

The Continuing Significance and Relevance of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC): A Political Group in Transition

Earnest N. Bracey, Ph.D., DPA

Professor of Political Science

College of Southern Nevada

Social Sciences Department

6375 West Charleston Boulevard – W2

Las Vegas, NV 89146-1164, USA

Abstract

Creating the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) wasn't a simple task, given the small numbers of the original members. But establishing the group was important in dealing with pressing racial and national concerns, like doing something about issues (in the United States) that negatively affected African Americans, and other people of color. In this respect, the CBC has put up hundreds of bills in the U.S. Congress for consideration, with serious legislative appeal. In this specific way, the CBC has been able to deliver on some of the things they have promised their constituents. Specifically, reforming the Federal Sentencing Guidelines for non-violent criminals. In general, there was nothing inherently wrong with creating the CBC, because this independent group, starting out as a "Democratic Select Committee," has always tried to do what was right and just, despite conservative Republican opposition.

Furthermore, the progressive activist base of the CBC is judicious and significant, especially as far as their constituents are concerned. And even when some of the black members are at odds, they still connect, to have positive and pragmatic relationships – to help their less fortunate constituents, which they have been able to do since the very beginning of the Congressional Black Caucus. The CBC has also been about fostering civility, to bring about positive changes for all Americans. Finally, in the face of widespread criticism by other members of Congress, mostly Republicans, the CBC continues to survive. Indeed, the thriving legacy of the CBC is ongoing. To be sure, their collective (political) efforts will be extremely important in the future, particularly in standing up to "toxic racism" and white supremacy in our divided nation. Therefore, as far as the CBC is concerned, the essential work of the group is not done.

Introduction: The Beginning of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC)

In 2005, the Congressional Black Caucus (or the CBC) met in Mississippi, one of the "hot-bed" States of the Confederacy and white supremacy,¹ as well as a state of the modern-day (black), civil rights movement. The meeting was held in Jackson, the capitol, where the CBC members reaffirmed their commitment, as an "all-black" group in the U.S. Congress, "to eliminate unequal treatment minorities [still] receive in many parts of [American] life."² This is important to understand, because if the U.S. Congress, as a whole, fails "to deal responsibly with national [racial] problems," particularly in regards to African Americans, "the explanation [is] in part with the design of the [supreme legislative] institution."³ Therefore, the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) was created "in 1969 when the 13 black [members of the] House of Representatives joined together to strengthen their efforts to address the concerns of blacks and other minority citizens."⁴ For a long while, black members of Congress were just beating their heads against the wall, so to speak, and not getting much done, by way of legislation, because of their small numbers (see Table 1).

However, it should be pointed out that, “following the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, black membership in Congress [has risen] steadily.”⁵ Though it might be said that the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) is relegated to only a small part of the American political system, the group’s profile is now extremely high, because they can now address almost *any* kind of crisis that might involve their growing minority constituents. Of course, establishing the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) was not seen as a very radical idea in the beginning; but presently, some members have introduced controversial bills and legislation that seeks to *right* some of the *wrongs* perpetrated against minority people over the years, or in our *ugly* past.

We must also keep in mind that the original members of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) wanted to act and speak with one voice, as well as provide the necessary leadership, direction and “political visibility far beyond their numbers.”⁶ Indeed, members of this black group continue to bring a much needed perspective (in the U.S. Congress) to the urgent concerns of black people and other people of color; like: gun violence, health-care, education, income inequality, employment, affordable housing, and prison reform and *unjust* incarcerations. Hence, “one of the major objectives of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) is to push Congress to deal with these [aforementioned and] persistent problems,”⁷ in our society. In this regard, the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) has been debatably successful in American political life; but members have had to be prudent in considering their specific Congressional goals, given the criticism levied at them by the white members of Congress. This is to say that many white members believed that the U.S. Congress (itself) was already complicated enough without having such a distinctive (black) group from within its ranks. But, “the move of the CBC to concentrate (and restrict) its attention [only] to legislative matters [appeared] to [have been] a good strategy.”⁸ Moreover, some white members of Congress from the very beginning saw the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) as a sort of perverse (political) idea. This is to say that some believed that the CBC was just an advocacy group for *only* the black community. So what? Lucius J. Barker and others write that the CBC operates, and “resembles the expressive interest groups that people join to symbolize and express more effectively their values and opinions with respect to certain [political] causes.”⁹ Question: What is so wrong about CBC members wanting to advance the unique problems and causes of their constituents, especially when it came to bipartisan agreements to fund programs (for the poor and less fortunate) by the federal government? Nothing. In a nutshell, the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) was established by black members, “to positively influence the course of events pertinent to African Americans,” and to “achieve greater equity for persons of African descent in the design and content of domestic and international programs and services.”¹⁰ More crucially, the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) shares a common set of political beliefs with the National Democratic Party, and is organized, generally, into a powerful “voting block” that can sway other members to their point of view (or a minority point of view), when it comes to voting on legislation, like passing education and *anti-poverty* bills, or providing federal aid for those needing healthcare.

