatio] Humphrey [Jr.] that he should take it up the next day, which he did, but that’s the kind of political power they had in St. Louis in those days.

WASNIEWSKI: How would you describe the district when you first ran for election? What did it encompass, and the people, demographics?

CLAY: Well, it was 53 percent Black, and we had—and still have—very few other large racial populations there. Like right now in St. Louis, I think the Hispanic population is four percent, as compared to 30, 40 percent in other major cities. And the Asians, they didn’t have much of an input inside the city. They were located in the suburban area, but a lot of them, with the district, were put into the district that I got, and the reason—well, let me tell you the reason the Democrats couldn’t destroy the district is, to destroy the

district, they would have to destroy a Republican seat too. And so the Republicans joined with the Blacks in the legislature and gave us enough to pass that bill, see. So I forgot to mention that.

But no, in the Democratic primary, I had lots of opposition from whites and from the Catholic Church. The bishops, oh [expletive]. The cardinal—I've been a Catholic all of my life. I was baptized at birth, graduated from Catholic elementary, Catholic high school, and what some people call a Catholic university, but it was Jesuit, and so I've always—still, if I was running now, I would have the same opposition. In fact, in one election, the cardinal sent out a pastoral letter—didn't call my name, but it was to "kill two birds with one stone." He was at the Democrat—who was the Democrat running for President then. The issue was that both of us supported women's health rights and for them to choose, and so he sent out the pastoral. But the priests always had opposed me in their meetings and all, but I would go to their meetings. I know, [expletive], and I would say to them what my record was on all of the issues, and I would say, "Now on Sunday your priest is going to tell you that you can't vote for me." I said, "But you have—the election is on Tuesday. You have 48 hours to decide who's best for you. Him or me." {laughter} And I'd get a laugh then, so I knew all I needed to do was split the vote, and that's what I was good at doing. {laughter} "Yeah, you vote on Tuesday. You don't vote on Sundays. That's good for us." {laughter}

WASNIEWSKI: So the opposition was strictly because of your position on women's reproductive rights?

CLAY: Well, that and on the civil rights for my people, yeah. The unions would oppose me, and eventually they had to come around because their membership came around. But in this book, I said, I'm working on two books, one, *In the Crosshairs of Enemy Fire*, and that's during my career.

Some of the craziest things that happened, and one chapter is on labor and the local labor people. Not all of them, but they opposed me. And then even when my son was running, they opposed him, but he had 17 years in the legislature. And he had built the same kind of reputation with the workers that I had, so they just ignored him, but then [John] Sweeney and I—this chapter deals with him, too, and her.[1] Sweeney and I had a big argument at a Congressional Black Caucus meeting, and so the meeting was called because AF of L [American Federation of Labor] wasn't contributing to Black Members of Congress like they were contributing to others, and so the chairman from South Carolina, what's his name? I mean, the Black guy?

MICHELLE: [James Enos] Clyburn?[2]

CLAY: Clyburn was chairing the meeting, and so Sweeney made the statement that, "Right now, I'm trying to get Clay's son elected to Congress, and I'm—" and I said, "Oh, wait a minute. What the hell are you talking about? You won't even return my calls; half of your leaders down there have come out for his opponent. What the hell are you talking about you won't even return my calls?" So we got into this big cussin' match, right, at the meeting, and Clyburn said, "Hey, wait a minute. We didn't call this meeting for you two guys to fight it out." He said, "We called this meeting because AF of L is not giving our people the maximum, and you're giving white candidates with 60 and 70 percent voting records for labor maximum, and all of us are 100 percent." And so then, who's the head of the teamsters?

WASNIEWSKI: Currently?

CLAY: Hoffa.

WASNIEWSKI: Oh, Jimmy Hoffa.

CLAY: Yeah, Hoffa said, "Hey, well why am I here? I've maxed with all of y'all in every election." Clyburn said, "Well, who invited you?" He said, "Sweeney." He said, "But I'm getting the hell out of here." So he left. {laughter} Well, that was 1999; I guess it was because I wasn't running again.

