Muriel Morisey
Senior Legislative Assistant, Representative Shirley Chisholm of New York

Oral History Interview
Final Edited Transcript
April 19, 2017

Office of the Historian
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C.

"So we moved through our work, and even our social lives, carrying the mantle of being one of Chisholm's staffers. And people knew that meant we really were very powerful by virtue of the confidence that she had, the way she relied on us, the trust she exhibited. So for me, it's hard to separate any of the experience from the fact that working for Shirley Chisholm, having a position of trust with her senior staff—that was a really big deal. That's what I remember. Most of the staffs had few women. I knew it, but I think at the time I was always feeling [that] most people on the Hill don't enjoy the confidence and the trust and the capacity to make a difference that her staff did."

Muriel Morisey

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Abstract

During the 1970s, Muriel Morisey played an integral role in two congressional offices. In 1971, she began her career in Washington, DC, as a constituent case worker and press secretary for Walter Fauntroy, the first African-American Delegate from the District of Columbia. By 1975, she was senior legislative assistant for Representative Shirley Chisholm of New York, the first African-American Congresswoman. In this interview, she describes her work in the U.S. House of Representatives during this transformative decade in American political history.

Morisey highlights the way the growing number of women and African Americans in Congress began to shape political debates not only on the House Floor but behind the scenes in congressional offices. She reflects on Representative Chisholm's political philosophy, her pragmatic approach to bipartisan legislation, and her willingness to delegate responsibility and empower the women on her staff. Morisey chronicles the emergence of new social and professional networks for African-American staff members and discusses the relationship between Fauntroy and Chisholm and their respective congressional districts. In addition, she recalls her work as a research assistant for the House Judiciary Committee's impeachment investigation of President Richard M. Nixon in 1974. Throughout the interview, Morisey provides insight into the experience of women staff in the House and the political aspirations of the African-American community in the 1970s.

Biography

Muriel Morisey began her career on Capitol Hill in the office of District of Columbia Delegate Walter Fauntroy in 1971. During the next seven years, she worked on the impeachment investigation of President Richard M. Nixon, completed a law degree, and served as a close aide to Congresswoman Shirley Chisholm of New York in the U.S. House of Representatives. This was the first chapter of a long and distinguished career in which she excelled as a congressional staff member, lawyer, and academic.

Muriel C. Morisey was born in Greensboro, North Carolina, in 1947. Her parents were both college graduates from families with deep roots in the South. Her mother, Juanita Pope Morisey, had a long career as an educator, and her father, A. A. Morisey, was a trailblazing African-American reporter who broke the color barrier at a previously segregated newspaper in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. Before she was 10 years old, her family moved to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, so that she could avoid the segregated schools of North Carolina. She went on to study history at Harvard University.

Morisey was briefly employed as a newspaper reporter before working on Maryland Congressman Parren Mitchell's first House campaign in 1970. Soon after, she joined Fauntroy's 1971 special election campaign to become the District's first Delegate in nearly 100 years. This led to a full-time position in his congressional office, where her responsibilities included constituent case work, office management, and press secretary duties. She left the Hill in 1974 to enroll in law school at Georgetown University. During the House Judiciary Committee's investigation of President Nixon and the Watergate break-in, special counsel John Doar hired Morisey as a research assistant to organize and process confidential documents pertaining to the case.

In 1975, Representative Chisholm hired Morisey as senior legislative assistant in her Capitol Hill office. While still in law school, Morisey concentrated on speechwriting as well as research and legislation on education policy. A trusted member of Chisholm's staff, she often worked directly with other congressional offices to develop legislation and express Chisholm's legislative goals.

After law school, Morisey departed Capitol Hill for a legal career. At the Department of Justice, she worked as an attorney in the Office of Legislative Affairs, and later became legislative counsel in the Civil Rights Division. In 1983, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) hired her as a policy advocate for civil rights issues in Congress. She moved on to Harvard University in 1985 to assist the university administration with higher education policy issues. In each position, her work frequently brought her back to Capitol Hill to meet with Members of Congress and participate in hearings. In 1991, she joined the faculty of the James E. Beasley School of Law at Temple University in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. After 25 years of teaching, she retired in 2016.

Editing Practices

In preparing interview transcripts for publication, the editors sought to balance several priorities:

- 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*.

The first reference to a Member of Congress (House or Senate) is underlined in the oral history transcript. For more information about individuals who served in the House or Senate, please refer to the online *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress*, http://bioguide.congress.gov and the "People Search" section of the History, Art & Archives website, http://history.house.gov.

For more information about the U.S. House of Representatives oral history program contact the Office of House Historian at (202) 226-1300, or via email at history@mail.house.gov.

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— MURIEL MORISEY —

A CENTURY OF WOMEN IN CONGRESS

MURPHY: This is Mike Murphy in the House Recording Studio on April 19th, 2017. Today we are happy to have Muriel Morisey join us for an interview that will be part of the Office of the Historian's women in Congress oral history project, *A Century of Women in Congress*. Thank you for joining us.

MORISEY: Thank you.

MURPHY: So I wanted to start with your story before you arrived in Washington, D.C. Where did you grow up?

MORISEY: I grew up in Philadelphia, from third grade to graduating from high school, but I'm a native of North Carolina, and my family lived there the first years. Segregation was in full force, so I started out in a segregated community, at a segregated school, and then we went to Philadelphia. So the bulk of my experience, in a way, is Philadelphia city kid, but I still feel very much the ties to North Carolina—partly because where you begin, {laughter} it's the beginning. So the segregation and all of that is still very vivid to me.

MURPHY: What did your parents do in North Carolina and then in Philadelphia?

MORISEY: My father was a journalist, and in 1949 he got a job—we believe he was the first full-time black reporter for a white Southern daily. He worked at the newspaper in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, for [about] five years. He wrote the Negro news and he did his own photography. They had a Sunday section for Negro news and that was his primary responsibility. At least once—because I remember he was excited about it, at least once he had a byline story in the main part of the newspaper. I think he was reporting on

some election results, local election results that were significant. So with that experience, he became—I guess we'd call it a public relations person for the American Friends Service Committee, the international Quaker organization. That's what took us to Philadelphia.

I actually don't remember my mother going out to a regular job in North Carolina. She was trained as a schoolteacher, and that's where she had started her work life after college. When we were in Philadelphia she taught in a public school there, and then did something we would probably call social work. There used to be a YWCA and she, for example, was the executive director of one of the branches of the YWCA in Philadelphia. And she did, I think, similar work grounded in community development, I don't know—Job Corps kinds of things. I don't know a good way to capture what she was doing, but it drew primarily on community involvement, community organizations, not in the grassroots organizing sense but in running institutions.

MURPHY: So we could say that she was a professional. She was working for most of her life once she moved to Philadelphia.

MORISEY: Yes, absolutely. My parents both finished college in 1934, and they held professional positions their whole lives. They met, actually, on the first job each of them had. It was their first teaching assignment out of college, and they were new teachers at the same school, and that's how they met.

MURPHY: But your father transitioned into newspaper reporting. What impact did your father's career have on your way of approaching the world?

MORISEY: I think it had a huge impact, because—and then I have all his papers, and so on, copies of the news articles he wrote. He was covering the political events of the day. So what I came to understand is that there is something called

local politics. {laughter} The President of the United States is not the only elected official. I also remember my parents talking about the Adlai Stevenson runs for president and saying he was too intellectual. When you think about whatever age I was—eight, 10, whatever—when people are in your home and over dinner talking about political events—there was never a moment in my life when I didn't know this is important. This is really important stuff.

I took a quick stab at journalism—wasn't very good at it—but it was very powerful to me. I still say with great pride my father was a journalist—especially to my journalist friends. I like to make that link. He also affected my understanding of what journalism requires in a political environment, because I remember him saying, "Because I'm a journalist I can't tell people how I'm voting, because the role of the journalist is not to be a partisan." We were staunch Democrats, no doubt about it in my mind, but I remember thinking being a journalist is different, and it's special, and if that's the route you take with your interest in politics, then you can't be a politics partisan. Those are sort of different tracks to carry out your interest in the public events going on.

MURPHY: So you were really interested in politics from an early age, and your father played a role in this. Were you inspired by an issue, a person, or a campaign? Or was it mainly growing up in that environment?

