CAROL MOSELEY BRAUN INTERVIEW
OBAMA: IN PURSUIT OF A MORE PERFECT UNION
KUNHARDT FILM FOUNDATION

Carol Moseley Braun
US Senator, Illinois
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Interviewed by Teddy Kunhardt
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MATTHEW HENDERSON:

Ambassador Carol Moseley Braun interview, take one, marker.

ON-SCREEN TEXT:

Carol Moseley Braun

US Senator, Illinois

Growing up in Chicago

1:00:10:18

CAROL MOSELEY BRAUN:

Well, I'm third generation Chicagoan. So, my family has been here for a long time. And I've – and I've lived all over the south side pretty much. Although never west of State Street, which is kind of interesting. We always lived south and east. So, but it was an interesting, and the timing of my life has been such that I was actually a witness to all the history that the Civil Rights Movement

made. When I was little – when I was a little girl, I was born into a segregated Chicago. And then as I grew up, things began to change to the point that when I was 16, I want to say 15, but when I was a teenager, I was able to march with Dr. King – Dr. Martin Luther King when he came here to talk about housing and housing segregation and poverty. And so, you know, I was on the cusp of the civil rights movement, which made it a very, very exciting time to be in Chicago.

Meeting MLK

01:01:08:06

CAROL MOSELEY BRAUN:

I met him, I was actually as close to him as I am to you right now, maybe I shouldn't say that because you're not here, right? Okay, but anyway, I was very close to him, physically. So, when the bricks and the bottles started being thrown, I was close enough to see him get hit and the blood come down. And he was– it was his calm, frankly, that made me into – made me a believer in the whole idea of nonviolent protest, which was his whole point as you know. And so, that was what transformed me as a young woman at the time, so, because he was so calm and so above it and just so, beatific is probably not too strong a word, in the face of the hate that was being spewed in his direction.

Getting involved

01:01:57:14

CAROL MOSELEY BRAUN:

Well, I was there, a kid, right? And marching along, when I saw little Greta Thunberg the other day talking about climate change, I thought "Well, okay, so this is their issue, this is the issue for their time just like civil rights was the issue for my time coming up." And I was very proud of her because as a teenager, you know, you take on your parents. And I remember my mother did not want me to go to the march and I just went anyway, because it was something I felt compelled to do. But it was a very exciting time to be here and to see what was going on in that march. It was just terrible; the way people were being treated. Although quite frankly, can I tell a funny story? Here's a funny, I'm marching down the street, right? And we're going toward the park. And there's this kid who's my age standing on the curb and he's screaming at us "Semi-humans, go home. Semi-humans go home." And I turn and I said, "You mean semi-humans?" And his face lit up with a smile like "Oh, thanks. Semi-humans, go home." So, he continued corrected. But it was funny because it was like making a human connection with somebody in that very moment. And, I don't know what happened to this kid. He probably doesn't know what happened to me, either. But the fact is that we connected in that moment.

Deciding to become a lawyer

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CAROL MOSELEY BRAUN:

Well, I had actually wanted to be an art historian and my father told me I couldn't make a living in art history. For his time, he was probably right. In hindsight, though, he was probably wrong. I mean, I could've made a living in

art history. But anyway, so, so art history was closed to me, and I just – I lived on the south side, not far from the University of Chicago. And we were walking down the mid-way one day and a friend said he was going go and take the LSAT. And I said "Oh, sign me up for that, too." So, I just – so, that was how it happened. Kind of serendipity.

Working with the U.S. Attorney's office

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CAROL MOSELEY BRAUN:

Primarily civil. I did not like the criminal work that much. I mean, I did some of it and I did some criminal prosecutions, and I did some appellant work. But the time I had to put somebody in jail and his little family was standing there, little boy was crying, and I felt so terrible about it. Even though he needed to go to jail, he had broken the law. So, he – but it was like no, I can't make a living – make a life like this. So, I decided I prefer the civil stuff which is what I did. By the time I got to the US Attorney's office, those issues coming out of the Civil Rights Movement were still very much in front of all of us. I mean, down to and including what conspiracy theorists have talked about, which was true, the FBI COINTELPRO effort. I had gone to school with Fred Hampton before he was murdered in his bed and, and it turned out that COINTELPRO was actually a thing within the FBI. They were setting up people to blow up these civil rights organizations and just sow discord and controversy and conflict within the movement. And I actually saw the documents, being an assistant, an AUSA, I actually got to see the original un-redacted documents out of the FBI about it. And so, and to see the litigation around those issues. So, that was,

on the Civil Rights front, that was very much a point. And frankly, there were a number of things that came while I was in that office, not the least of which was that was the first time there was any inkling of people using terrorism on airplanes. And so that was the first, under Jimmy Carter who was the president, the first laws were passed about that. And, and so, I had occasion to deal with some of the anti-terrorist stuff as well.