According to political scientists David V. Edwards and Alessandra Lippucci, the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC), as with other informal Congressional groups, initially got support from the Congressional body itself. And, before Republican conservatives in Congress –

stopped the practice in 1995, some [CBC members] managed to get their own paid staff and office space by collecting dues from [other] members or by inviting interest groups and other outsiders to fundraisers. Some [even had] coordinated activities with outside [lobbying] groups funded by [big] businesses, labor groups, or other special interests.¹¹

Consequently, many CBC members, today, are completely justified in what they have been doing over the years, while *never* putting politics above or ahead of principles, or what they deem is necessary for their constituents. For example, black journalist and political commentator, Alex Poinsett explained it this way:

Bursting on the national scene in January 1969, the [Black] Caucus sought to respond collectively to distress calls from [needy] citizens who, though living hundreds of miles from their congressional districts, saw them [the CBC] as congressmen-at-large, [and] as national caseworkers for the nation’s black, poor and disadvantaged.¹²

Although the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) is governed by the respective rules in the House of Representatives and Senate, its members have always wanted the flexibility to get tangible, legislative things done in the U.S. Congress. However, they can’t just do *anything*, or do things in their own imaginative way if it goes against these Congressional rules – in both houses. In either case, the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) has moved deliberately forward to change congressional laws and policies for the betterment of all American citizens.

CBC members also focus on the criminal justice system, as well as the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which essentially prohibits discrimination based on race, color, or national origin. Even more important, the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) continues to meet around the country to show *avid* support for the “Have-Nots” in our society, and to establish the appropriate means and, “an agenda that [will hopefully] close the gap of disparities they see between blacks and other Americans.”¹³ Such notable and commendable efforts are especially significant today since “civil rights legislation has not fared well” under Republican control and leadership.¹⁴ And without spouting wild propaganda, the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC), therefore, provides a crucial role or *cog* in the political wheel in American politics that represents the interests of African Americans, and “the African American members of Congress.”¹⁵ Also, it is important to note that the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) makes a convincing case for passing social legislation that is most important to the entire nation, like trying to prevent the lead (poisoning) that’s in some of our (contaminated) drinking water throughout the United States (e.g., Flint, Michigan). In this respect, the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) tries to put these issues into context, no matter the cost or circumstances.

Some past and current CBC members are immensely popular, like the legendary John Lewis, a Civil Rights Icon from Georgia, who is widely regarded as one of the great leaders of the black freedom and civil rights movements in this country. Or we might consider the formidable Shirley Chisholm from New York, who in 1968, “became the first black woman to be elected to the U.S. Congress, where she served until 1983.” Additionally, the late Shirley Chisholm “cofounded the National Women’s Political Caucus,” and ran “for the 1972 Democratic Presidential nomination.”¹⁶ In hindsight, establishment of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) was the right thing to do, as it has “become an institutionalized part of the Washington and national scene.”¹⁷ But there are those who may strongly object or argue that the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) is irrelevant and no longer necessary in today’s high-pace and sophisticated political culture. Furthermore, some conservative black lawmakers have even contended that, “caucuses based on race have largely outlived their usefulness,”¹⁸ especially given that “the diversification of the constituencies CBC members represent – a development largely brought on by [congressional] redistricting in the early 1990s.”¹⁹

To be sure, the revived, congressional redistricting process throughout the United States has also contributed to diluting some black representation in Congress. This means that the number of majority–black districts have decreased significantly, because they have been ruled *unconstitutional* by the U.S. Supreme Court. Currently, however, political party *gerrymandering* has not be totally eliminated. Nevertheless, *majority-minority* districts were significant; and as journalist Jeremy Derfner writes:

The 1992 majority-minority districts were some of the most integrated districts in the country. And after most of them were scaled back in response to the Supreme Court’s *Shaw v. Reno* decision outlawing racial redistricting, they became even more integrated than before.²⁰

But proportionately, this famous decision by the Supreme Court has not fixed the problem of racial or ethnic representation in the U.S. Congress.

Table 1
Original/Founding Members of the Congressional Black Caucus
February 1971

1.	Shirley A. Chisholm	House of Representative	New York	Democrat
2.	William L. Clay, Sr.	House of Representative	Missouri	Democrat
3.	George W. Collins	House of Representative	Illinois	Democrat
4.	John Conyers, Jr.	House of Representative	Michigan	Democrat
5.	Ronald V. Dellums	House of Representative	California	Democrat
6.	Charles C. Diggs, Jr.	House of Representative	Michigan	Democrat
7.	Augustus F. Hawkins	House of Representative	California	Democrat
8.	Ralph H. Metcalfe	House of Representative	Illinois	Democrat
9.	Parren J. Mitchell	House of Representative	Maryland	Democrat
10.	Robert N. C. Nix, Sr.	House of Representative	Pennsylvania	Democrat
11.	Charles B. Rangel	House of Representative	New York	Democrat
12.	Louis Stokes	House of Representative	Ohio	Democrat
13.	Walter E. Fauntroy	Congressional Delegate	Washington, D.C.	Democrat