So, and about 10 years later, wasn't it, Michelle? When you called me and said that the people at the [George] Meany Center want to meet with you? And I said, "They want to meet with me?" I hadn't been in Congress in 10 years. So we go down there, and they said, "You know, we've got a financial crisis here. The teamsters aren't contributing; service employees unions are not contributing." They had the list, and they said, "We want to know if we can use your $225,000 that's been sitting here since 1999." I said, "What do you mean, sitting here?" Well, what happened, when I retired, two unions put up $225,000 to provide scholarships at the Meany Center to train people how to run a union. They said, "Mr. Sweeney forbid us from awarding any scholarships." I said, "You've got to be kidding." Can you believe? I said, "Oh my God." So I said, "You can do what you want to do with the $225,000." And so they wanted to put it in the general fund. I said, "You have my permission. If that's what it takes." But those are the kind of stories, you know.

And then, like, the first chapter I talk about what happened with a Black university that wrote me a letter and right after I got elected and asked if I would accept an honorary degree. And of course I said yes. Then they wrote me a second letter and said disregard the first letter. So I found out what happened was they also offered—well they had a Black guy on the board who worked for McDonnell Douglas aircraft. And so when he heard about it—he was absent when they decided to give me the honorary degree—he raised all kind of hell. So then they said, "Well, what's the problem?" Well he said, "If

you're going to give Clay an honorary, you're going to give my boss an honorary." So they said, "Okay." So they wrote the same letter to James McDonnell. McDonnell wrote a letter back and said he wouldn't be caught dead on the same platform with me, so they didn't give him one and took the one back from me. {laughter} This is the kind of [expletive] that happens. But anyhow, the next year they had another Black from corporate America that just got on—the governor put him on—and at his first meeting, he said, "I got a motion, and I'm not going to leave this room until you pass it. You give Bill Clay an honorary doctorate." Well he was with IBM. {laughter} And he just happened to be my cousin, but he ended up rising in IBM. He managed a program for them in seven countries: Japan, Saudi Arabia, and all, and he was the first Black salesperson for IBM in the city of St. Louis. So those are the kind of stories that I put in there.

In fact, one story is tragic. Monsignor [Patrick] Molloy {laughter} he came out against the freedom riders in 1961, and oh, he said they were communist inspired, and that the whole "blah, blah, blah." So it got to be big news in St. Louis, so they asked me if I would debate him on the issue on live television. So I said, "Certainly. I'm the proper one. I'm Catholic educated, blah, blah, blah." So we get there. At the debate thing, he had the opening statement, and he went through all of his foolishness. And he said that the CORE [Congress of Racial Equality] was provoking the violence. "Going in the South, they know that white people down there didn't want Blacks to do this, this, and that, and so the demonstrators are wrong. They are provoking the violence." So when he finished, it was my turn, so I said, "Well Monsignor, I'm glad you made the statement that the white people don't want the Blacks down there, and by Blacks showing up down there they are provoking the violence." I said, "Right now, today, in the Belgian Congo, they are killing priests and nuns because the Black people over there don't

want them coming in, and so they're provoking the violence there." He got up and said, "I'm not going to sit here and listen to this sacrilegious speech." He said, "I'm out of here."

Well, the moderator said, "Well, Clay, we've still got 22 minutes left. What should we do?" I said, "I'm prepared to stay." He said, "Then let's continue." Well, that wasn't the end of the story. A week later—this was August of '61—a week later, my wife goes to re-register my two oldest kids in Blessed Sacrament Catholic School. Well, he was the pastor of Blessed Sacrament. He said to my wife, "Do you think I'm going to let your children come to my school after the way your husband embarrassed me on television?" And my wife said, "Your school? I thought this was the parish school." He said, "Well, you will find out." So we go, Carol and I, we go to see the superintendent of Catholic education, and he told us, "I agree with Monsignor Molloy, and your kids cannot go to any Catholic school in this town." I said, "Oh, okay." So then I called a couple of my Catholic friends. We had a meeting, and while we're sitting there—it was three of us—one of them got up and left the room, and when she came back, she said, "Been resolved." I said, "What's been resolved?" She said, "I called the nun who runs {laughter} the school on the campus of St. Louis University, and you know they don't give a damn about Catholicism. She said she'd be glad to let your kids come to her school." And so they transferred there, and they both finished. Did you go there, Michelle?