MORISEY: I don't remember in the early years being particularly inspired by anything—I mean "earliest years," meaning North Carolina. But when we got to Philadelphia, there was actually a polling place at the corner of our block, and I was probably no more than eight years old because I'd walk by it on the way to the bus to get to school. On the appointed Election Day I would say, "What are those people walking down in the basement of that house for?"

My parents told me that it's a polling place and they're going down in there because that's where the polling booths are. And then I remember the phrase, "Vote the straight Democratic ticket." So you could just go into the polling place, and just this one lever, and that's what my parents said we are all supposed to do. Well, of course, I wasn't old enough to vote. So I don't remember a particular individual running for office or anything that stuck in my mind, really, until I moved to D.C. years later.

MURPHY: When you were growing up, it seems—we've already mentioned that your family played a big role in shaping your worldview, but what about your family's deep roots in the South? Was that something that you talked about a lot in your family?

MORISEY: Yes, in the sense that I was very aware. We were—my father, my mother, my siblings, and I—all born in North Carolina, but we had a strong link to South Carolina as well, where my father's mother had been born and raised. I remember there was a snobbery between North Carolina and South Carolina—at least in my family. I grew up thinking if somebody would say, "Oh, yes, that's right, Muriel, you're from South Carolina," I'd say, "No, I'm from North Carolina." I don't know what that was about, and as it turns out the South Carolina link is very illustrious because my father's cousin, the author Ralph Ellison—they shared a grandfather. He was a slave and then prospered very well in South Carolina.

So now I feel very much I'm from South Carolina. I'm quick to tell people I have my roots in South Carolina. North Carolina, as well, but I'm very conscious of that. That's where I'm from. I'm from the South. And I don't sound like it. People say, "No, I can't believe it." I'm from the South, and I'm from Philadelphia in important ways, but that sense of connection to the South and to its slave history is very powerful to me—and then my own

family's slave history. I know a lot about it, and it's a very powerful part of my identity.

MURPHY: Was that something you had to seek out, or was that something that you grew up hearing stories about?

MORISEY: I grew up hearing that my mother's father—I grew up hearing all the time—we called him Daddy Pope. Daddy Pope's father was born a slave. Well, in retrospect, of course he was. My grandfather was born in 1876. Of course his father was born a slave. I mean, the shocking thing would be [if] Daddy Pope's father was a freeman. That would be news. {laughter} So I knew that—early, early memories of that part of our history. It was somewhat later I started learning about the South Carolina part. My grandmother's father on my father's side was born a slave as well. I learned about it, but in recent years I've done lots and lots of research about it. I have a cousin who's also done a lot of family history on my mother's side. And my father did some research about his side of the family. He passed away in 1979, but before then he'd done a lot of family research. I have the results of all of that research, including audio tapes that he left of interviews, and his own recollections about the family's history.

MURPHY: Were those stories framed as a counterpoint to your lives in the '40s and '50s? Or were they instilled upon you as something that needed to be remembered?

MORISEY: I think the impression I had was of pride, and that we had a history of people coming out of slavery and having prosperous lives. My ancestors—this is how I capture it—they went from slavery to prosperity, and there was never a period of poverty. I think part of what my family wanted to convey to me is that that's something to be proud of. That despite everything they were

educated, they were homeowners, they were very well established and highly regarded members of their community. And having been enslaved is nothing to be ashamed of, but it didn't necessarily determine everything that would happen afterward, because even formerly enslaved people could achieve and did achieve a great many things. The simple fact of home ownership and material comfort—not being poor—those were big deals. And I think both my mother and father wanted all of us to understand that and appreciate it.

MURPHY: But even so, they determined that it was best to move to Philadelphia at some point. Why was that?

MORISEY: Oh, something very specific happened. There was a citywide test. I don't know specifically, a sort of aptitude—IQ kind of test. It was given to all the children in the town we were living in, Winston-Salem, North Carolina. It turned out that I got the highest score—Negro or white. They wanted to do a story on me. The newspaper said, "Oh, this little Negro child got . . ." My father said, "No, because I' m not going to have my child the subject of publicity." It was inappropriate. I didn't really learn the full story about that until I went through the correspondence of my cousin, the author Ralph Ellison. He kept everything—and he kept a letter from my dad telling him about this. The gist of the letter was, "We can't let Muriel stay in these segregated schools." My father said to Ralph something like, "It's quite a responsibility to raise a child like this. Muriel was a problem because we've got to move because she can't be in the public schools in the South." That's why they moved: for me to be in a better school environment.

MURPHY: We've talked a lot about the past—looking backwards from your family's vantage point—but there was also a consideration of the future. What were you thinking in terms of your potential career paths or your desires for intellectual growth as you were growing up?

MORISEY: In our family, there was never even a discussion about the fact that I and my siblings would go to college. My father, my mother, my first cousins all went to college. So that was just a given. There was never a conversation about what happens after high school. It was where will you go to college? There was never any doubt that I would have a career—my late sister might answer this differently—but I knew I was going to have a career. I was going to do something and make a living and be independent after college. My brother, I think, would say the same thing. This was not something that got talked about because the only conversation would be, "Oh my God, so-and-so is thinking of not going to college." That would be a family conversation. I don't remember it ever happening, but that would be the shocker in my family.

MURPHY: Did you get the sense that there were inherent limitations for women, for example, if you wanted to pursue a professional career?

MORISEY: I don't remember thinking that way. My mother and all of her friends—her friendship network was women primarily she had known since college, and they were all professionals—very accomplished women. My father's two sisters were both—I think they were both schoolteachers, college educated. I was acutely aware of this thing called discrimination and segregation and limited opportunities, but I don't remember anyone telling me, "And therefore, here is a list of things you can't do." I don't think anyone ever even implicitly told me there was something that was out of bounds for me because of being black or female. It sounds a little crazy to say that, but maybe one of the most important things about the way my own career has developed is that it was always affirmed to me that I would do and achieve what my abilities suggested. That might include a career in social justice and

anti-discrimination work, and working for civil rights, because those are justice issues, not because my life or options were limited by race or gender.

MURPHY: When you went to college, what did you determine you were going to study?

MORISEY: Well, the most powerful thing I remember about beyond college was the decision that I never, ever wanted to go to school again. {laughter} Four years later, I enrolled in law school. I majored in history because I was fascinated by it, and particularly fascinated by the Nazi era—Germany in those years from the rise of Hitler and through the Holocaust. And I was very interested in American history, because American history, colonial history, was a huge part of the curriculum at the school I went to in Philadelphia. We went to every monument. We went to Independence Hall. We did all of that. The whole American history experience that children could have, we had in the school I went to. And at that school, there was a plurality of students who were Jewish.

I entered that school in '55. The end of the war, the revelations about the Holocaust were new and raw to some of my classmates' parents and grandparents. I remember hearing about it, reading about it. There was a book that circulated among us where I think everybody in the class practically took turns reading this book, and it was a very detailed, personal account of the Holocaust. So by the time I got to college, the influences of the education and the strong, strong history program at my school—generally all the way through high school the history faculty was very strong. And then I had this fascination with Nazi Germany. So I was an American history major, but it made sense to me to be a history major, to say, "Well, that's the angle on ideas that I want to pursue."

MURPHY: When you were an undergraduate, you went to school in the '60s in a new city. What was the political culture like at Harvard University?

MORISEY: Well, this was the '60s, and there were two things going on in terms of the political life on campuses. One was the Vietnam War, and the other thing was black activism—Black Power and all that. I wasn't so much involved directly in anti-Vietnam War activity though some people very close to me were. But I was very deeply involved in the Black Student Association and activities around that—not a Black Panther, {laughter} but really aware and following that part of the social justice movement of the '60s—even though it was an overwhelmingly white campus. But there were black students, and we had an organization, and I was very active in it.

MURPHY: Was the focus on social justice, political rights, or was there a cultural side of things as well?