Pivoting to politics

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CAROL MOSELEY BRAUN:

Well, okay. So, I stopped – I stopped being an AUSA because I was going to become a mother. And so, I had – my son was born and I was, frankly, to be honest about it, I was really kind of bored. So, I joined up with some neighborhood people who were bird watchers, and I had never done bird watching before, but I was very excited about it. So, I went bird watching there in Jackson Park, and the park district was going to tear up a part of the park that was home to these little rice birds called bobolinks. And so, the bird watchers were all up in arms about it. I was with them. You know, somewhere there's a sign of me holding "Park District: No. Bobolinks: Yes." Okay, so, I went out to protest the removal of the bobolinks and, and that was kind of the beginnings of my political career. I didn't know a political career was going to come of it. But my neighbors– some of my neighbors said, "We saw you in action and we think you'd be good at this state representative's position." And I thought "Oh, not me. I never done anything like electoral politics." And then this guy, this one fellow who was a pundit in the

neighborhood said "Don't run, you can't possibly win. The blacks won't vote for you because you're not part of the Chicago machine. The whites won't vote for you because you're black, and nobody is going to vote for you because you're a woman." And it was like "Okay, where do I sign up for this job?" So that was a kind of dare that pushed me over the edge and, and started my political career.

Running for State Representative

01:07:14:21

CAROL MOSELEY BRAUN:

I mean, it was a big, 10 people running for this. It was a vacancy, our State Representative was retiring and there were 10 people in the race, and I got out in what was probably the most hard-fought campaigns I've ever been in, but it was really tough because, you know, Chicago winters can be pretty brutal and I can remember standing on street corners with snow like an inch high on my shoulders. So, it was snowing and cold. And I had – I was doing door to door myself because in those days that's the way we did it. You had volunteers and you went door to door, and you told people what you believed in. And, and I came in first. So, it was really rewarding. I didn't know that was going to be the outcome, but you can imagine at the time it was just, like I said, it was a real slog. But I did what I had to do, and I got elected.

Challenges representing her district of Illinois

01:08:06:23

CAROL MOSELEY BRAUN:

Well, the district that I represented, to be honest, was probably the most diverse district in the entire state of Illinois. That is to say, it was against the lakefront, so the back stop of the district was the lake. But then I had Hyde Park and all these high-income intellectual types. I had South Shore, which was black middle-class professionals. I had Woodlawn, which was working class. I had parts of South Chicago which was white ethnic working class. And so, I had to bridge all of those – so, and not just, was it white ethnic, but it also Hispanic – one of the oldest Hispanic communities in the State of Illinois. So, I had a little bit of everybody in- in my district. And you can imagine as a newcomer in politics, I had to figure out how to have a conversation that everybody could understand. And I said the same – my message was the same to everybody. What I was saying, I was always real clear. If you tell people what you believe, they can respond to it. But you have to be able to communicate with them in a language they understand. And that's what I tried to do and, and it worked, so.

Harold Washington

01:09:14:04

CAROL MOSELEY BRAUN:

Well, the significance of Harold generally for the community was huge. For me personally, it was very huge also, because I had just, and I don't know how much of this you got, but I had just sued my democratic party over gerrymandering. And, and I wound up – I won the case, we created in that case the two, the first Hispanic districts ever for the state of Illinois. We created two new African American districts, in which African Americans

could get elected. And so, we did– I thought we did some real good with that lawsuit, but when I won, everybody told me that I had just, you know, pissed off the leadership in such a way, I was dead meat when it came back to going to Springfield. But instead of being, you know, run out of town on a rail, Harold got elected and named me his floor leader. So, I became an assistant majority leader instead of toast. So, it was – it worked out fine.

Chicago politics

01:10:10:09

CAROL MOSELEY BRAUN:

Well, at the time it was, it was – the late Mayor Daley, that is to say, the father, okay, had built a political operation out of Bridgeport that had tentacles throughout Cook County. And for all intents and – he literally started, he started out originally in the state legislature. And then he transitioned to local politics and he ran this community with an iron fist. There was – you did not get a job without going through Mayor Daley. You didn't get a contract with the city or the county or the state for that matter without going through Mayor Daley. He controlled all levers of government and all the levers of politics in this community. And, and I mean, it's said, I don't know if it's true or not, that he was single handedly responsible for getting John Kennedy elected president, because Chicago delivered for Kennedy at a time when there was still controversial and nobody knew what the outcome was going to be. That Richard Daley delivered for Kennedy in a way that delivered the White House to him. And so, it was – it was very impressive. In fact, my father, this is more background, my father was a dye

in the wool, small eye independent. That is to say, he believed you'd vote for what you believe in or the candidate. You don't just vote on a party line. In fact, he used to have a theory that it was illegitimate for the taxpayers to have to pay for primaries because that was an intra-party issue. And so, why should every taxpayer have to pay for the republican or the democratic primaries? That's a debatable issue, but the point is he was not part of the machine, and as a result of that, his business got shut down. Just absolutely shut down on one occasion. He tried to make it in spite of the fact that he was outside of the purview of the Chicago democratic machine, but it was very hard to do in those days.