MICHELLE: I went there for five years.

CLAY: So they went there, and they finished, and she [Michelle] went there too. So those are the kinds of stories that I put in this book, and oh, it's something.

WASNIEWSKI: Good stories.

JOHNSON: In 1968, when you were elected, there were two other new African-American Members elected too, Shirley [Anita] Chisholm and Lou [Louis] Stokes.

CLAY: Right.

JOHNSON: Can you talk a little bit about your relationship with them and just your impressions of them as political leaders?

CLAY: Well, Stokes and I had a great friendship—lasted until he died. We only lived about 10 minutes apart here—not here, in the other house, which was 10 minutes from here. We were the ones that really pushed through the idea of starting the Congressional Black Caucus. I had a great relationship with everybody in the caucus, but with Stokes it was closer than anybody else. I had a good relationship with Charles [Coles] Diggs [Jr.], the chairman, and of course Gus [Augustus Freeman] Hawkins. Gus Hawkins was a champion. He and I had the kind of friendship Lou Stokes and I had, and we were the ones that kept the organization together. You still had a lot of confusion in the organization, but we could always reach a happy medium.

You had several who wanted to lead like Adam Clayton Powell [Jr.], be *the* spokesman, and we said, "No, no. We are going to speak as a group." That's how all of these series of hearings that we had around the country. I was chairman of the communications committee, and I aligned with the chairman of the Howard University School of Communication [in Washington, DC], and we had hearings around the country. Gus Hawkins got with the educators, and they had hearings all over the country. [Ralph Harold] Metcalfe had a hearing with the medical community down at Meharry. [Ronald V.] Dellums and Chisholm took on the military, and they had hearings even in foreign countries, so that was what it was about.

We didn't really run into much disagreement until we started bringing southern Blacks into the fold, but I don't need to get into that. See, they were in tune to the gradualism kind of thing. Jimmy Carter and his [expletive]. The Black Caucus had to attack Jimmy Carter almost weekly. It was really obnoxious the way he wanted to treat us, but we were able to hold our own.

JOHNSON: When you were first talking about establishing the caucus and making it a formal organization, what was the response like in Congress, in the House?

CLAY: That's what I had said to—we had lots of people who were opposed to it, including the liberal end of the House Membership. But we made it clear to the labor union leaders and to the white liberals and their civil rights allies that Black people did not need "middlemen" to interpret our problems, our concerns, and our agenda for addressing them. We made it clear that, "We speak for our people. They sent us here. I don't know who sent you here. But I'm telling you," and that's why we had to build this national base for us. We got over the criticism because it became apparent that we weren't trying to usurp anybody else's power. "You speak for the women? Fine. You speak for workers? Fine. But we have to vote on these issues, so you better get together with us to make sure you're going to get it passed."

There was one incident with Pat [Patricia Scott] Schroeder that needs to be explained. I passed the Family and Medical Leave Act, but initially it wasn't my bill. It was Pat Schroeder's act. And this has nothing to do with the CBC. We all loved and respected her record of supporting our causes. But I feel compelled to explain how I came about becoming the primary sponsor of the Family and Medical Leave Act. It was just how things happened. The Congress passed a bill to increase the pay of Members of Congress, which was badly in need of being increased. I'll tell you, I made more money before I came to Congress than I did when I got here. They were paying $28,000 in

Congress. I made $35,000 a year before I got here. But then in April, they had already passed the bill to go up to $42,000.