MORISEY: The main focus, ultimately, became having Harvard create a department of African-American studies. I don't remember the particular name of the department, but the Harvard faculty decided to create a department of African-American studies as the result of and in the wake of a really well-organized black student movement. I'm quite sure we had lots of white student supporters, and obviously because there were no blacks on the Harvard faculty we had strong support—eventually—from faculty members. John Kenneth Galbraith, who was a world-renowned economist—and a tall and very imposing person. I will never forget they allowed us to sit in at the faculty meeting at Harvard for the vote and the discussion. I remember John Kenneth Galbraith standing up and saying to the Harvard faculty why he supported the creation of this department. One of my friends who was most active in that passed away about three weeks ago, and the obituary and the service mentioned his role in all of that. So it's very much on my mind that

we did something amazing. Got Harvard University to create an academic department about black people. That's the most powerful thing, for me, even though there was a lot of other activism. There were not a lot of black students. It was a tiny group, but they weren't monolithic. But the organization of black students made that the goal, and pulled it off.

MURPHY: Did that experience—entering a university that was majority white, changing the institution from within, and then steeping in all of that political activism—did that change your worldview, or did it reinforce your worldview?

MORISEY: I think for me it was all reinforcing my parents' perspective on social justice and civil rights. By the time I went to college, my father had worked for a time with the Commission on Human Relations of the City of Philadelphia. I think that's the title. It was actually Philadelphia's civil rights monitoring and enforcement entity. So by then that was his job—the civil rights goals and anti-discrimination in Philadelphia. I told a friend once, I'm an apple that fell straight off the tree and landed at the bottom. I just took on the roles in college or had the priorities in college that made complete sense if you knew my history. There was no, "Oh, Muriel's taking an odd turn." No, I didn't. I just went straight ahead on the values that I understood and took in growing up.

MURPHY: Did your father's role working for the City of Philadelphia influence your decision to become involved in politics and working here in D.C.?

MORISEY: No, I don't think so. He influenced my decision to try my hand at journalism. I thought, "I don't know what I want to do with my life. Well, my dad was a journalist. I'll try that." But I think it's much more. What I'm talking about is so much what permeated my understanding of the world,

and the way I wanted to live in the world. I don't think you can pin down very well—it's a silly analogy, but I've been short all my life. What does being short mean? Well, that's just who I am, and nothing happened, or no revelation—I mean, except discovering that if you're short there's certain things you can't reach. {laughter} I really think I was completely and totally sort of indoctrinated—in the best sense—in the very life I've been living.

MURPHY: What did bring you to Washington, D.C.?

MORISEY: Now, here's where it gets hard. At a certain point in your life, you have to remember your résumé. So I have to think, what brought me to Washington the first time? I was dating a guy who was from Baltimore and I had a sister living here. We were trying to figure out where we could be and have a base. If no job presents itself he'll live with his parents and I can live with my sister for a good long time if I have to. So we picked D.C. because it was a city. It was close to home for him, and as good as close to home for me. So we decided we'd come to D.C., he and I.

When we got here, he got a job working for the man who became Congressman Parren [James] Mitchell, and represented the part of Baltimore that the man who became my first husband grew up in. So I started literally stuffing envelopes in the campaign office for Parren Mitchell and had a summer internship at the *New York Times* and was hired by the *Washington Post*, which was a very unsuccessful experience. Then, somehow or another, someone told Walter [Edward] Fauntroy—who had a staff need for his congressional campaign—and somehow or another I got interviewed and hired, joined his congressional campaign as a full-time staffer. He was the Democratic nominee for that first congressional seat for D.C. He was a shoo-in. He was going to win, and when he won I was one of the people who joined his staff. So, really quickly, Parren Mitchell won his election

eventually, came to Congress in 1971. So we ended up both of us working on the Hill, and that was a great fit.

I think I knew when I was stuffing those envelopes that I wanted to be part of this whole political thing, that it was fascinating, and there was a purpose. You knew what you were doing and why you were doing it, and it was a good thing, and this was a good man who would be a wonderful Member of Congress and help the social justice goals that he believed in. I was really happy just getting my foot in the door that way. I did literally stuff envelopes. I'm not being metaphoric. But I just thought it was great. I loved it.

MURPHY: When you joined Delegate Fauntroy's staff, what was your position and your responsibilities?

MORISEY: Well, let's skip the campaign. I can barely remember what various things I did on the campaign, but it doesn't matter. I joined the campaign something like less than six months before the election. My first position was as a constituent case worker. So the constituency, of course, was D.C., and the district office for the D.C. Delegate was on Vermont Avenue downtown. So I was working out of the district office with constituents that came in and their needs. Somewhere along the way the Congressman decided to move me to his Capitol Hill office. I'm having a little trouble remembering why. {laughter} But eventually I was his press secretary, and also eventually I was sort of an office administrator—authorized signature, alternative signature on the office checking account, that sort of thing. But I guess press secretary was the simplest way of capturing what I did once I was no longer a constituent case worker.

MURPHY: What did that involve, press secretary?

MORISEY: {laughter} He had a little weekly radio show, and it involved writing the script, and going down with him to the House Recording Studio, and figuring out who the guests were going to be. That was one of the things—of course, press releases, speeches. He was a very strong writer, and he didn't really need somebody to write very much for him. But you know what press secretaries do: accompany the Congressmen to an event that's going to have some public visibility, be there in case interacting with the press is part of it and he doesn't want to be sort of out there in that public arena without any staff support.

MURPHY: Did you have to handle a lot of calls from the press and issue responses?

MORISEY: I don't remember much of that. Yes, absolutely. I don't remember it very much, but of course. That's what press secretaries do.

MURPHY: Part of the job. {laughter} When you arrived in that office, was it a welcoming environment for women?

MORISEY: Oh, yes. Yes, there were very strong, accomplished women on that staff. Yes—not so much as professionals, but in the sense that—well, there's a story about that. But even when I was hired for the campaign, the person who reached out to me and said, "[A political supporter of Fauntroy] told us about you, we'd like to talk to you about working for the Congressman's campaign." She was a woman with an Ivy League graduate degree and an extremely accomplished professional, and she was a hugely significant part of his campaign staff. That turns out to have been typical. There were really strong women working for him. I never felt isolated by being the only woman doing things that mattered in that office.

MURPHY: So when you arrived, it was a seamless fit, in a way? Did other women on the staff offer you any advice?

MORISEY: Well, you have to remember that we were the first people ever. We were the first staff ever for that position. Nobody had ever held it before. We weren't all from campaign staff. But the point is we were figuring out, well, when a Congressman needs paperclips, how do you get those? There were other Members of Congress coming around and offering their assistance, but yes, we were all on equal footing. None of us had ever done this before, including the Congressman.

MURPHY: Was that something that you saw frequently? Were women in these types of positions in other Member offices at that time in the early 1970s?

MORISEY: Well, I know, for example, that John Conyers [Jr.] had a very powerful, effective senior staff member—a black woman. It stands out because she and I maintained a friendship over the years. I think there were others. I'm not remembering specific people, but I think that the big divide was that there were so few women who served in Congress, but there were a number of opportunities—not as many as for men—but there were a number of opportunities to have a job on the Hill. The numbers were nothing like they are now, but it wasn't an environment where—I mean, I've had the experience as a black person going into many environments and looking around the room and thinking, "I'm the only black person here." I don't remember getting to work on the Hill and looking around and thinking, aren't there any other women here? There were.

MURPHY: Yes, but press secretary is an influential position. There are clear leadership roles in a congressional staff. That's something you found in some offices? Colleagues that you knew?

MORISEY: Yes, there were some. I'm sure there were lots of equally talented women who weren't getting hired. I'm sure that the majority of the men in Congress

weren't really interested in having women on their professional staffs. But if the idea is you arrive in a place and you feel you're the first and the only—I didn't have to go through that.

MURPHY: Do you think the fact that the office was new made these openings available, in a way, to women?

MORISEY: Well, he was able to hire an entire staff, you know? It wasn't like there was a job to fill. It was: this is what—the D.C. Delegate has the funds to have a staff, and you get to fill all the jobs. His two top people were men with law degrees. And in a sense he was pretty deeply chauvinistic. But I hear your question as, "Did I land in an environment where I felt isolated or so much a token that that was a problem?" And I just didn't. If I am misremembering or in a permanent state of denial about some experiences, maybe, but I don't remember some of these things as being bad or isolating.

I remember thinking working on the Hill was the greatest job in the world, and I just eventually wanted to have a bigger, more important job. The Member—all the big jobs on Capitol Hill were held by men, and most of them had law degrees. So I figured out, "Well, I'll go to law school." But I didn't want to leave the Hill, so I went to law school at night while I worked at Capitol Hill. I got it both ways.

