

Shirley Chisholm, *Unbought and Unbossed*

A Presentation by Aaliyah Brown & Alianna Wray



Agenda



01.

Her Background

Who was Shirley
Chisholm?

02.

Her Campaign

What was Chisholm's
path to political
leadership?

03.

Her Leadership

What were her
contributions to politics?

04.

Her Opponents

What kinds of obstacles
did Chisholm have to
face?

Title breakdown: “Unbought and Unbossed” What does it mean?

- It was her campaign slogan when running for president in 1972
- These were words against disdain and a reminder of her independence and outspokenness



Part I: Growing Up

- 1: EARLY YEARS IN BARBADOS**
- 2: BACK TO BROOKLYN**
- 3: COLLEGE YEARS**
- 4: STARTING IN POLITICS**



Overview: Who was Shirley Chisholm?

- Shirley Chisholm was the first African American to be elected into the United States Congress, March 3, 1969
- She ran for president in 1972, making her the first Black person, Black woman, and female Democratic candidate to ever do so
 - Calls herself the first woman to run seriously for President (Lynch 40:40)
- Co-Founder of the Congressional Black Caucus (1971)
- Joined the Unity Democratic Club that worked for equal rights for Black people
- Earned a Master's degree from Columbia University's Teacher College



I: Early Years in Barbados

- Chisholm's father, Charles St. Hill, was from British Guyana who grew up in Cuba and Barbados. Her mother, Ruby Seale, was born and grew up in Barbados.
 - Had 4 children, all girls. Shirley was the oldest
- When Shirley was around 3 years old, she and her 2 sisters (the third was not yet born) moved to Barbados to live with their maternal grandmother.
- Living in Barbados lays the foundation for Shirley's strong performance in academia



Young Shirley Chisholm held by her grandmother, Emmeline Seale in 1925. (Photo: Brooklyn College Library Archives)

Shirley Chisholm: Growing Up In Barbados



2: Back To Brooklyn

- They return back to Brooklyn around 1934 when Shirley is around 9 years old
- Her mother is thoroughly British in her ideas in terms of the manners she instills and ideas she instills in her daughters. And her Father was big on education
 - “You must make something of yourselves and go to school. Study and make something of yourselves”
- Her parents made great sacrifices for the future of their daughters
- Her father was a strong Garvite, aka a follower of Marcus Garvey

3: College Years

- Went to Brooklyn college, and majored in sociology with a minor in spanish. One of her sisters had a major in physics and graduated Magna cum laude but obviously by virtue of her race and gender she could not find a job
- Planned to become a teacher
- Other experiences sharpened her feeling for how racism was woven through American life
- Volunteered in an urban settlement house, teaching art, sewing, and writing skits. She wanted to devote her life to children

Shirley Chisholm from her 1946 Brooklyn College Yearbook



ST. HILL, SHIRLEY A.
707 Kingsboro Walk, Bklyn.,
33, N. Y.
Major: Sociology.
Pan-American Club; Harriet
Tubman Society; Social Serv-
ice Club; Ipothia.

4: Starting In Politics

- Political clubs, once a month they had membership meetings but the important meetings were the club nights. These were the nights people came in with their problems
- One meeting she walked in right past the group of people waiting. Two men blocked her way and said she wasn't waiting her turn. She said no and said the matter was urgent but she just wanted to see what they would do. They talked to her
- Her hairstylist introduced her to Wesley McDee Holder
- Her interest in politics grew gradually. She joined the 17th assembly district democratic club and scored her first political success as a cigar box decorator that held raffle tickets and money collected at each table during the evening. However she notices something.
- She also started in the regular democratic club and elected to the directive board in her 20s, however their treatment towards her whenever she would challenge them, was interesting

Part 2: Getting There

5: TEACHING, MARRIAGE, & THE POLITICAL ARENA

6: RUNNING FOR CONGRESS

7: BREAKING THE RULES



5: TEACHING, MARRIAGE, & THE POLITICAL ARENA

- She became a teacher at the Mount Calvary Child Care Center
- In 1953 she became director of a private nursery school: *The Friend in Need Nursery*
- 1 year later she was offered directorship Hamilton Madison Child care center in Manhattan stayed there for 6 years until 1959
- First Man of her life entered late in her last year of Brooklyn College
- Her mother was not exactly fond of him. When they met she describes her mother as very ungracious and barely spoke. Her father on the other hand tried to persuade her mother to be less Islander and more American in her views, she's only growing up. But she was already going on 21
- They then became engaged within a year or 2
- This news began to take a toll on her
- Decided her life would be devoted to children and education

Director of the Hamilton-Madison Child Care Center, Served as an educational consultant for the Division of Day Care



5: TEACHING, MARRIAGE, & THE POLITICAL ARENA

CONT'D

- During her time in the state assembly, she proposed legislation that did not succeed not even in just new york. It would have made it mandatory for policemen to successfully complete courses in civil rights, civil liberties, minority problems, and race relations before they are appointed to a police department
- At Columbia she was running from a meeting to class, when a good looking young man had stopped her. Conrad Chisholm
- She tried everything in her power to deter him from pursuing her
- Her mother actually like Conrad
- Got married in 1949
- A lot of people did not think any man would be suitable for Shirley
 - “any man of Shirley would have to be a weak man who enjoys her dominating him”
- However, Conrad completely lets Shirley be who she is without interfering
 - He lets her have the limelight, he doesn't care for it. He tells photographers to take her pictures and he will move to the side just puffing his pipe and watching his wife