Getting support from her father

01:12:09:08

CAROL MOSELEY BRAUN:

My father, yes. Yes, but in his own way. Okay, here's the irony of it. When I got to be US attorney, you imagine I was one of the first black and first female assistant US attorneys. My father called me a paper pusher for the government, okay? So, I was crestfallen. It's like you couldn't even be proud of this? So anyway, so when I ran for state representative, he was actually – he didn't think I had a snowball's chance to win. And I'll never forget, he wouldn't be a part of the campaign operation. But he had a big, green station wagon. And I was mortified, humiliated, because he would drive up and down the street with his green station wagon with the bullhorn on the side, "Vote for Carol Moseley Braun. Fight the greedy, support the needy. Vote for Carol Moseley Braun." It's like "Oh, god." I would see this green truck coming

past and hang my head like "Oh, no. What is he doing now?" So yes, I think he was proud.

Becoming Cook County's Recorder of Deeds

01:13:07:03

CAROL MOSELEY BRAUN:

It's the land office. I used to explain to people, it's like when you look at westerns and people go and stake their claim to land, that's what the Recorder of Deeds office does. And I was actually going to leave politics, because I – at that stage, my personal life was in turmoil, and so I was going to leave politics and go and just practice law. Harold Washington wouldn't have it and said "No, I think you should stand for countywide office." And so, I became really the first black woman elected countywide when I got elected to that office. Because you didn't have black people elected countywide in those days. I had two titles: Recorder of Deeds and Registrar of Torrens Titles. You don't want to know. It's complicated. So, I did both of those things simultaneously. Harold had been a mentor and then of course when he died, like everybody else, I was just totally shocked and devastated. It was just a really hard thing to- to accept that he had had a natural death. And as you can imagine, everybody said "Oh, he was murdered." Whatever. But the fact is he just died from overworked and bad food. So, you know, he worked hard, he ate whatever he wanted to eat. He just was, you know, he was not into healthy food. You know, he didn't exercise, obviously. And so, but he just worked himself to death. And so, he – it was a real loss of a real champion of ordinary people when Harold left here. I was actually at the hospital when

they took him up to Northwestern Hospital. I went to the – I was at the hospital when they brought his body in and we finally had to come to grips with the fact that he really had shuffled off this mortal coil. You know, he was actually dead. It was really, really tough.

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CAROL MOSELEY BRAUN:

Harold's being elected mayor paved the way for a black president on a lot of different levels. The first was that he showed that, again, think about it. It's a societal thing. He's up against a whole bunch of racist tropes that had been with the country for 100 years at that point. And so, the idea that a black person could run a two-car funeral, much less the city like the size of Chicago and complexity of Chicago was really alien and foreign to a lot of people. So, Harold rose to the occasion and showed that not only could it be done, but it could be done well. And he did a good job running this city. He brought the city together. He showed people that- that coalitions based on common interests were not only possible but were desirable. And I think that's one of the things that everybody responded to and still does – still do, because he brought us together as a community. He showed that by working together we could provide everybody with more of whatever their community wanted or needed. And, and that, and that all the kind of – the kind of games that the machine had played were not necessary. One of Harold's famous speeches was about patronage, which as you know was a mainstay of the way that the machine worked here in Chicago. By then, the Shakman decision had happened, and so you couldn't use political affiliation to hire people. You couldn't use political affiliation to fire people anymore. And Harold came in

just at the time that that decision had been made. And he gave a famous speech where he said "I've said to patronage. I said 'Patronage, are you dead?' I walked around the grave a few times and patronage did not answer me." He did a better job of it, obviously. But he gave this great speech about the death of patronage that was really enlightening and illuminating for people. And encouraging. He gave people hope.

First becoming aware of Obama

01:16:53:18

CAROL MOSELEY BRAUN:

After I left the state legislature, I think, you know, he was a generation after me, kind of. He- he ran for office for the state senate after I left the Illinois legislature. He actually ran for a seat that had been occupied by a woman who's still a friend, Alice Palmer. And everybody thought Alice was going to go back into the state senate. She had had a bout with cancer, and everybody thought she was going to go back. But then the first thing I knew, I hear about this guy who's running for her seat who she had essentially mentored, was running for her seat. And after that kerfuffle died down and they were able to get that resolved, he became the candidate for that senate seat. And it was the other – in those days, the state legislature, you had two house districts in a single senate district. And that would've been the senate district that my house district would've been part of.