Majority-Minority Congressional Districts and The CBC

Put another way, redistricting based on political party or ideology has not been banned by the Courts. Why? Unsurprisingly, *shrewd* and self-serving white Congressmen, like former Republican Majority Leader, Tom DeLay (from Texas) took maximum advantage of this failure to decide or act decisively on the part of the U.S. Supreme Court, to ban political *gerrymandering*, which further undermined or eroded African American representation in the U.S. Congress. Indeed, DeLay's "long [nefarious] journey reached the political "promised land" in 2003 – a redistricting delegation [in Texas] from a 17-15 Democratic majority, to a 21-11 Republican majority." ²¹ DeLay's "direct actions" were also extremely damaging to the "black vote" in Texas elections, particularly in areas where there is a high concentration of African Americans, in their respective districts. Constitutionally, such a redrawing of Congressional district lines should have been accomplished after the "census [or after every 10 years] to ensure that each district has an equal number of residents." ²² However, this knowledge (or policy) did not deter DeLay's outright, political biased *plot*, as he successfully orchestrated the redistricting plan in Texas before the census, which was later implemented by the state legislature. So was this plan an illegal act on the part of DeLay and the predominantly Republican state legislature in Texas? Perhaps. Politically speaking, we must understand that, "majority-minority districts [allowed] black candidates to gain the toehold of incumbency," and has had "a small but discernible transformative effect on white voting patterns." ²³ Even so, the question is whether white Americans are willing to vote for black Congressional candidates with a different ideological bent. Or can African Americans really be elected in predominantly white districts?

Unfortunately, our nation is still not *color-blind*. Therefore, can we say that white voters in *majority-white* districts are more likely to elect *only* white, Congressional candidates, rather than African Americans, because of some loyalty to a *color line*? Who knows exactly? According to journalist Jeffrey McMurray, however, it has been “largely due to redistricting, [that] some blacks are [now] elected from majority white suburbs, Southern farmlands or thriving business hubs, forcing the [Black] Caucus to refocus its mission.”²⁴ But what does this all mean? Keep in mind that such *majority-white* districts are not necessarily equal to majority-black districts/populations; and white voters *may* or *may not* elect an African American person to Congress. So can black Congressional candidates possibly win in *majority-white* districts? Perhaps. Or does it depend on the party affiliation of the black candidate? Eventually, voting for black members of Congress – disregarding a person’s race, or political affiliation – might tell us that racial prejudices and “election polarization” is not always the rule, but it is the *exception*. In other words, white constituents might possibly vote for liberal, black candidates when it might suit their ends or needs, or further their power base (somehow) in Congress. Therefore, as Lucius J. Barker and *et.al.* write:

Black influence in Congress... depends upon more than how many blacks happen to be members at any given time. As the dynamics of power in Congress now operate, it is not enough to gain membership in that body; members must be able to remain there for a long time. They need to gain seniority. By doing so, a [black] member can normally become a committee chairman, and such positions provide crucial influence in the congressional power system. Obviously, members wish to gain seniority on the right committee, that is, a committee that is important to the interest of the [black] member’s constituents.²⁵

We must also bear in mind that, “While many blacks also stereotype white candidates [for Congress] negatively, they are far less likely to do so in terms of a white candidate’s ability to achieve important societal goals and far more likely to report that blacks vote more on the basis of qualifications rather than race.”²⁶ Incredibly, however, some white members of Congress are “tone-deaf” about tackling social and political problems facing minority communities. More importantly, American citizens must ask: Will Congressional districts throughout the United States, with black liberal majorities, *always* elect black representatives to the U.S. Congress, no matter what? Perhaps. However, it must also be understood that not all *majority-black* districts will automatically elect an African American to Congress – that is, because of his or her skin color. Moreover, “black representatives [in Congress today] are being pulled” in different directions, and by “different interests.”²⁷ This means that African Americans or black members of Congress must be vigilant and absolutely sensitive to the variations of minorities that are in their new political districts (or in their own backyards), and realize how exactly they are being elected to the U.S. Congress. In particular, this recognition might indicate that members of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) must represent not only blacks in their (expanding) districts, but others as well. Further, many CBC members must understand that, they “represent the vast majority of Americans.”²⁸ Former black Congressman Ronald V. Dellums has poignantly written that the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC), in its infancy, was “bound together by race – and the experience of race in American,” believing that they needed “to work with each other to more forcefully advance [their] common agenda.”²⁹ However, we should be cognizant that, “a central element in the [Congressional Black Caucus today] is the increasing importance of *biracial politics* and political coalitions.”³⁰ Dellums goes on to write that the original Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) was:

Largely made up of urban-based members... [and the CBC] was fairly uniform in its focus on securing funding for housing, transportation, healthcare, education, and economic development – on solving the problems of the cities and addressing the crisis of urban decay. But [they] were aware of other issues, and did [their] best to be advocates for rural blacks and those in the South. [Furthermore], civil rights and social justice goals constituted [the CBC] “non-budgetary” portion of [their] domestic priorities focus. And [the CBC was] determined to raise the profile of Africa and the Caribbean in the debate on United States foreign policy.³¹