SHIRLEY AND CONRAD



6: Running For Congress

- Redistricting made it almost impossible for her to run for congress, it was badly gerrymandered. Purposely to disenfranchise minorities
- **Gerrymandering:** manipulate the boundaries of (an electoral constituency) so as to favor one party or class
- The citizens committee invited potential congressional candidates to come in for interviews
 - She was the only woman and they unanimously endorsed her. She was the only one that talked back against them and disagreed with them about what to expect.
- She didn't have the money for a conventional campaign so she worked the hard way in the streets and indoors with selected audience
- She would go to many houses in the community and engage even sharing a meal with them. In Black houses she ate Chitlins, in Jewish houses she ate Bagels and lox, and in the Puerto rican houses she ate rice and chicken
- She fell sick, had to go to the doctors, and found that she had a stomach tumor. Got surgery



Cont'd 6: Running For Congress

- Sexism had seriously infuriated her. She wanted a time to come where we could be as blind to sex as we are to color
- She says how enslavement in the islands was less destructive than it was in the south. Ex: families being broken up more often in the south.
- In the islands there have never been much race barriers (there are class barriers) and as a result Black people in the islands have less fear of white people thus they hate them less. However in the states and mainlands, Black people are often reminded of their inferiority to whites



7: Breaking the Rules

- Everyone had been expecting her to be a stereotypical noisy, loud, anti-white type of woman. Someone once said “You’re actually charming”
- As she is interviewing people for her staff, she decides that she wants majority of her staff to consist of young women, from her secretary to her top assistant. More than half were Black
 - most of her constituents were telling her she needs to hire an all Black staff because if you don’t, who will
- She found out she had been assigned to the agriculture committee but did not think was the right choice as she is better expertised in other areas, such as education as she has served in education for over 20 years. So during a meeting she pushes back because she knows she can better serve the marginalized community who are poor, unemployed, and badly housed

“I am not the candidate of Black America, although I am Black and proud. I am not the candidate of the women's movement of this country although I am a woman and am equally proud of that. I am the candidate of the people of America. And my presence before you now symbolizes a *new* America in American political history.”

—**Shirley Chisholm (Lynch 14:21)**

As seen in the documentary, “Chisholm ‘72; Unbought and Unbossed”





Discussion Question #1

How might her appealing to constituents as a candidate “of the people of America” rather than a Black or female candidate have helped her gain support for her campaign?

Can you think of other political leaders who have utilized a similar campaign strategy?

Chisholm's Translocality

- Term by Dr. Tammy L. Brown used to describe how Chisholm leveraged her Black, female, and **West Indian immigrant identity** in her campaign strategy
- She encouraged all women to become active in politics and use their voice
 - “Our country is in deep trouble,” she admonished, “And we need women; yes, we need women...to make their voices heard in policy making and decision-making processes of this nation so as to be able to get this ship of state guided clearly again on a path of sanity” (Brown 1019)
- “I say unequivocally that there is a need for women in America to move out politically to *save our children*” (Brown 1020)
- Her personal style represented a mature generation of the “New Black Woman”
- She represents one of the “surprising number of successful black politicians of our time [that] are of West Indian descent” (Brown 1017)



Her Opponents

- Media mocked her campaign
- Congressional Black Caucus or National Black Agenda did not support her
 - Congressman William Clay said, “Sometimes I question her motives in certain instances. I certainly question her judgement and even at times I question her sanity. Shirley Chisholm has been rejected at the polls and state after state by Black people. Black delegates at this convention have a mandate from their people not to support Shirley Chisholm (Lynch 01:03:01).
- White Women like Gloria Steinem supported her but couldn’t commit “Shirley Chisholm is good for the cause and everything, but I think George McGovern is great” (39:09)
- Attacked three times while on the trail (43:18)
- Faced fierce opposition in California
- I have pointed out time and time again that the harshest discrimination that I have encountered in the political arena is anti-feminism - from both males and brainwashed "Uncle Tom" females (Chisholm, “Race, Revolution” 20)

Discussion Question #2

Post by
[@shirleychisholminstitute](#)
on Instagram



With her demeanor and slogan “Unbought and Unbossed” how does Shirley Chisholm change what it means to be a charismatic leader? What tools or strategies did she use as a political candidate to give her that “glow”?



Discussion Question #3

What similarities do you see between the political leadership of Shirley Chisholm and Fannie Lou Hamer?

“That I am a national figure because I was the first Black person in 192 years to be at once a congresswoman, black and a woman proves, I think, that our society is not yet either just or free.”

Food Insecurity

- Pushed back as a member of the Agricultural Committee
- Instrumental in the creation of governmental programs such as WIC

“I am most often asked by white women these days is “What can we do?”

I have responded to that question in many ways...Today I must state it. Free yourselves! And in order to do that you must first free yourselves of the assumption that you are now free”

—**Shirley Chisholm in Race, Revolution, and Women”**

Joblessness

- Served on the Education and Labor Committee
- Expanded Fair Labor Standards Act to extend wage protections domestic workers

Abortion

- Emphasized right to abortion for women

Legacy & Impact

“I was the first American citizen to be elected to congress in spite of the **double drawbacks** of being female and having skin darkened by melanin... I hope if I am remembered, it will finally be for what I have done. Not for what I happened to be”

- **Shirley Chisholm, 2:08.**



Shirley Chisholm: How I Want To Be Remembered



Shirley Chisholm: The First Black Congresswoman





Discussion Question #4

What stood out to you about these videos?

Thank you!



Citations

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