Challenging petition signatures to win an election

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CAROL MOSELEY BRAUN:
That's again, that's a tradition in Chicago. People challenging petition signatures. I mean, they do it – they have done it since time immemorial and they continue to do it. That's like the oldest game in town. You challenge somebody's petitions and signatures and you get the signatures whittled down so it falls below the threshold and then you kick them off the ballot. I mean, think about it. It's an easier way to win an election than having to campaign.

First meeting Obama

01:18:23:17

CAROL MOSELEY BRAUN:
In those days when we were all, now remember, there was still just a handful of black legislators to begin with, and so we all knew each other. And even though he was younger than me and I had actually moved into county politics by then, I got a chance – I knew Barack from his being in the community and being around.

Obama's character

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CAROL MOSELEY BRAUN:
I don't think he's changed much, to be honest. Based on what I saw, I didn't see much in the way of change. That he was pretty much – he's always been very smooth, very elegant, very self-possessed. Very cautious. How can I put it? He was an elegant man and he is an elegant man.

Why the Obamas lived in Hyde Park

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CAROL MOSELEY BRAUN:

Well, Hyde Park, again, I mentioned, it's a community of intellectuals. Or at least, people who consider themselves to be intellectuals, they're not all intellectuals. In fact, there's a famous old joke by Mike Nichols and Elaine May, "Hyde Park is black and white, shoulder to shoulder, against the poor." Right? So, that was kind of – that's the way the community structured itself kind of, and so it was a natural pick since he was teaching at the University of Chicago. He got a job in the law school and she got a job working for the hospital. And so, it made absolute sense that they would live there in the neighborhood.

Jesse Jackson's significance in electoral politics

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CAROL MOSELEY BRAUN:

A lot of the Project Vote came out of Jesse Jackson's presidential efforts, because he made the point, and I think at this point, the democratic party has pretty much embraced the notion that if you register voters, those voters will probably be your voters. Again, back to the easy, the easy play. And so, what Jesse did, particularly since there was such a tradition in this country of black people not voting, not being able to vote. I mean, there was a time when, you know, if you tried to vote in Alabama, you'd get hung. Or Mississippi or Georgia. But not so much Illinois. But the fact is, people come particularly

with the great migration, there was a tradition of black people not getting involved in electoral politics for a variety of reasons, and primarily it's safety.

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And so, Project Vote said we're going to take the message out to these people in the communities and explain to them why not only is it their right and their obligation, but that they can do this without expecting to get lynched. That it's safe to do. And so, it was a matter of registering voters, and they were very successful doing it. And a lot of grassroots people were active in getting people signed up to vote. I'll tell you something. Because Jesse Jackson came, he ran against the machine, let's start with that. When he, when he – particularly the first time he ran, it was not with no support from the democratic party here locally or even the democratic party nationally. And he shook things up. He gave people who had no reasons to expect that a black person could get elected president a reason to hope that it was possible. He got out there and of course, particularly, he's so brilliant, and he was able to hold his own in the debates and what not and he made people proud. He made people proud that he could do as well and hold his own in these venues as a candidate for president. And he was a credible candidate for president. He changed the democratic party rules, as you're well aware, to open it up and make it more inclusive. To begin the conversation about how do you treat the people whose vote for you almost automatically, 89% or 90% of the time? How are you treating with the black community? And so he was really at the vanguard of a lot the civil rights – he represented the Civil Rights Movement coming together with electoral politics for the first time. And that had not really happened before.

Jesse Jackson's 'Operation Breadbasket'

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CAROL MOSELEY BRAUN:

When Jesse Jackson came to Chicago for the first time, he had something called "Operation Breadbasket." And it was out of a theater on Halsted. And so, and Operation Breadbasket was about teaching people A, they could vote without fear – without fear of their own personal safety. And B, that there was something to be said to participate – participation in the electoral process. So, did he find it hard? I don't think he did. I think it was a natural transition because it was the same conversation really. His agenda was a civil rights agenda. It was about poor people. He was continuing Dr. King's work in terms of raising the issue of- of- of class and poverty in this country. It wasn't just about black for Jesse Jackson, it was about, remember he had the rainbow coalition? That's what he called it, a coalition of people from all walks of life who had the same – shared values in terms of making sure that this country worked for everybody and not just for the privileged few. And so, you know, I think it's major kudos for having done that for the country and he paved the way for Barack. There would not have been a Barack Obama had it not been for Jesse Jackson. That's just that simple.