Political Alliances and Evolution of the CBC

Perhaps most importantly, as discussed by Dellums, it might be wrong to argue that a new racial alliance and constituency between the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC), and almost everyone else actually exist, because it can be politically *misleading*. Still, members of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) are being elected today (in Congressional elections) because of their strong *biracial* appeal.³²

As mentioned, white voters will help elect black representatives (in white districts) if they believe they have *something* to gain economically or politically. Unfortunately, the Republican Party frowns upon black Republicans in Congress joining the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC), primarily because of ideological differences and political reasons (see Table 2). Specifically, black Senator Tim Scott (from South Carolina) *is not* a member of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC), nor is House of Representative Will Hurd of Texas; nor was former Congresswoman Mia Love from Utah.³³ We must ask why? Of course, members become a part of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) because they want to be a part of something larger than themselves; but this is not the case with the current crop of black Republicans in Congress today. Moreover, depending on your point of view, the constituencies of several Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) members have “put them on different sides of legislation from to time,”³⁴ disrupting the unity they (the CBC) supposedly have. This means that some CBC members now vote on national and international bills or legislation that is contradictory to the core mission and/or goals of the whole group. Therefore, several Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) members focus more on issues that are not necessarily “race specific,” because their constituencies are not entirely of one racial or ethnic group, nor do they represent “majority-minority” districts, or fall in line with the National Democratic Party. It is predicted that the make-up of CBC constituencies will definitely move along *biracial* or *multiracial* lines in the future – and as black Democrats change toward the ideological center. Is this because African Americans are not voting in the necessary numbers to get black candidates elected or reelected to the U.S. Congress? Probably. Indeed, American citizens today must not ignore the demographic shifts that are even now playing a role, (or serious factor) in state or general elections; and especially in terms of electing Black Congressional representatives. But the CBC *cannot* do *everything* for everyone, or “be all things to all people.”³⁵ Some scholars and political scientists have even suggested that the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) *cannot* be both “a legislative organization and a civil rights organization,”³⁶ because of the obvious conflicts of interest. But many black members of Congress are inclined to disagree, as it is not so simple a dichotomy to decipher.

Furthermore, Congressional critics and other *political pundits* might incorrectly argue that, “an ideological muted biracial politics will keep the CBC from leading on issues that affect African Americans,” as well as other minorities.³⁷ But this might not be exactly true, either, given the Congressional Black Caucus’ traditional or historical role in Congress. Additionally, *all* Americans should consider the CBC of today, compared to when it was first started. It is fair to say that the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) was also established to actually frame many of the controversial discussions about racism, discrimination and Civil Rights, as our nation was in a different place in the past – that is, in the sense that African Americans didn’t have many social or political rights. That said, it should be pointed out that our nation was “less racially diverse [politically] and [blacks were] truly marginalized,”³⁸ and mistreated. The Congressional Black Caucus (CBC), therefore, tried to “give groups [and organizations] outside the [U.S.] Congress a clearer and more realistic view of what [the CBC] could and could not do and what their responsibilities” should be.³⁹ In this way, the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) will continue to address our present race-relation problems. On the other hand, however, journalist Poinsett believes that the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) should be grounded politically, and only “focus on the legislative process, [which is] the one specific area where it [possesses] the greatest expertise.”⁴⁰ This simply means that the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) should “provide a black perspective for any legislation that [comes] through the [House of Representatives], especially through its [Congressional] committees,⁴¹ and subcommittees. And this might be the CBC’s greatest strength. Indeed, it is one of the things that the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) prides itself on. Furthermore, many political scholars fundamentally believe that, “a very black and urban-centric political agenda”⁴² is counter-productive, and could be the “Kiss-of-Death,” so to speak, for some CBC members, particularly running for the U.S. Congress today, because of the increase in diversity in their changing districts or communities.

Federal Elections and the CBC

Increasingly, black voter participation, because of “voting behavior” can also make a significant difference in federal elections when minority candidates are involved, and the “black vote” is *unjustly* diluted, or if elections are outright stolen, as was alleged in the 2000 Presidential Election. According to journalist Greg Palast, “the U.S. Civil Rights Commission looked into the smelly pile of spoiled ballots [from the 2000 Presidential election] and concluded that, of the 179,855 ballots invalidated by [Republican] Florida officials, 53 percent were cast by black voters.”⁴³ And therein lies the problem with African Americans having the right to (participate and) vote in the United States. Or whether their votes are even counted in their continuing *disenfranchisement* by racist, partisan forces in this country.

Palast goes on to write:

An apartheid vote-counting system [present in the 2000 Presidential Election was] far from [being] politically neutral. Given that more than 90 percent of the black electorate votes Democratic, had all the “spoiled” votes been tallied, Gore would have taken Florida in a walk, not to mention fattening his popular vote total nationwide. It’s not surprising that the First [Bush] brother’s team, informed of impending rejection of black ballots, looked away and whistled.⁴⁴

As for changes in the size of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC), or in order for the intrepid group to grow in membership, black voter participation is, essentially, the key. So how can we make our national election systems better for African Americans running for the U.S. Congress? Unfortunately, like our divided nation, the black and white members of Congress live separate lives, without a lot of behind-the-scenes or personal interaction, or intimate, political contact. Furthermore, “blacks have yet to achieve political power commensurate with their numbers.” Clearly, “for blacks to reach proportionality in elected office and, more specifically, for blacks to increase their membership in Congress, it seems clear that more whites will have to start voting for black candidates.”⁴⁵