But then a couple of years later, there was another big push to increase the pay even more. Pat Schroeder declared she had enough and opposed the proposed increase that had passed just before the House went into its Christmas recess. Pat Schroeder and some other Democrats decided to oppose the pay increase for Members of Congress that had already passed. When Members went home for Christmas holidays anticipating an increase in salary, she and a number of others were campaigning to repeal the increase. They got major support from the media that was saying, "Oh, this is outrageous." So they got enough support to kill the pay increase. Well, the Democratic Leadership, supported by most Republicans said, "Mm-mm." They told Pat Schroeder—because she was leading the thing—"Your bill, Family and Medical Leave, will not ever pass this House as long as we are in charge." So the women representing national organizations came to me and asked if I would take charge of the bill. I said, "No, not unless Pat Schroeder made a public statement asking me to." My position was that I was not going to take her legislation. So the next thing I know, Pat asked me to take it over. That's how I got the legislation. That's just the way things happened.

JOHNSON: Well, one thing I wanted to know was about in the early days of the CBC, some of the pragmatic part about, like, how often did you meet? What were your biggest issues when you were just getting off the ground?

CLAY: Oh, well, we met weekly, and I'll give you an example of that. After Barbara [Charline] Jordan got elected, well she and I would always be the first two at the meeting, scheduled meeting, and then the rest of them started dragging in, 10 minutes late, 30 minutes late, 45 minutes late. And at some point in every meeting, Barbara Jordan would say, "Mr. Chairman, I got here on

time, but we have discussed what I think is important for Black folk, so I'm getting the hell out of here." And she would leave. Those are the kind of things that she had to go through.

But then we had, as I said, we had a couple Members who thought they would prefer to act as Adam Clayton Powell did. They wanted to be *the* voice of Black politicians, and, of course, we had to fight that down.

[A 23-second segment of this interview has been redacted.]

But I've written about all of this stuff in these seven books that I published.

WASNIEWSKI: Was there anyone in your early years who served as a mentor to you, who advised you on how to get things done in the House, what committees to go for?

CLAY: Yes, it would have been Gus Hawkins who would have been like a mentor to me. He was cool and calm and well respected. And, of course, I had my own ideas about what committees to be on. In fact, that was one of my first fights. I wanted to be on the Education and Labor Committee, and Meany had already pledged to me that he was going to get me on the committee. Well, then when the official list came out, I wasn't on the Education and Labor Committee, so I called Mr. Meany to thank him for trying, I said, "For trying to get me on the committee." He said, "Trying? What do you mean, trying?" I said, "Well, the chairman was the one from Arkansas."

MICHELLE: [David Hampton] Pryor?

CLAY: No. Chairman of the Ways and Means Committee.

WASNIEWSKI: Oh, Wilbur [Daigh] Mills.

CLAY: Wilbur Mills. I said, "Mr. Mills and them didn't." Well he was chairman of the committee to make assignments. I said, "And I didn't get on the list." That's when he [George Meany] shouted. "You what?" He said, "Let me tell you something. You're not important in this issue." He said, "No country [expletive] is going to put me in short pants." He said, "You just don't say a word. I'll take care of this." Well, the next day Wilbur Mills called me to let me know that not only was I going to be on the Education and Labor Committee, but I was taking seniority over the others that were just appointed.

Anyhow, Members said, "Oh yeah, we welcome you." So that's how I got friendly with Frank Thompson [Jr.], too, on the committee. He was one of my heroes. I had a great association with Phil [Philip] Burton, but I wouldn't say he was one of my idols, he didn't influence me. {laughter} We had some other issues, but not Frank Thompson. Then, I wanted to be on the House Administration Committee—Wayne [Levere] Hays was the chairman, and he kept blocking me. So one day I went and called him, and I went to see him, and I said, "Why don't you want me on this committee?" You know what he said? He said, "Because you're on Education and Labor." I said, "Well what's that got to do with it?" He said, "They already have five members on this committee, and Frank Thompson wants to be the chairman of this [expletive] committee." He said, "I'm never going to let that happen." I said, "Well, I'll be damned."

WASNIEWSKI: This was House Administration?

CLAY: House Administration. Well eventually, a couple of years later, I did get on that because the Speaker wanted me to go down and count the votes in Indiana eight [8th Congressional District]. He wanted me to be the chairman of a special committee to investigate the alleged theft of votes by Republicans

in the election. But Annunzio—Frank Annunzio—opposed me and made Leon [Edward] Panetta the chairman. I was the second Democrat named, and then a Republican from California was selected. The three of us went down there every weekend to count those votes. And the Democrat won by, I think, four votes, but that's how I got on the committee. Then, of course, I ended up with some influence on that committee, though.