Shirley Chisholm's influence

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CAROL MOSELEY BRAUN:

You know, the thing is, and she's my personal heroine because the fact that she, as a woman, she brought together both the challenge of race and gender. And frankly, that's a little more difficult because you've got two different sets of competing values, competing issues and stereotypes. So, assuming for a moment you've got the stereotypes associated with being a black person on the one hand, when you're talking about a black woman you've got the stereotypes associated with being a woman on the other. And they come together in unique and bizarre ways sometimes. They fight each other sometimes; they complement each other other times. But the fact is, it's a different ballgame for a woman candidate, I think. And again, Shirley Chisholm opened the doors for women across the board. Her challenge was less race based than it was about gender and opening up our democracy and making it work for everybody. And so, you know, just as Jesse came at it from the civil rights or from the racial perspective, Shirley Chisholm came at it from gender, and--but they both had the same message, which is this democracy has got to work for everybody.

Becoming U.S. Senator

01:24:48:11

CAROL MOSELEY BRAUN:

It was pretty amazing. I… I decided to run for the senate because President Bush nominated the first, someone for the United States Supreme Court who was absolutely antithetical to my personal hero, which was Thurgood Marshall. And Thurgood Marshall's work had made it possible, made my entire life path possible both in terms of housing segregation, Brown versus

Board of Education in schools. So, I was able to get a decent education because of his work. I was able to live in a good neighborhood because of his work. And so right on down the line, Thurgood Marshall had made a huge positive difference in my personal life. And then the person to quote "replace" him with this, and I hope we get to the point there's more than one single quote "Black seat" on the Supreme Court, but that's the way that the power structure looked at it. And so, the black replacement for the black Supreme Court Justice was this archconservative who shared none of my values.

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And actually, was against the things that Thurgood Marshall had spent a lifetime fighting for. And then when you added what happened with Anita Hill, it was like too much. And so, it was like, okay. Just like the bobolink challenge, it was time to go. It was like "Okay, fine, I'm getting in this race. Whether I can win or not is not important, but I will get out here and make the point." And that's what I did. It's not like--I didn't come out of the blue. Alan Dickson was his name, Senator Dickson. I had met with Senator Dickson twice and tried to explain to him why the Thomas nomination was such a challenge for people like me, and that I hoped he wouldn't vote to confirm this man. And he just did not understand. He didn't get it. And he – obviously he voted for confirmation and when that happened it was like "Okay, it's on." That was when I decided I was going to run for the senate. Was that he chose to vote to confirm Clarence Thomas and it's like "Why?" You know? And so... our other senator, by the way, was Paul Simon, and he did not support the Thomas nomination. And so, and I wanted to see it, our senate delegation,

more in the Paul Simon mode than in the Alan Dickson mode. And so that was why I decided it made sense for me to run. So, I hope that it opened up doors for women, and it kind of has, we have more women in the senate now than ever anticipated. I hope it opened up the doors for people of color, which was huge and important. I hope it opened up the doors for working class – people from working class backgrounds; that you didn't have to be a billionaire to get to the senate. And I hope that my candidacy and my election cut through some of these barriers. That was the thinking at the time and that's actually what happened I think. And so, I'm very proud of that.

Jesse Helms

01:27:55:08

CAROL MOSELEY BRAUN:

The Jesse Helms story has like layers to it. And if – you ever have these days when you wake up and everything starts going wrong? Okay, that was my day. So, I got up, and my first – the first challenge was I had a judiciary committee meeting. I go to the judiciary committee, and it turned out that the debate was having to do with choice. Now understand, backing up here for a second. I almost didn't want – I almost turned down a seat on the judiciary committee because I had served on the judiciary in my state legislature and there are always things that people will never agree on. There're always controversial issues on which there's no consensus and or how many angels can dance on the head of a pin. So, I was like "Okay, I don't really want to do this." But I was put on the judiciary committee. And so, when I get to committee that morning, there was a senator who still – I think he's still in,

Orrin Hatch is still there, isn't he? So, Orrin Hatch is holding forth against choice. And he's comparing abortion to slavery. I almost went through the ceiling. It was like "What?" So, I was furious about that, but how do you, how do you – I'm a freshman senator, right? I had only been there a few months at that point. So, I'm taking on Orrin Hatch in committee. And then once that's over, my staffer comes over and says, "Jesse Helms has just taken to the senate floor with an amendment on the confederate flag." And I thought I had already killed that issue in committee, previously. But – and I had killed it. But he resurrected it and went to the senate floor with the confederate flag thing.