Furthermore, the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) must create sound legislation to prevent (white) “voter fraud” and the rejection of black votes in *any* State or federal election; otherwise our Democracy should be considered a *sham*. Moreover, a return to *majority-minority* districts, and a “just ruling” by the Supreme Court in regards to *gerrymandering*, should render Congressional districts – drawn along political lines – *unconstitutional*, which is another way to grow minority voting – that is, if we are to be serious about this political matter. Meaning, we should draw Congressional district lines in a non-partisan manner. It is also important to note again that African Americans *must not* “remain under-represented in [the U.S. Congress] compared with their share of the total population.”⁴⁶ Yet, also keep in mind that the CBC’s clout is considerable, given its small size. Indeed, Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) votes can actually save a president’s agenda. For example,

in 1993 [former] CBC chairman, Representative Kweisi Mfume of Maryland, and the highest-ranking black congressman [at that time], Representative John Lewis [of Georgia], delivered the [crucial Black] Caucus vote that saved [President] Clinton’s \$500 billion economic budget in both the House and Senate.⁴⁷

This specific congressional vote (at that time) is important to understand, because the Clinton administration, in return, provided support “for inner cities, poor families, children, and the elderly.”⁴⁸ In this respect, the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) *did not* present a *discordant* message, and got more than they even bargained for. In other words, this particular negotiation on the part of the CBC with the Clinton administration was a winning formula, or brilliant strategy. It is also quite evident that the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) has a legislative agenda, but its “long tradition of focusing on the politics of moral resistance”⁴⁹ cannot be summarily dismissed either. Therefore, “since 1971, the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) has promoted African American members for leadership positions and has pushed for legislation beneficial to African Americans,”⁵⁰ as mentioned. It is also important to understand that black voters are not necessarily given *any* guarantees, but they firmly believe in the promises made or offered by CBC incumbents and *newly-minted* black candidates that represent their respective districts – that is, with a majority population of African American voters.

TABLE 2
Current Members of the Congressional Black Caucus
April 2019

1. Cory Booker	Senator	New Jersey	Democrat	29. Robin Kelly	House of Representative	Illinois	Democrat
2. Kamala Harris	Senator	California	Democrat	30. Brenda Lawrence	House of Representative	Michigan	Democrat
3. Alma Adams	House of Representative	North Carolina	Democrat	31. Al Lawson	House of Representative	Florida	Democrat
4. Colin Allred	House of Representative	Texas	Democrat	32. Barbara Lee	House of Representative	California	Democrat
5. Karen Bass	House of Representative	California	Democrat	33. Sheila J. Lee	House of Representative	Texas	Democrat
6. Joyce Beatty	House of Representative	Ohio	Democrat	34. John Lewis	House of Representative	Georgia	Democrat
7. Sanford Bishop	House of Representative	Georgia	Democrat	35. Lucy McBath	House of Representative	Georgia	Democrat
8. Lisa B. Rochester	House of Representative	Delaware	Democrat	36. Donald McEachin	House of Representative	Virginia	Democrat
9. Anthony Brown	House of Representative	Maryland	Democrat	37. Gregory Meeks	House of Representative	New York	Democrat
10. G. K. Butterfield	House of Representative	North Carolina	Democrat	38. Gwen Moore	House of Representative	Wisconsin	Democrat
11. Andre Carson	House of Representative	Indiana	Democrat	39. Joe Neguse	House of Representative	Colorado	Democrat
12. Yvette Clarke	House of Representative	New York	Democrat	40. Eleanor H. Norton	Congressional Delegate	District of Columbia	Democrat
13. William L. Clay Jr.	House of Representative	Missouri	Democrat	41. Ilhan Omar	House of Representative	Minnesota	Democrat
14. Emanuel Cleaver	House of Representative	Missouri	Democrat	42. Donald Payne	House of Representative	New Jersey	Democrat
15. Jim Clyburn	House of Representative	South Carolina	Democrat	43. Stacy Plaskett	Congressional Delegate	U.S. Virgin Islands	Democrat
16. Elijah Cummings	House of Representative	Maryland	Democrat	44. Ayanna Pressley	House of Representative	Massachusetts	Democrat
17. Danny Davis	House of Representative	Illinois	Democrat	45. Cedric Richmond	House of Representative	Louisiana	Democrat
18. Antonio Delgado	House of Representative	New York	Democrat	46. Bobby Rush	House of Representative	Illinois	Democrat
19. Val Demings	House of Representative	Florida	Democrat	47. Bobby Scott	House of Representative	Virginia	Democrat
20. Dwight Evans	House of Representative	Pennsylvania	Democrat	48. David Scott	House of Representative	Georgia	Democrat
21. Marcia Fudge	House of Representative	Ohio	Democrat	49. Terri Sewell	House of Representative	Alabama	Democrat
22. Al Green	House of Representative	Texas	Democrat	50. Bennie Thompson	House of Representative	Mississippi	Democrat
23. Alcee Hastings	House of Representative	Florida	Democrat	51. Lauren Underwood	House of Representative	Illinois	Democrat
24. Jahana Hayes	House of Representative	Connecticut	Democrat	52. Marc Veasey	House of Representative	Texas	Democrat
25. Steven Horsford	House of Representative	Nevada	Democrat	53. Maxine Waters	House of Representative	California	Democrat
26. Hakeem Jeffries	House of Representative	New York	Democrat	54. Bonnie W. Coleman	House of Representative	New Jersey	Democrat
27. Eddie B. Johnson	House of Representative	Texas	Democrat	55. Frederica Wilson	House of Representative	Florida	Democrat
28. Hank Johnson	House of Representative	Georgia	Democrat				