JOHNSON: Since you brought up committees, we had the opportunity to interview Ron Dellums, and he told the story of how he was able to get onto Armed Services that involved you and Lou Stokes, and a meeting with Speaker [Carl Bert] Albert.

CLAY: Yes.

JOHNSON: Do you remember that meeting? Can you tell us about it?

CLAY: I wrote about it. I'm trying to remember. Yeah, we had to say to Albert that, we had to threaten them because the chairman of the committee was a southerner. I'm trying to think who it was.

JOHNSON: Mr. [Felix Edward] Hébert.

CLAY: Hébert, yes, and he was saying that he would take any Black, but he didn't want Dellums. And we had to say to the Speaker, "Look, nobody's going to pick who speaks for us." That was the position we took. And we said, "We will disrupt the hell out of this session," because we had already boycotted [Richard Milhous] Nixon and all of that stuff, so they knew who they were talking to. So we said, "No. Hébert can't tell us who's going to speak for Black America. This is what the Black Caucus wants. We want Dellums to speak for us," and that's how he got on it. But it was a little more detailed; in one of my books I mentioned it.

JOHNSON: Well, that's pretty much what Mr. Dellums said as well —that it was kind of a good cop/bad cop, and you were the bad cop.

CLAY: Right. And Stokes was the good cop, yeah.

JOHNSON: Yes.

CLAY: Well, that happened in a number of instances, where they told me to be the bulldog, and it didn't work one time. [Charles B.] Rangel, who was very close to Tip O'Neill, and what was happening was the Ethics Committee of the House was kind of stacked with conservative Democrats and the Republicans, and they were giving the liberals disproportionate hell. And so the liberals decided that they wanted somebody on the committee who could stand up and tell people, "Hey, no. You can't hurt me back in my district. This is what we want." So they voted to have me represent them on the Ethics Committee. Charlie Rangel takes me in to see Tip O'Neill, and I wrote about this just recently. I'm sending out now political humor. I sent this out just recently. Charlie Rangel goes in and said, "Tip," and explained the situation, and he said, "And we want Clay to represent us on the Ethics Committee." And Tip said, "This Clay?" Charlie said, "Yeah." Tip started laughing, and he started laughing, and he never stopped laughing. Then finally Charlie said, "Clay, I don't think he wants you on the committee. Let's go."

But the reason he was laughing was, see, I had gone through all of these investigations. I mean, tax people, Justice Department, you can name them. God dog all of these things. In fact, Mary Warner from the University of Iowa said I was the most investigated since Adam Clayton Powell, the most dogged individual, or something like that. But anyhow, it was terrible. A Justice Department federal prosecutor, in open court, said in his opening

statement, "And I will prove that Clay was involved in the illegal traffic of drugs." All this kind of stuff. They sued me for $180,000 alleging falsifying my travel and getting reimbursed for trips I didn't make. This was a story the *Wall Street Journal* had wrote on me, and then they syndicated it around the country. Well, it ended like all the rest of them. I produced evidence over a five-year period that proved every trip I took except $1,800 worth of trips—I guess that was two trips. But in the process, I found $2,500 worth of trips that I never got paid for. So we exchanged checks. The government gave me one for $2,500. I gave them one for $1,800. That was the kind of stuff. But, anyhow, Tip said, "This Clay?" So, no, he won't be on the Ethics Committee. Oh, boy. {laughter}

WASNIEWSKI: I read somewhere where he backed you the entire time that you were in the middle of that ethics investigation.

CLAY: Oh, Tip O'Neill? Oh, yeah, yeah. Oh, Tip, he was just a comedian. In fact, after he retired, like six months after he retired, my wife and I were with him somewhere—I don't know, it wasn't here in Washington—and he was saying to us, he said, "You know what? I never knew that they paid people this kind of money for advertisements." He said, "When I left Congress, I had $200 in my bank account." He said, "I got thousands of dollars now," because he was doing commercials. He said that. Oh, he was funny. {laughter}

JOHNSON: You had mentioned the State of the Union boycott for President Nixon, and I was hoping you could provide a little background on that because that was very soon after the CBC had organized. So where did that idea come from, and then how did that all unfold for the caucus?

