

# Shirley Chisholm

U.S. Representative (1924–2005)

*“My greatest political asset, which professional politicians fear, is my mouth, out of which come all kinds of things one shouldn’t always discuss for reasons of political expediency.”*

—Shirley Chisholm

Born in Brooklyn, New York, in 1924, Shirley Chisholm is best known for becoming the first black congresswoman (1968), representing New York State in the U.S. House of Representatives for seven terms. She went on to run for the 1972 Democratic nomination for the presidency—becoming the first major-party African-American candidate to do so. Throughout her political career, Chisholm fought for education opportunities and social justice. Chisholm left Congress in 1983 to teach. She died in Florida in 2005.

## Early Life and Career

Famed U.S. congresswoman and lifelong social activist Shirley Chisholm was born Shirley St. Hill on November 30, 1924, in a predominantly black neighborhood in Brooklyn, New York. Chisholm spent part of her childhood in Barbados with her grandmother. After graduating from Brooklyn College in 1946, she began her career as a teacher and went on to earn a master's degree in elementary education from Columbia University.

Chisholm served as director of the Hamilton-Madison Child Care Center from 1953 to 1959, and as an educational consultant for New York City's Bureau of Child Welfare from 1959 to 1964.

## Political Career and African-American Firsts

In 1968, Shirley Chisholm made history by becoming the United States' first African-American congresswoman, beginning the first of seven terms in the House of Representatives. After initially being assigned to the House Forestry Committee, she shocked many by demanding reassignment. She was placed on the Veterans' Affairs Committee, eventually graduating to the Education and Labor Committee. In 1969, Chisholm became one of the founding members of the Congressional Black Caucus.

Chisholm went on to make history yet again, becoming the first major-party African-American candidate to make a bid for the U.S. presidency when she ran for the Democratic nomination in 1972. A champion of minority education and employment opportunities throughout her tenure in Congress, Chisholm was also a vocal opponent of the U.S. military draft. After leaving Congress in 1983, she taught at Mount Holyoke College and was popular on the lecture circuit.

### **Personal Life and Legacy**

Chisholm was married to Conrad Chisholm from 1949 to 1977. She wed Arthur Hardwick Jr. in 1986. She authored two books during her lifetime, *Unbought and Unbossed* (1970) and *The Good Fight* (1973).

Chisholm died on January 1, 2005, at the age of 80, in Ormond Beach (near Daytona Beach), Florida. Nearly 11 years later, in November 2015, she was posthumously awarded the distinguished Presidential Medal of Freedom

"She was our Moses that opened the Red Sea for us," Robert E. Williams, president of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People in Flagler County, once said of Chisholm in an interview with *The Associated Press*. William Howard, Chisholm's longtime campaign treasurer, expressed similar sentiments. "Anyone that came in contact with her, they had a feeling of a careness," Howard said, "and they felt that she was very much a part of each individual as she represented her district."