Conclusions

The results of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) has been undeniably productive, as the group has made invaluable contributions to our U.S. Congress and our nation, particularly with underrepresented black and minority communities. Indeed, the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) could have been a *disruptive* force, but it has made a positive difference in the lives of many, providing greater opportunities with the mantle of the nation's supreme legislative body. And that is nothing to sniff at. So should we respect the mission of the black members of Congress? The CBC has changed a lot in the U.S. Congress today – that is, in terms of its *make-up*. The challenges are many, however, given that the group has grown, mainly because more African Americans are being elected from their home state and mixed districts (see Table 2). It is unlikely, however, that some white American voters will ever let go of their political biases, race-based predispositions, or racial prejudices anytime soon. To be sure, some Congressional districts that are predominantly white will continue to divide themselves along racial and ideological lines. So the questions that remain are: Can African Americans from *majority-white* districts be elected across the nation? Probably. Or can black, political candidates, from mixed neighborhoods/communities, continue to be elected to the U.S. Congress? Perhaps. Still, what are we to make of these election contradictions? These political questions must be seriously addressed, given the (proportionately) low percentage of African Americans still serving in Congress today? It is also necessary that members of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) should change with the times, and “broaden their [horizon or] vision beyond race,”⁵¹ in order to be more politically competitive and helpful to all their constituencies and supporters; but the traditional agenda of the CBC is still “shaped by the liberal causes of urban black Americans.”⁵² Also, the current argument that is popular with some African Americans is that, the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) “will continue to drive the agenda from the left or integrate themselves more fully into the [Democratic, political] party apparatus.”⁵³ Recent critics of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) tell us that this black group cannot be viable in today's political (polarizing) climate, or even survive as a separate, parochial group. If this is true, will the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) be able to accomplish its many, varied political goals? And although there are *only* Democratic CBC members in Congress today, many have conservative morals and conservative, political leanings, like their Congressional (Republican) counterparts. And one more thing: Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) members are not just limited to only a liberal agenda today, as in the past.

Equally importantly, the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) is not only needed, but this independent group is vital to our modern-day politics, in terms of race-relations, because it is the driving force behind protecting the Constitutional rights of *all* poor Americans, as well as serving as the political voice for those without a *forum* for elucidating their displeasure with our federal government, particularly when it (government) is repressive toward minorities, and others that need moral support and financial help. In this respect, the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) “has [also] cast itself as the [moral] conscience of [the U.S.] Congress, making up for a lack of votes with claims to legislative purity.”⁵⁴ Furthermore, the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) must continue to stand firm against the tide of some state legislative plans (by predominantly conservative Republicans) to redraw district lines, to favor their political party's standing, making for a permanent majority in Congress. No doubt, if such unconstitutional measures are not challenged, the representation of African Americans in the U.S. Congress will be limited, or flounder. Moreover, the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) plays, as Poinsett astutely explained in 1973, and is relevant today, “a prophetic role in congress, functioning as the spiritual, political and moral leader of America's niggers. [And] under [Black] Caucus leadership, perhaps all niggers – the black ones, the brown ones, the yellow ones, the red ones, the white ones – may yet force this nation to fulfill its promise,”⁵⁵ to do the right thing for *all* Americans.

Finally, the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) bodes well for the diversity in our U.S. Congress and our future. To say the least, there is absolutely a need for the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC). Consider: The CBC is not only focusing on *civic* responsibility, but also proposing legislation to reduce the wealth gap, and providing help for low-income families throughout the United States. Also, the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) has held up surprisingly well as an independent, Congressional group over the years; and it has gained a lot of traction. As to its longevity, the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) is at a crossroads; but it will be around as long as there are African American members in the U.S. Congress. Many CBC members are excited for the next chapter of this serious black group. Unfortunately, most Americans don't know very much the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC); and why it is necessary, or exist at all.