CLAY: Well, he [President Nixon] had refused to meet with us Black Members for over a year, and one day Congressman Stokes said to me on the House Floor

that we should boycott his State of the Union address. He asked me to draft a memo to other CBC members. I did, and the rest agreed. So we boycotted the State of the Union, and some people said you shouldn't do this, and you shouldn't do that, but we stood tall, and eventually because of the ridicule from China, Russia, and other foreign adversaries, he was forced to meet with us.

Then one time, some of us in the CBC responded to another of his State of the Union [addresses]. Yeah, it was his State of the Union because I was one of the responders. And what happened was we objected to some of the things he said in his State of the Union, and the national broadcast gave us one hour to respond. And so what we did, we split it up into four areas: 15 minutes in Detroit, 15 minutes in LA, 15 minutes I guess somewhere in the East here. I was in Detroit with [William Joseph] Green from Philadelphia, the mayor of Philadelphia—he was an ex-Congressman—and also with the Senator from Michigan. And so we handled the 15 minutes there, in response to the State of the Union. But I guess that's what—I hope I'm not confusing the boycott with that instance.

JOHNSON: What effect do you think the boycott had for the caucus? Did it provide some influence, and did it give you some credibility right away with the power that you could have joining together?

CLAY: No, we had already established our credibility, and what happened was, what really, really gave us our credibility was the kickoff of the Congressional Black Caucus, which was a fundraising dinner held here in Washington. The speaker was so dynamic, Ossie Davis, and he set the tone for what the Black Caucus meant for Black America. His theme was giving us Black people the cause.

And at that dinner, we turned away thousands of people because the fire marshal said, "You can only have X number of people. There ain't going to be no standing room." And so that really gave us our pathway because Black America accepted the plan that Ossie Davis laid out. The title of it, "It's the plan, not the man." From there on, it was what we did afterwards, holding all of these meetings, seminars. We were already well respected. That's how we could get away with it.

WASNIEWSKI: Just to just kind of step back, take a broader look at the CBC over time, what do you think its impact on the institution of the House was, if you had to sum it up?

CLAY: Well, it gave people who normally didn't have a vehicle for a voice, it gave them, not just Black Members, but other Members—see, back in the day, if you weren't chairman of a committee or a subcommittee, nobody paid any attention to you. And so that's what happened: when we started demanding that we're going to get our positions, other caucuses started doing the same thing. Yes, I mean the farm people, and suburban people, and all these other—

WASNIEWSKI: Women's Caucus.

CLAY: The Women's Caucus, yes. It was like that until the late '90s when Newt [Newton Leroy] Gingrich came in and destroyed the effectiveness of the caucuses. So for 20, 25 years it did make a difference in who could speak for and on what issues you would speak for. Because at one time it was just the chairman and the subcommittee chairman, and nobody else had anything that was recognizable.

WASNIEWSKI: And when you talk about Gingrich in the '90s, you're talking about pulling money and resources away from the caucuses.

CLAY: Oh, he destroyed the caucuses. There were a whole lot of caucuses [about 25], but he wanted to get to the Black Caucus, and in order to do that, he had to destroy the Ripon Caucus, the Republicans Caucus, and all of those others. And what he did was he said that caucuses could not raise money from sources outside of Congress. It was a blow to all caucuses, but in a sense, it backfired—that necessitated us establishing the Black Caucus Foundation. We had already established it, but it wasn't doing much of anything. You know they had set up a scholarship program, but then after that we had to go—they had to raise the money for our programs.