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So, you know, so, I ran across the campus there at the capitol. If you – literally, ran from the … office building over to the capital itself. And there he was holding forth about how wonderful the daughters of the confederacy are. And it's like "Oh, no, you can't do this." So, I at first took on kind of a lawyerly, like I was in court or whatever. I'm taking on the issue on the substance of it, as opposed to the merits or anything emotional. And I lost the vote. So, I was furious about that. And so, that's when I decided I would filibuster. And it's like, you know, "No, you'll have to drag me off the senate floor in chains before I give this up." And I just kept talking. And happily, when that happened, a number of people came and switched the position or began to support my position. And, and really, the pivotal moment was when Howell Heflin, who was the senator from Alabama, got up and said his grandfather had been a general in the confederate army, but it was time for us as a nation to get pass these issues and recognize that we've got one flag and that's the

stars and stripes, and that he supported my position. When that happened, it was like the floodgates were open. And that's when a number of the southern and the older senators came on and supported the position. And we wound up winning. And so, the daughters of the confederacy were denied a patent for the confederate flag. And, and so, I think Senator Helms figured out at that point that he had been beat for real, because I had won it in the committee before. But this time, once I won it, I think that was kind of a signal to him that he could give that particular fight up. And then he got on the elevator, insulted me, about how he's going to whistle Dixie until I cry. And I told him "Senator, you could sing Rock of Ages and I would cry." So, it was like, we kind of had a thing.

Racism in the Senate

01:31:23:17

CAROL MOSELEY BRAUN:

There was another senator – there was another senator who will remain nameless actually, who actually filed an amendment that would have repealed the Public Accommodations Laws in the country. And, you know, Public Accommodations was so you could go – you didn't have to drink out of a water fountain that was labeled "colored," you know, that sort of thing. And he was going to repeal it. And I was so outdone, I was like "How can you do this?" I said, "How can you do this, in this day and time, how can you do such a thing?" Well he didn't see that it was a problem. So, I went, actually, this is a Bob Dole story. Because I went to Bob Dole. I said "Bob, this is horrible. Why should I have to be..." remember, I was the only black person in the senate.

So, all these issues kind of fell on me, or at least the expectation was that I would address all the issues having to do with race. Which, in hindsight, even at the time I kind of resented but in hindsight it was really unfair. So, I was like "Okay." So, I went to Bob Dole and I said, "I can't believe what this guy is doing." And Bob Dole said, "No, you're right. Go talk to him and see if you can get him to withdraw the amendment." And so, I did that, and the guy did withdraw, I think Dole told him to withdraw it. He withdrew the amendment, and, and then Bob Dole to his credit said to me "Now, you should go over and thank him for doing that." And it's like "Do I have to?" So, so I did, I went and thanked him for doing the right thing. But yeah.

The 1986 Marquette KKK Rally

01:32:43:02

CAROL MOSELEY BRAUN:

Chicago was the kind of town where they could do that, right? I mean, this city has always been just as diverse, it's a microcosm of America. And so, we've got it all here. We've got the KKK types, and we've got the lefties here. We've got everybody. And so, do I remember the KKK rally? Kind of, sort of, not exactly is my answer. I do know that the--was it the ACLU that came to their defenses that they had the right to march or something like that? It was just kind of really disgusting. I mean, I understood, because they did have a right to march. I didn't agree, obviously, with what they were saying or how they were doing it. But, you know, it was like, freedom of speech is one of the values that we're all fighting for, I think. That you can speak whatever it is

you believe in this country. And so, that was their right to do. Obviously, I don't agree with it.

Confronting racism

01:33:39:15

CAROL MOSELEY BRAUN:
Some of those people when confronted with what it is that they're, what they're holding up is actually hate and symbols of hate and destruction and hurting other people. Once they're shown the error of their ways, will recognize it and come around. At least, that's always been my faith. Now maybe I'm--you know, call me Pollyanna and whatever. But I just believe that if you speak to people and you tell people the truth and give them the rational –– speak in a language they can understand instead of just combating with them, if you tell them that, you know, "Here's why this is bad." They will – if they listen to you, they can change. And that's been my experience.

Bobby Rush

01:34:20:14

CAROL MOSELEY BRAUN:
Bobby Rush is a congressman from the first congressional district. He had been a member of the Black Panther Party, and that's why he keeps getting reelected, because people recognize the work that he did as a youngster coming up through the party. And because remember, the Black Panthers in this town, they had the free breakfast program, they fed children before they

went off to school. They did tutoring. They did a lot of good work in the communities. And so, and I think Bobby Rush has been able to survive all these years because of that work. He was a community hero. And people really appreciated what he had done in service to the community. He understood that, that it wasn't just about him personally, it was about the community and service to the community. And I think people can pick – can gather that, they pick that up as authentic. That authenticity of that service makes a difference. And so, that's why he's able – been able to stay in the congress and will stay in the congress until he decides he doesn't want to be there anymore. Barack Obama did not have the kind of in the – in the community experience. He came from another world, he grew up in Indonesia, in Iowa. And so, in terms of knowing what the streets of Chicago are like and what the struggles of indigenous African Americas were like. He just didn't – he didn't have that. And so, I don't think he really appreciated the regard in which Bobby Rush was held. He was – saw an open, a seat for the Congress and saw – and thought he was just going to go for it. And I don't think he understood that for a lot of people that was taking on someone who had been a genuine public servant. And that they valued and were protective of.

