

Shirley Chisholm

November 30, 1924 – January 1, 2005

Tenacity



“If they don’t give you a seat at the table, bring a folding chair.” Shirley Chisholm

Shirley Chisholm became the second African American in *New York State Legislature* in 1964. In 1968, she won a seat in Congress as its first African American woman, earning the name “Fighting Shirley” in her time in congress as she championed racial and gender issues as well as support for the poor. Chisholm cofounded the *National Women’s Political Caucus* in 1971. She became the first African American woman to serve on the *House Rules Committee* in 1977. Chisholm’s **soft skill of tenacity** enabled her to make change where she saw opportunities, making strides for African Americans by her own example of service.

Shirley Anita St. Hill (Chisholm) was the oldest of four daughters to immigrant parents, Charles St. Hill from Guyana, a factory worker, and Ruby Seale St. Hill from Barbados, a seamstress. She is a graduate of the *Brooklyn Girls’ High* and from *Brooklyn College*, where she was recognized as strong and Cum Laude in 1946. Although encouraged to consider politics by teachers, she did not believe that an African American female politician was realistic.

Chisholm worked as a nursery school teacher upon graduation. She

wed a private investigator, Conrad Q. Chisholm in 1949, which lasted 28 years until their divorce in 1977. By 1951, she earned a master’s degree from *Columbia University* in early childhood education becoming a consultant to the *New York City Division of Day Care* by 1960. She had become more aware of inequalities and she joined the *League of Women Voters*, the *National Association of Colored People (NAACP)*, the *Urban League* and her local Democratic Party club in Brooklyn, NY.

Chisholm’s tenacity made effective in her service in the *New York State Legislature*, and she then set her site on the presidential nomination of her party in 1972. She was blocked and took legal action, but, her efforts were too fraught with discrimination. Chisholm remained in New York, retiring from Congress in 1983, then she taught at *Mount Holyoke College* and co-founded the *National Political Congress of Black Women*. Her health began to decline by 1991 and she turned down an opportunity to be the *U.S. Ambassador to Jamaica*, enjoying her deserved retirement in Florida until her death in 2005.

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