MURPHY: That was while you were working for Fauntroy?

MORISEY: Started, then finished up when I was working for [Shirley Anita] Chisholm.

MURPHY: When you were going to law school, were you still press secretary at Fauntroy's office?

MORISEY: Now we get into—I don't know. I didn't bring a copy of my résumé to consult. {laughter}

MURPHY: It's okay. But you had other positions. You moved out of the press secretary position.

MORISEY: Well, I did, because he replaced me.

MURPHY: What happened with that?

MORISEY: {laughter} When the administrative staff were out, it was understood generally that women would answer the phone. I answered the phone, "Congressman Fauntroy's office." And the guy on the line said, "Hello, I'm calling at the suggestion of" whoever. "I understand the Congressman is looking to hire a press secretary." And I thought, "Well, I'm the press secretary. I wonder what's going on." {laughter} So that's how I left the press secretary position. The Congressman hired this guy who was really an extraordinary person. It was [Robert L.] Bob Johnson, who ultimately became the head of Black Entertainment Television—one of the first black billionaires ever. It wasn't like this loser came in and took my job. {laughter} But they kept me on and I had a professional position—it's just that I don't remember what I did other than I was authorized to write checks. {laughter} I was doing things that were important and interesting, I just can't tell you what the tasks were.

MURPHY: Right. During this period, the Congressional Black Caucus [CBC] was founded. How did Delegate Fauntroy see his position in the caucus, and how did the staff react to that new development?

MORISEY: Well, I know that by the time he arrived in I guess it was a special election—I think he took the office in '71, but there was something off about the timing

of the election for that position.[1] I forget. Off in the sense it wasn't the usual cycle. But the Congressional Black Caucus already existed. There was such a thing, in a fledgling way.

MURPHY: With a different name, I think.[2]

MORISEY: Now that I'm thinking about it, I don't know if it was quite organized that way, but I'm very aware of the fact that the black Members of Congress knew each other and Shirley Chisholm was already there. I think of the Congressional Black Caucus as sort of this organic thing that was bound to happen, that had to happen, and everybody who was black was in it—with different levels of involvement. I don't remember Congressman Fauntroy being particularly caught up in that, but it was there. I mean, I think of it as inevitable. What do people do when they're in the minority and in a power dynamic? They come together to enhance their power and influence as a minority subset.

MURPHY: Did you ever hear of any Members reluctant to join that organization or anything like that?

MORISEY: No. But you see, to me—when I was on campus, there was a question: are you going to be active in the Black Students Association? And some people weren't, but there was never, are you going to be among the black students? Well, the only issue is, are you going to show up at the meetings, are you going to do stuff, are you going to be high visibility. But you're black, you're in. I mean, some extreme reason, maybe, to distance yourself, but I never heard of anybody in Congress doing that, not any Democrat. Since then there have been blacks in the House who weren't Democrats, but, of course, they all were then.[3]

MURPHY: And as you worked—you said you were working and going to law school.

MORISEY: Yes.

MURPHY: How was your experience at law school as a woman?

MORISEY: Well, I was in the evening division, so my experience was unusual just by virtue of the fact that the evening division classes—it's not as huge a number as the day division. There were several other women in law school with me, and we were a tiny number. They had to build a ladies' room, because the Georgetown University Law Center had been designed by people who had not thought about the possibility that there might be some significant number of females needing to use the bathroom, and so they had to add one—an additional one. So that was kind of a reminder of how it was.

I became part of a study group of black women in the evening division. I think there were four of us in this study group. That was a very strong experience. Two of the women knew each other from before, and I knew one of the other members of the group from before. So I'm very aware of a very supportive environment. I remember I made friends amongst students who were white as well in the evening division.

But when the numbers are that small, you look around the room and practically everybody is a male. I had one female professor who was also black, and I witnessed my classmates treat her like dirt. I like to sit in the back row, and I could watch white males in the class talking about her. I don't remember overt, offensive things to her face out loud, but I was witness to it through the entire course. When I later became a law professor, I experienced some of what I had seen Pat King go through all those years before—dismissive, insulting treatment from white students—white males. One white female student got very upset with me about something, but that was her reaction to my giving her some feedback on a paper. She'd never

gotten anything but an A her entire life, and she wasn't headed to getting an A from me and she got upset, but I don't think it had anything to do with race. {laughter} "You mean I'm not getting an A?" It had literally never happened to her before.

MURPHY: At Georgetown in the '70s—you said there was a small number of women. Was it a racially diverse campus?

MORISEY: No, it was not. {laughter} When I say I was a member of a study group of four black women, I think we were the entire number of black women in the evening division in our class, period. It's not like there were some black women around that we didn't invite into our study group. I think we were it.

MURPHY: At the same time you were in law school, you did some other work for the [President Richard Milhous Nixon] impeachment inquiry in 1974, and I was wondering how you were brought into that work, and what was your experience then?

MORISEY: I joined that staff on the recommendation of Congressman Charles [B.] Rangel, who was on the [House] Judiciary Committee. Each member of the Judiciary Committee was given the opportunity to recommend people to join the impeachment investigation, which was a very separate staff. Separate location, complete confidentiality, and none of the people on that staff were members of the regular staffs. So Congressman Rangel's top assistant knew me from my work. We just knew each other from the Hill. Congressman Rangel, with a list developed basically by my friend George [Dalley], presented a list of names to [Special Counsel to the House Judiciary Committee] John Doar.

So I was hired under the auspices of Congressman Charles Rangel, who I had never met and didn't know me from Adam, {laughter} but his top staff

person strongly favored me to go on the list, and he knew my work. So that's how I ended up getting an interview, and then ultimately John Doar made the decision to hire me.

MURPHY: What work were you doing for the investigation?

MORISEY: I was in law school, although my first year of law school ended at the end of the academic year. So I wasn't literally going to law school classes after, I guess, the last class in May or something. I was part of a team—I think our title was researchers or something. In a law firm you'd have called us the paralegals, maybe. We were all college educated. We were doing work that wasn't by itself all that difficult, but it had to be done with extreme care. It had to be done by people with a lot of education, and tuned in to the implications of what was going on. We were going to be privy, along with the lawyers, to all sorts of confidential information about the investigation that led to the House preparing to vote articles of impeachment. I don't even know if it was mostly research, but the best analogy is paralegals.

Sometimes we were—like everybody else—helping to photocopy things, and put it all into binders. There were these thick binders for every subject, and somebody had to literally proofread every document, and make copies, and get them in the binders. Support staff helped with that, but so did the rest of us who were these researchers. We were all stuck together in a room, worked together in a room called "the library." So we were known as "the library staff." It has nothing to do with actually what we were doing, {laughter} it's just—you ask somebody who worked on that, and I would say I was on "the library staff," and they'd say, "Oh, yes."

MURPHY: What did John Doar, as Special Counsel, what did he talk to the staff about in terms of the goals for the investigation? And the relationship between that investigation and the Judiciary Committee?

MORISEY: Well, the most important thing, of course, was that the impeachment investigation staff was completely separate and worked under strict confidentiality. A member of that staff was fired because that person communicated something about the impeachment investigation to a member of John Conyers' regular staff, and that was a firing offense. John Doar expressed the role of the impeachment investigation as preparing for a grand jury presentation, and the grand jury was the House Judiciary Committee. So the goal was to determine whether as a matter of the facts and as a matter of the law, what constitutes high crimes and misdemeanors for impeachment purposes? Whether President Nixon should be impeached—that's what we were all tasked with doing. He insisted, as a matter of the culture, that we respect and never forget we were investigating the President of the United States, and we had to refer to him as President Nixon, Mr. Nixon, the President. Nobody—at least not if John Doar was going to find out—would call him anything but that. There were no "Tricky Dick" and—there were very disparaging and offensive nicknames floating around about President Nixon. Not among that staff.

To this day—I mean, until I retired—I insisted on that with my students. I was teaching matters where we'd be talking about administrative law, which is about the President and the executive branch and everything, and I said, "You will refer to all holders of office respectfully. That's a rule." That was a straight outgrowth of John Doar saying, "This person is the President of the United States, and even if we determine that he ought to be impeached, we

are talking about the President. We will recognize that in all of our dealings, even when we're talking among ourselves."