Deciding not to run for re-election

01:36:10:14

CAROL MOSELEY BRAUN:

My feelings were very hurt. I worked very hard in the senate to produce for my entire state. I thought I tried to do a good job. I just did not have –– I

couldn't self-finance a campaign. I didn't have the money. And again, the public opinion had turned negative about me by the time I got to reelection. And so, I was swimming upstream on that score as well. And so, so when I said I wasn't going to run again, I'm sure that's what that came out of. Just my feelings were hurt. You know, you devote yourself to public service and you expect that the public will appreciate that. But they don't always. Support was not there for an election and having done it before, done it once, I was not inclined to get out there and just bang my head against the wall taking on the democratic party, the national democratic party in an attempt to go back to the senate, so. Actually, another person who is much wiser than I said, "The voters are always right." And they are. I mean, the fact that I didn't win re-election was probably the best thing that could've happened to me. Because I then got to go off to New Zealand.

Becoming ambassador to New Zealand

01:37:18:06

CAROL MOSELEY BRAUN:

I was ambassador to paradise in the best job ever. When you're an ambassador, everybody wants to suck up to you and be nice to you. So, I went from being, you know, kicked around and dumped on here at home to a place where everybody was nice to me and I got to be, you know, queen of the May. I mean, when I got to New Zealand, I thought I died and gone to heaven. Because they were on their second female Prime Minister, the head of the biggest corporation there was a woman. The head of the Supreme Court was a woman. So, it was like "Where am I?" So, it was wonderful.

“Girls can be president too”

01:37:54:01

CAROL MOSELEY BRAUN:

Well, okay, there's a story there, too. My little niece –– I was- I was at my brother's house. And my little niece said, "Aunty Carol, come quick." And I said "Okay." So, I went to her room and she's sitting there, she was so little, she had to be no more than 10. And her feet didn't even touch the floor, she's sitting at her desk, and she had her social studies book open. And she said, "But Aunty Carol, all the presidents are boys." And I said "Well, sweetie, girls can be president, too." And so, when I came out of the room, my brother said, "What's the matter?" I said, "Well, I just lied to Claire." He said, "What do you mean?" I said, "I told her that girls can be president, too." And he said, "So what are you going to do about it?" I said "Well, I guess – I guess I have to run so I'm not made into a liar in my niece's eyes." And so, I got out there to make the point that girls can be president, too. And I'm not sorry, that was a really wonderful, it was a hard campaign, we had no money and trying to do it, you know, from spit and sealing wax, right? And people being nice to me was difficult, but it was the right thing to do and I'm glad I did it. And we got – this time we have, what, three women or four women running for president? I mean, I think it's wonderful. Again, it shows that society and the culture are changing. And I think that- that- that it's been a really good thing because it's opened up to bring in the talents. I mean, you bring in, to leave out the talents of half the population suggests that you don't tap into all the genius and all of the contributions that you could have. So, it's like leaving 50% of your talent

on the table instead of using it. And so, there's a real role for women to contribute to our society, and I'm glad that society is moving in the direction of letting that happen.

Obama's run for the presidency

01:39:46:12

CAROL MOSELEY BRAUN:

I was surprised that he ran for the president after only two years in the senate. That came as a shock to me, I thought he was going to, you know, because the tradition was you hung around the senate long enough to get some experience under your belt and then, and then you launch a presidential campaign. So, I didn't – I had no idea, and I was as surprised as anybody else in the country. But actually, it turned out obviously to be a good gamble on his part because it worked, and he became president and that was a very positive thing.

The excitement of Obama's election

01:40:20:10

CAROL MOSELEY BRAUN:

Oh, yeah. I mean, I was as excited as anybody. Having come through as I did with an appreciation for the struggles that black people have had in this country, I was obviously very, very excited to see Barack Obama elected as President of the United States. It was really – I mean that's why Jesse Jackson that night was crying. Because when you think about all the people who had been lynched and the people who had been degraded and dehumanized and

insulted along the way to pave the way to make it possible, and here this guy had pulled it off, how he pulled it off I guess you're going to figure out, people will be looking at it and analyzing for a long time. But the fact is he pulled it off and became President of the United States. People my – people of a certain age could not have predicted it. And we're obviously delighted to see it happen. And it happened, as you know, from looking at the crowd there in Grant Park. It happened with people from all walks of life. I mean, there were all kinds of people out there supporting him because they responded to his message, which has been my politics from the very beginning, that if you say what you believe and you stick with that, people will respond to it.