What he did, and how he hurt the caucuses, was we had established a ruling where we could merge our staffs to buy expertise. We could, like if you wanted to put a scientist who was knowledgeable about a certain thing, three or four Members could take their official clerk hire and divide it up and pay for hiring that expert. Well, he abolished all of that, so you weren't able to do that kind of stuff. If you want somebody to do real expert investigation of some legislation, you can't just pay him a limited amount that the Congress has set for staff people. You had to go above that and bring in somebody who was an expert. Other than that, you've got to depend on the committee expert that you may not always agree with. So our caucuses—not just ours, but all of them—were using the same thing, like the Democratic Study Group. They provided information for Republicans as well as Democrats, but they couldn't do it with some staff member limited to maybe $40,000 a year when they should pay $200,000 for the kind of expertise you were looking for. Well he abolished all of that, and that's what destroyed the effectiveness of those caucuses.

JOHNSON: This is a question that we've asked some other Members that we want to know more about the role of the caucus in trying to bring attention to the

apartheid regime in South Africa, and what individual Members were called upon to do?

CLAY: {laughter} Well, I'm laughing because I went on a trip with John Conyers [Jr.]—John Conyers and two or three others, but it was Conyers. We were going to South Africa. We stopped in, not Pretoria. What's the other big town?

WASNIEWSKI: Johannesburg? In South Africa?

CLAY: No, not that. We ended up in Johannesburg. Where?

MICHELLE: Cape Town?

CLAY: Yes, Cape Town. We got to Cape Town, and I was just thinking about it the other day. When Israel wouldn't let those two Congresspeople in. We got to the airport in Cape Town, and it was empty. That's a couple of million; that city's a couple of million people. It had one security guard and one teller in there, and somebody from the ambassador, or state department, or something, just the three of them plus our committee in this big airport telling us that we can't go into town because we had John Conyers in our group, and he was leading the fight on the question of apartheid. That's the kind of stuff that happened. We ended up in Johannesburg, though, and we met with a lot of people for and against apartheid. Didn't meet with the head of state there while we were there, but that's the kind of stuff that you would run into. Of course, a lot of us in the CBC got arrested at the South African embassy, protesting the apartheid.

WASNIEWSKI: I just had a follow-up question about the way the CBC changed over time, and you alluded to it earlier, about southern Members coming on board the committee, or on board the caucus. Can you talk a little bit about the—as

the caucus got bigger, how maybe it became a little more difficult to agree on issues or policy?

CLAY: Yes, well, and right now I can't remember specific instances well, but one is the—[Gary A.] Franks. I mean, that never would have happened. In the original, we would have kicked his butt out of the caucus. But you had [Kweisi] Mfume there from Baltimore, and then the press was saying that because it was an effort to kick him out. I wasn't leading the effort; I was supporting it, but it was two other Members. And the press was saying that that was unfair, and that we shouldn't do that, and so our leader, Mfume, sided with them, and they let him stay. And now here's a guy that was opposed to everything that the Black Caucus was for. He even went down south and testified in court against two members of our Black Caucus on a redistricting thing, and got them, and they took their districts away from them. And, of course, my position was that we should kick him out. But it didn't happen until—see, he came from a district that was predominantly white, and he thought he was serving their agenda. And they decided, "That's not our agenda either," and they kicked him out. He saved us. In fact, this is in this book, *In the Crosshairs*, that I'm writing about: he saved us because we looked like idiots. I mean, if you had a caucus, that's to promote a certain interest. And if you've got somebody in there like Mia [Ludmya Bourdeau] Love from Utah came here, and she made public statements that she was here to destroy the caucus from within. Well, they let her in, but then she ended up supporting it. Then, of course, you had others who never joined, like the one from Oklahoma [Julius Caesar (J. C.) Watts Jr.], but he wasn't anti-Black. He just didn't want to. And the Senator from Massachusetts never joined the caucus.

WASNIEWSKI: Edward [William] Brooke [III], yes.

CLAY: Yes, because the agenda of the Senate is different from the agenda of the House. And he would have to take positions that he probably didn't want to take.

JOHNSON: What kind of impact did the growing number of African-American women that were elected to Congress have on the Caucus? Did that change the dynamic?

CLAY: Well, very positive effect. They took over the leadership. You could name women— {laughter}

JOHNSON: Yes, early on [Yvonne Brathwaite] Burke and Cardiss Collins were chairs.