MURPHY: The House Judiciary Committee was looking into this as well?

MORISEY: No. There was a Senate Watergate Committee that had done its work, basically, by the time the House investigation got underway.[4] The House Judiciary Committee was going about the regular business of what the House Judiciary Committee was doing. Its regular work did not overlap at all with the impeachment investigation until John Doar was ready to make a recommendation to the House Judiciary Committee, which he did in late July. He told the Committee it was his determination, in his judgment, Richard Nixon should be impeached. And none of us had ever heard him say that. He wasn't telling people, "Oh, I'm leaning towards thinking the President should be . . ." No.

I remember so vividly, because my mother passed away on July 18th, 1974, and I had to go up to Philadelphia for her funeral. The morning of my mother's funeral the *Philadelphia Inquirer* had a headline that said, "John Doar Says Nixon Should Be Impeached." And I remember total shock. I was obviously emotionally sort of a wreck anyway, but I remember thinking, "Oh my God." Because none of us knew until John was ready to tell the committee whether he'd ever say that. Now, there may have been a couple of the lawyers who reported directly to John Doar who knew—probably a couple of people knew that's what he was going to say to the committee—but the rest of us did not know. It was one of the most stunning pieces of news I've ever heard in my life, because it all came down to, "Yes, it's really bad." Because if John Doar says he should be impeached, he has really committed high crimes and misdemeanors. There's no doubt about it.

MURPHY: After that point, you transitioned into some other work for that investigation, right?

MORISEY: Well, President Nixon resigned on August 9th. Well, if my mother died on July 18th, it was about July 23rd. So there wasn't a whole lot after that.

During that time, the House Judiciary Committee then formally adopted articles of impeachment. It was not long after that, that was officially done. He resigned. There was nothing for the rest of us to do. We were all absolutely convinced—well, I should say that differently. Those of us on the staff, the people I talked to, were torn between if he doesn't resign and there's a Senate trial, many of us will probably have the opportunity to staff that—and that would be very exciting and powerful in a kind of bad way.

But the other side was that if he didn't resign, and we ended up working on a Senate trial, it would be horrible because we were all so physically and emotionally drained. I mean, all-nighters and spending our lives for months unable to talk to our spouses or anybody about what was going on. You couldn't talk about your work life outside the room—almost literally that room. So we were sort of sitting around finding out like everybody else Congressman so-and-so's gone to the President and says the House will impeach him if he doesn't resign.

After his resignation, then what was left to do was pack up the boxes, literally, with the files for the National Archives. So if you think of August 9th, President Nixon resigns, I was on the payroll, me and several others, until October, literally getting the files in order for transmission to the National Archives. That's what we did for the rest of August and all of September and part of October. Full-time job, several people, getting them labeled and organized and put in boxes so that decades later if another

impeachment thing came along the files would be in order. {laughter} Of course, thinking, well, that won't happen.

END OF PART ONE — BEGINNING OF PART TWO

MURPHY: So from that point, how did you find your way to Representative Chisholm's staff?

MORISEY: For a short time, I was—I had just had a sort of filler position with an organization that was called the Black Women's [Community Development Foundation]. It wasn't really a foundation in the usual sense. It was an organization to identify and promote various projects that had to do with black women, and the particular one I worked on primarily was a publication about the disproportionate impact of certain diseases on black women, the higher incidence of breast cancer, the higher incidence of breast cancer mortality, those kinds of things, so that was a compilation of others' research. A publication like that was the kind of thing the organization did. They needed someone to run the operation for a while—I guess their staff director had left.

So I was doing that, and moving in my Capitol Hill circles, and went to a reception in one of these buildings here—maybe [the Rayburn] building—and ran into a guy I knew from the Hill who I think had been on Congressman [Augustus Freeman] Gus Hawkins' staff—or perhaps still was. In any case, he said to me—literally over the little cheese squares, toothpicks, that back then all Capitol Hill receptions involved. Young people—young in their careers—would go to these receptions. It wasn't dinner. Wasn't much if it was cheese and crackers at a reception, but it didn't cost you anything. So anyway, Ken Coburn came up to me and said, "Patsy Fleming is leaving

Shirley Chisholm's staff. She's going to be looking to hire somebody to replace Patsy." And I interviewed, and I got the job.

There's a little more to it than that, partly because my stepmother was a very high-profile figure in social work and education in New York and she'd known Shirley Chisholm for forever. And I went to the interview, and it was ending. I said, "Mrs. Chisholm, my stepmother says to tell you hello, Patricia Garland Morisey." And Mrs. Chisholm said, "What? What? Pat is your stepmother? Pat!" {laughter} I always felt that that was just the moment when I felt, this is really going to go well. It seemed like a good interview, but boy, being Pat's stepdaughter was a big deal. {laughter}

MURPHY: When you took that job, your position was legislative aide?

MORISEY: Yes, legislative assistant. There was at least one other person with that title, another woman. Yes, we were called LAs.

MURPHY: Before you worked for Representative Chisholm, what did you think of her political career? Had you followed her political career that much, or her presidential campaign in '72?

MORISEY: Not that much, but remember that I was working on the Hill from '71 all the way through until Nixon resigned. I knew people in the Congressional Black Caucus staff. Again, it felt like a natural progression. It felt like a reasonable place for me to go. I knew what those kinds of jobs involved from knowing people that were doing that kind of work. So it just made a lot of sense. I felt very comfortable. Patsy Fleming—whose resignation created the opening that I took—and I have stayed in touch still. Like, today's version of that is we're Facebook friends. I had another very dear friend with whom I'm still in touch, who worked for John Conyers. So I moved into an environment where I felt comfortable, where I felt it was a good fit, but I

wasn't particularly aware of Shirley Chisholm—except that she was the first black woman elected to Congress. So I was completely and totally aware of her. But I wasn't following the presidential campaign. I was aware of it and very mindful of her presence on the national scene. But she wasn't looming as a big figure in my life, except that she was looming as a big figure in the entire country. {laughter}

MURPHY: What was your experience like in that office when compared with your earlier experience in Delegate Fauntroy's office?

MORISEY: Oh, totally different. With Shirley Chisholm, there wasn't any issue of, "I wonder if a strong black woman has a place here." And her D.C. staff was dominated by women. Her press secretary was a woman. The senior legislative assistant was a woman. The chief of staff—back then we'd call them the administrative assistant, today I think the preferred phrase is now chief of staff—was a woman. There was a young white man on the staff {laughter} who was a terrific guy and beloved by everybody, but he was the white man on the staff. {laughter}

While I was there, Mrs. Chisholm brought in an intern who was a young man sort of on leave from college at UC [University of California] Berkeley. One summer a young woman who was a student at Wellesley—[a] young black woman—came on the staff. But most of the time it was a staff of women. I'm thinking back a moment ago. I referred to her press secretary—Mrs. Chisholm's press secretary was white; I don't know if I misspoke and said it was a black woman. Women were in charge. The person who headed Mrs. Chisholm's political operation, based out of Brooklyn, was male—[a] black guy named Thad Garrett. But he was Brooklyn. He was the political—that's what he did. But the D.C. operation was Mrs. Chisholm and her almost entirely female staff. {laughter}

MURPHY: Did you and the other members of the staff self-consciously embrace that identity as a woman-dominated office, and see it as something that set a contrast between your office and other offices on the Hill?

MORISEY: I think we were aware that a bunch of women—we did at one point have a black male on the staff in the D.C. office who ultimately had to be fired. Just as an aside, because I didn't want to forget there was another male on the staff at one point.

I think we were aware that we were unusual—but we were working for Shirley Chisholm. We were the Chisholm staff, and that carried so much meaning because of who she was—and also that she empowered her staff enormously. So we moved through our work, and even our social lives, carrying the mantle of being one of Chisholm's staffers. And people knew that meant we really were very powerful by virtue of the confidence that she had, the way she relied on us, the trust she exhibited. So for me, it's hard to separate any of the experience from the fact that working for Shirley Chisholm, having a position of trust with her senior staff—that was a really big deal. That's what I remember. Most of the staffs had few women. I knew it, but I think at the time I was always feeling [that] most people on the Hill don't enjoy the confidence and the trust and the capacity to make a difference that her staff did.