Notes

1. Mississippi is the only state in the nation or the Deep South that has incorporated the Confederate battle flag in its state flag. Fortunately, the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) tries hard to understand all sides to a racial problem, regardless of where they might hold their meetings.
2. Emily Wagster Pettus, "Members of black caucus visit Mississippi," *The Clarion Ledger*, August 9, 2005, 2B.
3. Thomas R. Dye, *Politics in America*, brief edition, 2nd edition (New Jersey: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2007), 67.
4. Congressional Research Service, "Report on Black Members of Congress," [http:// www.house.gov/cummings/cbc/cbhistory.htm](http://www.house.gov/cummings/cbc/cbhistory.htm) (9/12/05), 1.
5. Dye, *Politics in America*, 267.
6. Dye, *Politics in America*, 267. The very fact that the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) exists at all is a small miracle, because (at one time) there wasn't always enough black members – to even make a *forum*.
7. Lucius J. Barker, Mack H. Jones, and Katherine Tate, *African Americans and the American Political System*, 4th edition (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1999), 278. Recently, African American Senator and presidential candidate, Cory Booker has suggested "a commission to explore reparation proposals for African American descendants of slavery." See: Rodrigo Torrejon, "Sen. Booker to introduce slavery reparations bill," *USA Today*, April 10, 2019, 3A.
8. Barker, Jones, and Tate, *African Americans*, 288. African Americans in Congress today are in a stronger position than ever before. This is why the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) has staying power. However, the founding members were thought of as delusional for wanting to find a way to overcome the adversity of blacks in the U.S. Congress.
9. Barker, Jones, and Tate, *African Americans*, 287. The Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) members make other members in Congress better, because of their righteous beliefs. CBC members also provide moral support to other members.
10. John J. Coleman, Kenneth M. Goldstein, and William G. Howell, *Understanding American Politics and Government*, 2nd edition (New York: Longman, 2011), 312. Members of the CBC also spend a lot of energy talking or dialoguing with other political party members, even with the opposition party, where they can influence votes on legislative matters in the U.S. Congress.
11. David V. Edwards and Alessandra Lippucci, *Practicing American Politics: An Introduction to Government* (New York: Worth Publishers, 1998), 44. Bear in mind that, "Despite being stripped of its staff and funding by the new republican majority in late 1994," its role and purpose remained consistent and well recognized, which is to serve as "a more effective catalyst for the economical, educational, and social concerns of Blacks and other underrepresented Americans." See: Barker, Jones, and Tate, *African Americans*, 287.
12. Alex Poinsett, "The Black Caucus: Five Year Later," *Ebony Magazine*, June 8, 1973, 69.
13. Emery Carrington, "Healthcare focus of [CBC] meeting," *The Clarion Ledger*, August 10, 2005, 1B.
14. Victoria Valentine, "Civil Rights Report Card," *Emerge*, volume 8, October 1996, 53.
15. Carrington, "Healthcare focus," 1B.
16. "Chisholm, Shirley," in *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Encyclopedia*, ed. Mark A. Stevens (Massachusetts: Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc., 2000), 337.
17. Barker, Jones, and Tate, *African Americans*, 187. To be sure, the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) *never* tries to ignore divisive, cultural issues, as this goes against the entire CBC mission. And within the vast halls of the U.S. Congress, controversial, racial issues, throughout our nation, still matter to CBC members.
18. Jeffrey McMurray, "Black Caucus looks beyond racial issues," *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, November 30, 2003, 11A.
19. Jeremy Derfner, "The New Black Caucus," *The American Prospect*, March 27-April 10, 2000, 16.

20. Derfner, "The New Black Caucus," 16.
21. Jonathan Gurwitz, "Have Things Gone Sour in Sugar Land?" *The Wall Street Journal*, March 24, 2005, A15. The Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) must not give up or relent, when it comes to its important role to challenge such unorthodox, voting methods (by Tom DeLay) of Texas – that is, manipulating or wrongly changing districts, to win Congressional seats.
22. Jon Sarche, "Colorado redistricting case gains nationwide audience," *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, September 8, 2003, 7A. Unfortunately, such successful redrawn, districting plans have denied African Americans and other minorities their right to select and elect their own candidates to the U.S. Congress.
23. Derfner, "The New Black Caucus," 17.
24. McMurray, "Black Caucus," 11A.
25. Barker, Jones, and Tate, *African Americans*, 289.
26. Linda F. Williams, "White/Black Perceptions of the Electability of Black Political Candidates," *National Political Science Review*, vol. 2, 1990, 62.
27. Derfner, "The New Black Caucus," 17.
28. McMurray, "Black Caucus," 11A.
29. Ronald V. Dellums and H. Lee Halterman, *Lying Down with the Lions* (Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press, 2000), 94. The CBC also expressed a need to unify members to a common, political purpose. CBC members also provide a sort of social outlet for each other.
30. Derfner, "The New Black Caucus," 17.
31. Dellums and Halterman, *Lying Down*, 94. The Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) has also advocated for creating congressional legislation, to help states that assist low-income neighborhoods, while redirecting attention to eradicating white supremacy and racial hatred.
32. Derfner, "The New Black Caucus," 17. With a renewed drive, the CBC is positively addressing the myriad of issues facing our nation during many legislative sessions in Congress. All that being said, the CBC does not want to be on the sidelines, doing nothing, particularly with the prodigious energy of its members today.
33. Paula D. McClain and Steven C. Tauber, *American Government in Black and White: Diversity and Democracy*, 4th edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 184. The CBC would like all African Americans in Congress to join the caucus, but over the years, black Republicans find it hard to let go of their political party affiliation, and join the political group.
34. McMurray, "Black Caucus," 11A.
35. Poinsett, "The Black Caucus," 72. Now, more than ever, the CBC is necessary because of the diversity and changing demographics of their constituents, which might increase the number of African Americans in Congress.
36. Derfner, "The New Black Caucus," 16. All the while, this *conundrum* about the CBC is sparking further debate. Furthermore, the collective goals of the CBC, as expressed, have changed considerably in today's politics, because of changing racial constituencies, and the redrawing of district lines to benefit one political party over the other.
37. Derfner, "The New Black Caucus," 19. One could also argue that such *biracial* districts in the political landscape are, perhaps, inevitable in the near future due to the unconstitutionality of redrawing district lines to favor just Republican conservatives.
38. McMurray, "Black Caucus," 11A. We should also consider the shift occurring toward a more conservative agenda in this country, and a continuance of white nationalism.
39. Dellums and Halterman, *Lying Down*, 104. The CBC believes that it is proper and important that American citizens see the group as more than just some black organization. Nevertheless, the issues that the CBC is confronted with today are from our recent and distant past.