CLAY: Yes, but then I think we had five or six then. Maxine Waters, Barbara Lee, and [Karen] Bass. They contributed significantly to the progress of the Black Caucus.

WASNIEWSKI: We're up on 1:30, which is our allotted time. Do you have any wrap-up questions?

JOHNSON: I think just that overarching legacy question that we tend to ask?

WASNIEWSKI: Yes, sure. Go ahead.

JOHNSON: Not an easy question, especially for you since you were in the House and your congressional career was so influential, but what do you think your lasting legacy, just focused on your House career—if someone were to say, "Congressman Clay, this was your legacy," what do you think that is?

CLAY: Well, it would be my legislative career because, see most Members of Congress don't pass important legislation. They're just there to support it. But I passed 295 bills that became law, and many of them were legendary—I

mean, like Family and Medical Leave, Hatch Act reform, five-year vesting in your pension, transferability from one job to another, all of these. See, in the old days, if you had a pension, you had to stay at that job until you retired, or you lost your pension. Well, I had a lot of bills that I passed in the pension arena that made it possible for people to take their pensions with them to another job.

And then in the field of education and what we did for Black colleges and all of that. I would say—oh, and putting extra teachers, federal government. I passed that law, putting 100,000 extra teachers in the low-income areas, putting 150,000 policemen on the streets in the ghettos where the high crime rates were, that kind of legislation. This book that I'm writing, *Around the World in 80 Years,* it talks about the 74 countries that I've visited, the 25 world leaders that I negotiated with, those kinds of incidents.

And there's some very interesting stories too. But when we met with [Fidel] Castro, it was comical. First of all, there was about nine or 10 of us, and we met with him at 9:00 at night. We go down to where his headquarters was. It's one car in the driveway, as opposed to when we got in going to see our President. And he, as well as other leaders, always told us how Castro was targeted by his own people. According to our official policy, "the Cuban people hated him." Well, apparently this night they were showing off for their American guests. There was only one car in the driveway. When we got inside, there were only two security guards. And so then we go with Castro. He could talk and talk and talk. We started at 9:00. It's about 1:00 in the morning, and this elderly Congressman from New Jersey who had fallen asleep about 11:00, woke up, looked at his watch and said, "What the hell's going on here?" He said, "Do you know what time it is? Let's get the hell out of here."

The next day, we went on a bus tour, and Castro [was] the lead tour guide. We were driven into an area filled with glorious, huge mansions and so Castro was saying, "Yep, this is how the rich used to live, and the poor people didn't have jobs, and blah, blah, blah." Then Ben [Benjamin Arthur] Gilman, a Congressman from New York, interrupted to announce, saying, "Yes, and you took these houses away from them people." Castro replied immediately and in a loud voice, "What?" Because he had up to this point, he had spoken in Spanish, and his words were translated to us by an interpreter. But suddenly in English, he shouted, "Stop. Stop right here." And the driver stopped right in front of a house there—so it couldn't have been planned—Castro said, "Come on. Let's go inside." So we went inside, and he said, "See this? Thirty-two to 34, 35 rooms in this house, one family lived here before the revolution." He said, "I didn't take their property and didn't put them out. They're still here. They're probably up there on that third floor, or fourth floor, but there's 34 other families who live here with them now." {laughter} Oh boy, but those are the kind of stories.

WASNIEWSKI: Well, we appreciate your time. Thank you so much for inviting us in to talk.

CLAY: Alrighty. Okay.

WASNIEWSKI: We're happy to get some stories about the CBC and your early years.

CLAY: Well you can have that, and let me give you—oh, I'll tell you another thing that I want to be remembered for is my scholarship program. It's in its 34th year now, and we have more than 350 Clay graduates from 57 colleges and universities. We give four-year scholarships.

WASNIEWSKI: That's great.

CLAY: I'm proud of that.

JOHNSON: Thank you very much.

NOTES

[1] Long active in labor unions—beginning in New York City—John Sweeney went on to serve as president of the AFL-CIO from 1995 to 2009.
[2] Congressman Clay's daughter Michelle was present for the interview.