MURPHY: Did you feel like you had that power in any interactions with other staff members from other offices? Was there a sense that you had credibility behind you?

MORISEY: Oh, yes, I think it was widely known and understood. She was a great believer in working across the aisle. She was a great believer in finding common ground with Republicans. I remember particularly Congressman Al

[Albert Harold] Quie from Minnesota, who I think was probably the ranking Republican on the House Education and Labor Committee, and he had a staff member, a guy named Bob Andringa. Congressman Quie and Congresswoman Chisholm basically told us—it was a particular project, I forget what it was. But they told us to get together and work something out, because if Congressman Quie endorsed it, the Republicans would see it as a good idea. And if Shirley Chisholm endorsed it, the Democrats would see it as a good idea. So they decided our staffs could get together and get it done, because those two endorsements were going to make that thing fly. I can't remember the specific proposal, but I remember working with [Bob Andringa], and all of us, under strict orders: "We're going to make this happen. Congressman Quie and Congresswoman Chisholm are counting on us to get it done."

MURPHY: So you were involved in a lot of policy discussions in that position?

MORISEY: Yes.

MURPHY: Mainly related to education.

MORISEY: Right. My portfolio was largely higher education, but yes, education. She was on all three education subcommittees of the [Education and Labor] Committee. That was a huge part of what we did.

She had a strong interest in reproductive rights, and there was another member of the staff who primarily worked on that for her. It was not, for example, anything I personally worked on—just aware, for example, that Congresswoman Chisholm's pro-choice position was not particularly popular among her black constituents in Brooklyn. A lot of traditional Christians among her black constituency, and the pro-choice stance was not a popular

one. It was not an easy thing for her to deal with that when she was home in Brooklyn.

MURPHY: She was clearly a national figure, but she also represented the district in Brooklyn that had a particular viewpoint. Did you have to deal with that as a staff member—of thinking about the ways these policies you were working on for education, for example, played at home?

MORISEY: I think that except for the pro-choice issue, for abortion rights issues, there wasn't much to navigate. I think that at every point she was—again, using today's language—very much in touch with her base, and beloved by her base. There was this particular issue that that drew out something particular among black Christian churchgoing people.

But also, we were Hill people, and our job was not Brooklyn. I never even set foot in her congressional district the whole time I worked for her. We were hired to do the D.C.-based policy stuff. And Thad Garrett—her point person in Brooklyn [and] her staff in Brooklyn were in charge of that. I don't think any of us on the Capitol Hill staff had any background in Brooklyn. I had been to Brooklyn by that time in my life, I guess. But we did not come out of her constituency. We were all picked because we had savvy on the Hill and were strong policy people, and that's what we did. I don't remember anybody minding that. I don't remember any tensions or anything. Her answer was—and I do remember her stating the position—"I choose my Washington staff by their ability to be effective working on Capitol Hill on the policies I care about." Period.

MURPHY: In cases like abortion rights, for example—the fact that she did differ from her district—how would she discuss that discrepancy?

MORISEY: Well, I think, first of all, it wasn't looming as a big issue. It was just that I remember the experience of the D.C.-based woman who worked on that issue, and how she talked about how organizing meetings and constituency things in Brooklyn on that issue were more difficult. You couldn't expect to let a few traditional leaders in the Brooklyn community and a couple of the top ministers know Shirley Chisholm is having a community meeting, and everybody [shows up]. If it was abortion, it was tougher. But I don't even know how Helen Butler, the person who was doing that work, would tell you now how big a deal it was. It was a big deal because it was the one thing that was really tough to organize.

Maybe I'm dead wrong, but I really think that she was standing for and pushing for the very things that her district needed and wanted. I'm not sure I'm getting at your question, but it wasn't uncertain. Negative ambiguity and nuance seems to be a pretty big deal now and those years I was teaching. It complicated things for legislators to decide. I think Shirley Chisholm had very little of that. I think she was crystal clear.

She was pragmatic. For example, work with the Republicans. If that'll work, we're going to work with them. Really, almost a clarity of mission and values. Probably rare. You will have heard other people's views. I just felt like we knew what we were doing. We knew what she stood for, she trusted us. She'd back us up if we screwed up, which we did at least once. {laughter} Colleen O'Connor, the press secretary and I, were the point people on something. We were putting out the word to other staffers that Mrs. Chisholm supported—I don't know what it was. But anyway, this Congressman comes up to her on the floor, and he has reservations about this Chisholm position that he has got wind of. He comes up to her—this is all her account, of course—and says, "Mrs. Chisholm"—not many people called her Shirley,

maybe he did, but anyway—"I'm hearing that you're working on . . . and your staff is telling . . ." When she got back to the office she said, "I told him that the staff were working with my complete support for what they were doing." Then she said, "I don't know what he was talking about. Could you tell me what you've said, or what you did?" {laughter} I mean, it was great. "I didn't let on that I didn't know what you were doing in my name."

MURPHY: So did that give you confidence to do your work without wondering if you were going to step over a certain line?

MORISEY: Yes. We really didn't go around her. She was extremely accessible and available. It's just that on this one thing, whatever Colleen and I calculated, it didn't involve this person coming up to Mrs. Chisholm on the floor out of the blue and saying he didn't much like what he'd heard. It was just {laughter} we hadn't planned it through that far yet.

MURPHY: What other type of work did you do for her? You were working on policy in terms of the Education Committee. What else was the everyday experience of working for Shirley Chisholm?

MORISEY: Well, I wrote a lot of things for her. If she was going to be in a committee markup, if she was going to be taking an active role, or if she—there were sometimes informal events that she'd convene, like a panel discussion on something or the other. I'd be the one most likely to prepare her notes.

One time she convened a panel. She liked to sort of bring people together and have presentations and get issues aired and bring in the views of experts. One time, one of the speakers at such an event—I forget the guy's name. The panelist was a close associate of David Mathews, who was Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare—or had been. But in any case, Secretary of HEW. The guy had told me—the panelist—that he had a close relationship

to Secretary Mathews. I wrote her prep notes, and I was a little fuzzy about this guy. I wasn't 100 percent solid, for whatever reason. So what I wrote in her prep notes was, "He claims to be a close associate of David Mathews." And she read it verbatim as she introduced him. She says, "Our next panelist, he claims to be a close associate of David Mathews." {laughter} It didn't come across as badly as it might, but I knew, so I was cringing because she could have really blown it. {laughter} No, she delivered the line straight, but I was just horrified. I was pretty careful after that to consider the possibility that she would appreciate what I wrote so much she would read it verbatim.

MURPHY: But when you were preparing those things for hearings, for other meetings like that, was it a lot of research? Did you have to frame the issue?

MORISEY: Well . . .

MURPHY: Were you considering getting down data for her to use?

MORISEY: Well, at times like that, for example, a public statement about something—this was an issue that was well worked through. This was just wordsmithing. You know, "I'm going to . . ."

MURPHY: In general.

MORISEY: Yes, and at that point in the writing, I would know her position. All that work would have been done if she were going to go public with some articulated statement about this, that, or the other. Part of the job was knowing these issues. In other words, it was my job to know what was going on, what the Republican alternative looked like, what the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People] position on something was. I was supposed to be on top of that—"I" meaning me and the others.

That was part of what she expected—that we were experts on whatever it was that she was not the expert.

One of my favorite moments was when a group of three or four august figures from Brooklyn were in town and wanted to meet with her, and they were calling her Shirley—which nobody called her Shirley. When somebody called her Shirley you knew they really actually didn't—it was an, "Oh, God, there's some people who came in the office and they're all calling her Shirley."

So this group of men—it was men—were going to meet with her, come in her office, and she sits down. I'm there, and she's listening and paying them close, respectful attention. Then she says something like, "Thank you so much, and this is so important, and here's the best way to get this forward. I want you to work closely with Muriel and go forward with it." Which was a way of saying—I knew what she meant. "I don't need to talk with these people anymore, and now I've anointed you, Muriel, to deal with this." I have this particular vivid memory of it happening, I think because it was all male and they were calling her Shirley.

But that was typical of how it worked. The idea was that she had us because there were three or four of us, and she can't be but one place at a time. When somebody important—politically important—wants to meet with Shirley Chisholm, some of those requested meetings are going to happen, but they're not supposed to get her all embroiled in the—today's lingo would be in the weeds of the proposals. That was what we did.