40. Derfner, "The New Black Caucus," 16. It is clear that the CBC wants to address such racial matters in a timely and an effective manner, to achieve maximum impact for political socialization.
41. Poinsett, "The Black Caucus," 72.
42. Derfner, "The New Black Caucus," 16.
43. Greg Palast, "One Million Black Votes Didn't Count in the 2000 Presidential Election," *Common Dreams News Center*, June 22, 2004, 1. <http://www.commondreams.org/views...>
44. Palast, "One Million Black Votes," 1.
45. Barker, Jones, and Tate, *African Americans*, 291.
46. Julie Rovner, "Record Number of Women, Blacks in Congress," *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report*, vol. 46, November 12, 1988, 3293.
47. Darlene C. Line, William C. Hine, and Stanley Harrold, *African Americans: A Concise History* (New Jersey: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2009), 595.
48. Line, Hine, and Harold, *African Americans*, 595.
49. Derfner, "The New Black Caucus," 16.
50. McClain and Tauber, *American Government in Black and White*, 185. Keep in mind that the CBC retains "its unwritten rule to limit membership to [only] African-American legislators; but it briefly allowed [in 1988, 41] white members to join as nonvoting associates." This policy was later abandoned, as there are currently no white members in the CBC. See: "Creating and Evolution of the Congressional Black Caucus," 3. <https://history.house.gov/exhibitions-and...>
51. McMurray, "Black Caucus," 11A.
52. McMurray, "Black Caucus," 11A.
53. Derfner, "The New Black Caucus," 19.
54. Derfner, "The New Black Caucus," 16. It should be understood that, "the moral role of government is to ensure that no one set of sectarian or narrow definition of morality is imposed by the [federal] government on unwilling citizens." See: James P. Pfiffner, "The Paradox of Governmental Power," *Society*, September/October 2000, 23.
55. Poinsett, "The Black Caucus," 72. Fortunately, the CBC will remain engaged with their (diverse) constituents, as well as with other members of the U.S. Congress and the nation as a whole.

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Biographical Sketch

EARNEST N. BRACEY is a retired Army Lieutenant Colonel, with over twenty years of active military service. He was commissioned through Reserve Officer Training (*Distinguished Military Graduate*) at Jackson State University, where he graduated with honors (*Magna Cum Laude*), and received his Bachelor of Arts degree in political science in 1974. In addition, he received the Masters of Public Administration in 1979 from Golden Gate University, his Masters of Arts degree in International Affairs in 1983 from the Catholic University of America, his Masters of Business Administration in 2009 from California Coast University, and his doctorate of Public Administration (with emphasis in Public Policy) in 1993 from George Mason University. Dr. Bracey also earned his Ph.D. in Education from Capella University in 1999.

A recipient of numerous military awards and civilian honors, he is also a graduate of the United States Naval War College and the Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, and previously served as Director of Administration at the prestigious Industrial College of the Armed Forces, Washington, D.C. He was also recognized as Who's Who Among America's Teachers in 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, and 2006.

Dr. Bracey is professor of political science, and currently teaches American Politics and Black American History at the College of Southern Nevada in Las Vegas. He was formerly Chair and Professor of Political Science at Jackson State University and Chairperson of the Political Science and History Department at Hampton University. He serves as an editorial board-member for the Nevada Historical Society Quarterly. His work has appeared in professional journals and other publications, and he is the author of the books, *Prophetic Insights: The Higher Education and Pedagogy of African Americans*, University Press of America, 1999, *On Racism: Essays On Black Popular Culture, African American Politics, and the New Black Aesthetics*, University Press of America, 2003, *Daniel "Chappie" James: The First African American Four Star General*, McFarland & Company, Inc., 2003, *Places in Political Time: Voices From the Black Diaspora*, University Press of America, 2005, and *The Moulin Rouge and Black Rights in Las Vegas*, McFarland & Company, Inc., 2009. He also co-authored the book, *American Politics and Culture Wars* (2001). He is also the author of the novels, *Choson* (1994) and *The Black Samurai* (1998), and the book of short stories, *Requiems for Black Folks*, 2002.