The importance of Obama's presidency

01:41:34:19

CAROL MOSELEY BRAUN:

The fact that a man of color, a person of color, wound up being President of the United States was really a tribute to all the hundreds of thousands of people who struggled to get to the point where that was possible. And black, white, and other. I mean, the fact of the matter is that a lot of people sacrificed and suffered to make Barack's election possible. And- and- and so really, it was seeing the good play out, I think. And so, you know, like many people, I was obviously very, very proud of him. And proud that he got there. And, I mean, that's why he got a Nobel Prize. I mean he hadn't been in office three days, right, when he was awarded the Nobel Prize. It wasn't the function of anything he did. It was a function of the fact that he was who he was, and he got there.

The difficult conversation of race in America

01:42:34:17

CAROL MOSELEY BRAUN:

Race is a difficult conversation in this country, still. In part because we don't know our history. People don't know the history of it. The fact is that blacks have fought in every American war and are as patriotic as any other group in this country. But the American people don't know it. And a lot of black people don't even know it. So, I think that working on spreading the information, speaking the truth to people and communicating to young people about the history, I think that's important to creating an environment in which the conversation about race can take place. Because it hasn't really yet, we're still working on it. We have not had anything like truth and reconciliation, which they had in South Africa. You know, there's – there are people now beginning to talk about reparations, but that's not – that's a conversation that'll get people shut down before they get into any serious conversation about it. In large part, because our history is just so convoluted. I mean, slavery was the original sin for this country. I mean it was America's original sin. And it was not just slavery, but once you get past slavery you got to get to the apartheid that followed. The backlash after the Civil War and then the apartheid that followed that and all the things that go with it. And so, until we have kind of a common vocabulary about race, it'll be a very difficult conversation for anybody to have.

Navigating race

01:44:05:19

CAROL MOSELEY BRAUN:

Barack was particularly challenged because he, again, did not come from the indigenous African American experience. He- he had to learn all of that. He had to learn what a lot of people in the neighborhoods grow up with. And so, and so, did he do enough for black people? I think the issue –– I think history will tell the tale on that. I can tell you that from what I see, a lot of the backlash that we're in right today comes from – comes as a function of the fact that people who- who believe in white supremacy didn't--objected to Barack Obama. You know, I think a lot of what we're seeing now is reaction to Barack Obama. The tragedy or the irony of that is that the people who should have benefited from Barack's presidency didn't necessarily. I mean healthcare serves everybody and we can all applaud that as an initiative, but in terms of doing something specific for inner city schools or for black wealth or in terms of incarceration, he didn't, I mean, he didn't do those things. And was that out of caution on the issue of race? I think it was.

Creating the federal holiday for Dr. King

01:45:26:20

CAROL MOSELEY BRAUN:

Well, again, talk about polarization. Half the country saw Dr. King, and they tried to make him into being some kind of traitor. You know, trouble maker. And so- and so, those people really did not want to see a national holiday named after him. Happily, they were the minority. And so, folks who wanted to believe that, as Stevie Wonder put it, why shouldn't there be a holiday

after Dr. King since he stood for all the positive values, love and community and people coming together. Why shouldn't there be a holiday named after him? Because he literally transformed this country. He made America a different place. I often get – I have been asked whether or not there'd be another time that I'd want to come back as – come back in. And you know, this is for me personally, this is the best time. I mean, maybe the future will be even better, but, you know, to come back 50 years ago to be in my mother's shoes, my mother couldn't have done – couldn't have imagined being a United States senator. My father couldn't have imagined being a United States senator. And I told you, when I became a US attorney, he called me a paper pusher for the government, right? So, he didn't – their vision didn't go that far because the America that they grew up in, the America that they knew, limited them because of the color of their skin. And- and- and they were prescribed roles that they understood that they had to – that they could do and not more. My family, my folks, my grandmother used to vote. You know, when she got the vote – when the women got the vote in the 1920s, you know, my grandma was out there, you know, participating as best she could. And – and I say that because, and my mother's family, actually I'm working on that part, too. My mother's family came from Alabama. My father's people came from Louisiana, from New Orleans. And so, musicians and farmers. And that was my background. And again, it all makes for the rich quilt that we have in this country. We all come from someplace, from different places, and we come together in this wonderful melange or stew if you will that makes America. And I think we should celebrate that. I don't think there's any reason--I mean, right now the existential challenge to our

country and to the world is climate change, right? So, if we can zoom in for a moment, we took on civil rights, we can take on climate change. And I don't see any reason why we can't just continue to be confident and feel like we can handle these challenges in our time and do the right thing by them so that we protect that which is worth protecting.

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