MURPHY: During the '70s, as a woman Member of Congress, what was her relationship with the ongoing struggle for women's rights in the United States at that time? To what extent did she want to dive into those issues?

MORISEY: Well, she particularly took an interest in black women. There was an organization that got started called, I think, the National Black Women's Political Caucus. She was one of the founding members of that. So there were these organized efforts to particularly build the strength of black women as an organized presence.

But she was very much part of the women's rights efforts that included Bella [Savitsky] Abzug and [Patricia Scott] Pat Schroeder and the other women in Congress. But I think she was very clear that as a black woman—and the first black woman in the U.S. Congress—she was in a very special position to recognize and bring attention to black women, and highlight the efforts of other black women in leadership roles, and give them visibility by attaching her name to an organization as a co-founder. Then the organization has a stature that it might not otherwise, even if every founding member of a group had a well-developed history and expertise in something. You get Shirley Chisholm co-founder, and it's different.

MURPHY: Did she try to push the CBC to address some of these issues?

MORISEY: That's not the way I remember it. I do not remember her as having a particularly good relationship with the CBC. And I should switch that around. I think that life has taught me that in political involvement that black men can also be very sexist. But I don't think the black men in Congress were entirely comfortable with a strong black woman, particularly since—now I'm just imagining what might have been going on—she was more famous than most of them.

And Congressman Parren Mitchell was very fond of her, and they had a great relationship, and I'm not sure I'm confident about exactly who said this, but the phrase I'm remembering was, "Men whose egos are intact have no

problem dealing with strong women." {laughter} I thought about that dealing with men who were disrespectful or assuming I was not very bright or they needed to explain things to me. I've often wondered, "I guess his ego's not intact, is it?" {laughter} But Congressman Mitchell was unusual in that regard, and she singled him out as one of the black men in Congress who treated her as an equal peer, and never any problem or anything from him that was even remotely disparaging or diminishing.

MURPHY: This may have been towards the end of your time in the office, but did she feel that the Women's Caucus would be a way to achieve some of her goals?

MORISEY: I don't have a particular memory about that—the Women's Caucus as an entity. I remember only that she thought the world of the other women in Congress. She probably interacted with them in ways that I didn't necessarily see, because I saw very little. There was really very little need for me to see Member-to-Member contact. If she and Bella Abzug on the floor are talking or whatever, I wouldn't be there. So I have a very limited sense. I have a sense of the people she highly respected, and the people that not so much. But there's a lot of stuff she was doing I don't know about.

MURPHY: In terms of policy, what did she discuss with you in terms of her relationship with the Democratic Party, in the sense of pushing to change the institution, take it in a different direction? Or was she more pragmatic? You emphasized the pragmatism.

MORISEY: I don't remember about the Democratic Party, per se. And I wasn't on her staff during the presidential campaign. But I have a strong sense, partly from working closely with people who had been on her presidential campaign staff and were then still on the Hill, that she was not doing something that the Democratic Party particularly wanted to see happen. This was Shirley

Chisholm's thing, not part of the Democratic Party strategy for policy or anything else. My impression is that a lot of the men were uneasy with her boldness, I think. But, again, in a way my mind is very compartmentalized, because I actually feel as though, "Oh, I had nothing to do with the Democratic Party," meaning I'm the last person she'd have been talking to about that, possibly. I think there are things that she didn't talk about with me enough that I remember, but I have these impressions because I was always in constant contact with everybody on the staff. We were a friendly bunch, and I had a sense of a lot of things that I can't say she ever spoke to me about directly.

MURPHY: But then she did try to acquire positions of power within the Party.

MORISEY: Well, in the House. She ran for House [Democratic] Caucus Chair, and I think she had a pretty general idea that the House leadership could be improved, and she would bring energy and visibility, and time for a black woman—a woman. I don't think a woman had ever been Caucus Chair. So we had this little campaign, and her campaign was "Give your chair to a lady." {laughter} And we all worked on that. I mean, it was an internal thing, so it wasn't inappropriate at all for her staff to be advocating within the House for her to be chair. Sometimes, I think about things like that, but that was just Mrs. Chisholm. I mean, that's how she was. That's who she was. That was the kind of thing it would occur for her to do, and she wouldn't need the men to tell her, "It's okay if you run for House Caucus Chair." "Oh, well, I think I'll do that. Let's pull that together." She probably talked with a few people who would go along with it, but I don't think she ever actually asked anybody's permission to do anything. She was politically astute enough that she knew what was worth a fight. She probably often calculated what she would and wouldn't win.

This is just coming to my mind. When she passed away, there was a small gathering on Capitol Hill—literally in a committee room, hearing room or something—and the people in the New York congressional delegation came and spoke about her. It was mostly staff and former staff. But I remember Charlie Rangel talking about what a powerhouse she was in New York politics, and how impressive—I got the sense of, "And nobody messed with Shirley," {laughter} [Charles Ellis] Chuck Schumer spoke. Hillary [Rodham] Clinton was in the Senate. I think she sent remarks—I don't think she was there. But I was really impressed listening to Charlie Rangel talk about her back in the New York legislature and all that. She was always really something.

MURPHY: Yes, in 1976 an African-American elected official from New York City described her power in this way: "People have the feeling about Shirley that if she gets you in the streets, she can do a job on you," adding, "A Shirley Chisholm endorsement still means a lot." Did you ever see that power at work? Representative Chisholm exercising that power of her reputation and influence?

MORISEY: I think that's what she was always doing. Now, mind you, I was never in Brooklyn. I wasn't there when she's working her constituency. I was not in one-on-one meetings with legislators. But she had a presence, and she had intelligence and clarity, and confidence and boldness. And I think that's one way people exercise power. Her voice meant something. And in that sense, I would think that that's part of what it would mean if an endorsement meant a lot, because people trusted the integrity of her ideas. I don't ever remember hearing of anybody saying, "Well, Shirley Chisholm's hypocritical about this," or "She's compromised because of what she said about that." You know, "She signed onto this thing, and we can't trust her." I have never

heard anybody question the integrity and the conviction that she brought to the policies she was pushing for.

I'm not saying she was the most skillful political operator I've ever seen. I don't know who would be. It's difficult for me to capture this, but I'm trying to capture an idea I think is a broad one. Individuals can make a difference, and some people are different in the sense that what they bring to the dynamic is very particular to them, and almost like their skin, or their height. Someone 6'3" moves through the world differently than someone of very average height. Well, Shirley Chisholm was a sort of 6'3" personality, and really knew who she was and what she cared about. She wasn't wavering or uncertain. I think she relied on staff, for example, "Given the values and the things we care about, tell me whether this legislation is worth supporting." But then she was expecting us to know what we were talking about, and give her guidance about the legislation—the substantive proposal—and what she stood for. Because she wasn't going to have her name out there endorsing a person or a thing or an idea that wasn't who she was.

I'm listening to myself and I'm thinking, she really was an extraordinary person. It's very difficult, I think, to separate the threads, because she was a combination of strengths and abilities and guts that is rare even among people who manage to get themselves elected to Congress. I think most of them are capable, thoughtful people who believe in something, but most of them are probably not particularly extraordinary in the sense of people moving through the world. Good, hardworking people, and the path they chose is Congress. I don't mean to disparage anybody. I still follow politics obsessively. Sometimes somebody—a Member of Congress is being interviewed on some issue, and they're talking, and you're thinking, "This is really a very capable person." Often I say, "This person has a future in the

Democratic Party at the national level." And then some people you just think, "Well, so that's his idea about it." {laughter} She was powerful.

MURPHY: Her name became something, right? She became a national figure. In some sense she was an international figure. You said when you left your position you took a trip abroad, and that was somehow connected to your time—

MORISEY: Well, I took a leave of absence, and we hired somebody to cover my legislative portfolio. The idea was to travel for three months, instead of taking the bar exam. It worked out okay. I came back, I took the bar exam, I passed the bar exam. But the idea was, graduate from law school, leave, travel for three months. Once that plan was in place, a friend—actually, one of the lawyers from the impeachment inquiry staff, a guy named Evan Davis—told me that, "If you're going to be abroad, the United States Information Agency will set you up with these speaking events." He said, "They're really great to do, and you get a per diem in your expenses for every day you're doing it." So if you have five days of speaking engagements, that's five days of your trip paid for." So I reached out and got set up to do that.

I left the country June of '77. The hook was impressions of the [President James Earl "Jimmy"] Carter [Jr.] administration—which had just come in—and the fact that I was a senior aide to Shirley Chisholm. At that point, I might have been the senior legislative assistant. I don't remember. The USIA [United States Information Agency] setting up speaking engagements for me in these countries—so I spoke in Kenya. I was leaving the country going to Kenya. That was the starting point of my journey.

But then they sent me to Zambia for four or five days. Just flew me down there to events, flew me back to Kenya—to Nairobi. And the whole point was that I was close to Shirley Chisholm, the first black woman in the U.S.

Congress, and people were really happy to hear from someone close to her, because she had an international stature. And the fact that it was the first six months of the Carter administration, we needed a title. {laughter} USIA needed a way to package these speeches. "Senior aide to Shirley Chisholm speaks about impressions of the Carter administration." That's what I did. It was sort of basking in reflected glory, because nobody would particularly care about my impressions of anything if I weren't a senior aide to Shirley Chisholm. But it was terrific. It was a terrific experience.

MURPHY: What was the goal of the USIA program? Was it to get you to speak there about certain issues, or just give general information?

MORISEY: The program, as I understand it, is that if Americans who have something to say are going to be abroad, it doesn't cost us much to give them a per diem and hotel and food. It's a cheap way to have informal ambassadors out there. When Evan did it, he had been chief of the Watergate segment of the Nixon impeachment investigation, so he was in charge of the legal team that did that part of the work that turned into one of the articles of impeachment. So Evan was an interesting guy with interesting things to say. I think that it was, at that time, a very typical thing to do. That's why Evan said to me, "Let them know. They might . . ."

I think of it as a smart, cost-efficient way to have people in other countries have contact with Americans, Americans who are familiar with and involved in our government, for example. The State Department would have also sent me to South Africa. But I felt, no, this was still the apartheid regime, especially not connecting myself to Shirley Chisholm, or being connected by virtue of my job. So I didn't go. I didn't take them up on that, because there's no way I wouldn't have been used. And she would have been used.

Her name would have been used. My connection to her would have exposed her to being used by the apartheid regime, and no, that can't happen.

There was a point at which she was approached by some people here in the United States advocating for the African National Congress [ANC]. My memory's a little fuzzy, but I think she may have actually met with ANC representatives, but I'm sure she made a decision she was not going to take a public stance or speak to their struggles against apartheid in any public way. But that reinforces the notion that if I had gone to South Africa then, under that regime, it would have been awful, really. I mean awful in the sense of a really bad mistake—for me and for her.

While I was in Zambia, there was a young man who was attached to the U.S. Embassy in South Africa. He happened to be in Zambia, and I met him at a dinner party. He seemed like a perfectly nice young black guy. It turns out he knew my brother, actually. But I remember thinking, how can he do that?

MURPHY: So, thinking retrospectively, your time working in the House was mainly in the '70s, but you had other continued interaction with many different facets of the government in the decades beyond. Mainly during your time working here, what did you see in terms of the status of women as staff members and Members and how it changed over time?

MORISEY: I think the changes were in early stages when I was working here. So you had Barbara [Charline] Jordan and Bella Abzug and Pat Schroeder Those are the particular women I'm remembering now, Yvonne Brathwaite Burke, and of course Shirley Chisholm. They were the vanguard. I used to know the names of all the members of the Congressional Black Caucus, because there were 13—I think the number now is in the 40s. Except for the ones who were alive back in the '70s and in office, I couldn't tell you who they are.

Similarly, with women, there are all these women. It happened gradually. Every once in a while something will happen and some journalist or some newspaper, TV will say, "Oh, it's the Year of the Woman."[5]

Well, it's been 40 years, say, since I left law school and went on that journey speaking. If you're in the middle of something, you may not realize that it's changing. I think this is what happened to me—there's a new woman elected to Congress from someplace or other, or a black person got elected to fulfill somebody's seat. Well, that's how it happened. There have been waves in huge numbers, but I think I was always aware.

I think I had the benefit of being in the middle of it, and watching it happen. And it was happening as the normal course of life, because normal was more and more women, more and more black people—and it was happening. I think it was really inevitable. I mean, how could it not?

This all had to happen, partly because for years and years and years there'd been all these talented women who weren't getting a shot, or some of them were probably told something that was never told to me: "Oh, well that's not suitable for you." Some of them were told go for it, but then, say, the Democratic Party apparatus in wherever they were wouldn't help them. I'm glad that I saw it in the early stages, but I'm really glad that now it's—I don't mean everything's equal, everything's wonderful, everything's perfect, but there are a heck of a lot of women and a heck of a lot of black people around the Hill in staff and elected positions. It's so different. It's different if MSNBC has, "And next we're going to hear from the Congressman representing the whatever," and the screen comes up this black woman I've never heard of before. I think that's fabulous. {laughter} "The new governor of wherever." This very nicely coiffed woman shows up. That's what I got to see really starting. And none of the black people and none of the women were

alone. Now it's normal. A woman got a majority of the popular vote for President. That's different. {laughter} Shirley Chisholm—her name was put in nomination at the [Democratic National] Convention.

But I feel like I'm sounding like an apologist or somebody who I'd listen to and think, "Oh my God, don't you appreciate the world?" I'm not complaining enough, I'm not disparaging, I'm not doom and gloom. But because you're asking me to look back on my experience, I don't feel doom and gloom. I feel hopeful, and like the country is more normal now because it is a normal thing to have women. For crying out loud, a woman's been Speaker of the House. That's the new normal—to use another current cliché.

What I lived was I was experiencing it's not so crazy anymore for a woman, or black woman, or black man to achieve these things. Rare, but not crazy. But now it isn't even rare. Well, I mean, there are pockets, like partnerships at a white law firms—the big law firms. Fortune 500 CEOs. But in the world of political public service, it's come a long, long way. Having spent 25 years teaching law students, I regret that I don't see the millennial generation—I taught a lot of people with a lot of talent who had not even considered they might use their law degrees in a public position. There are really interesting jobs for lawyers in government, and I'd get, "Oh, really?" Yes, every government entity in the country needs lawyers, and a lot of them are on staff—not just whatever law firms are on retainer for us. I taught a student once, he was a senior staff member to the governor of Pennsylvania. Now, that was a hard thing to be doing and going to law school at night. And his attendance was problematic. But I knew what he was doing. He was working hand-in-hand with Governor Ed Rendell, and I thought, that is so great that people still choose to do that. But not enough.

MURPHY: Unfortunately, we probably have to end it here, but there's so much more I think we could talk about all day.

MORISEY: Well, you're asking me to talk about my life. I could go on forever. {laughter}

MURPHY: Yes, that's because these are very interesting stories. I want to thank you for joining us, and we'll have to talk more sometime.

MORISEY: Thank you.

MURPHY: But thanks for coming in today.

MORISEY: Thank you. I enjoyed it.

NOTES

[1] Walter Fauntroy was elected by special election on March 23, 1971. Public Law 91-405 created a Delegate from the District of Columbia to be seated in Congress. The legislation became law on September 22, 1970.
[2] The CBC was formally established in 1971. In 1969, Congressman Charles Coles Diggs, Jr., of Michigan created the Democratic Select Committee as an informal organization. It had no staff or budget, but was designed to bring together African-American Members of Congress to discuss common concerns. Office of the Historian, U.S. House of Representatives, "Creation and Evolution of the Congressional Black Caucus," http://history.house.gov/Exhibitions-and-Publications/BAIC/Historical-Essays/Permanent-Interest/Congressional-Black-Caucus/.
[3] Senator Edward William Brooke III of Massachusetts was the lone black Republican in Congress in 1971.
[4] The Select Committee on Presidential Campaign Activities was created by S. Res. 60 on February 7, 1973, to investigate and report on the Watergate scandal and the 1972 Presidential campaign. It was also known as the Senate Watergate Committee or the Ervin Committee, after its chair, Representative Samuel James Ervin, Jr.
[5] The election most closely associated with the moniker "Year of the Woman" was 1992, when 24 new women Members were elected to the House along with three new women Senators.