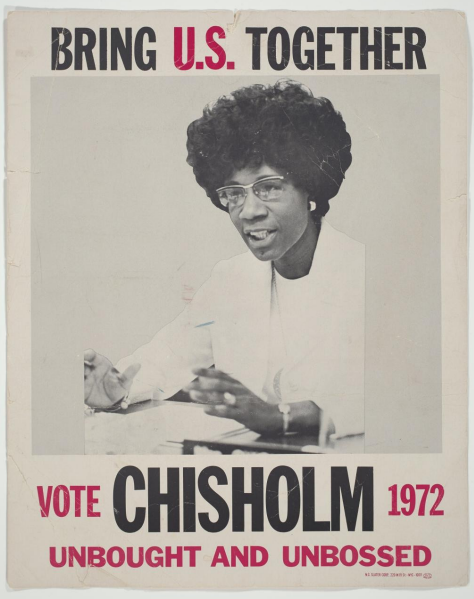


# WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH

## A Civics In Real Life Series

### FEMALE FIRSTS

### SHIRLEY CHISHOLM



Just over 50 years after the election of [Jeannette Rankin](#), the first woman elected to U.S. Congress, the nation elected its first Black Congresswoman: [Shirley Chisholm](#). She was elected in 1968 to a newly drawn U.S. House district in the Brooklyn, N.Y. area that was created in response to a court order. Chisholm's strong personality, along with her efforts to bring Black women into national electoral politics, garnered national attention. Chisholm was born in 1924 in Brooklyn, New York to immigrant parents born in Guyana and Barbados. She excelled in school and would enter the education profession after graduating from Brooklyn College. She became an education consultant for New York City's Bureau of Child Welfare after earning a masters degree in early childhood education from Columbia University. In 1964, Chisholm was elected to the New York state legislature, the second Black woman to serve. In the 1968 congressional race, Chisholm faced three other African-American candidates in the primary before defeating [James Farmer](#) in the general election. Her unique campaign style included driving the neighborhood streets with a loudspeaker announcing "Ladies and gentlemen ... this is fighting Shirley Chisholm coming through." and stopping to have conversations with voters. Chisholm's time in the U.S. House of Representatives was challenging due to her activist style. She often refused to follow House tradition and procedure, had no fear of speaking up and speaking out, and often struggled maintaining relationships with colleagues. A fierce advocate for education funding, one of her most notable moments was leading the House in overriding [President Gerald Ford's veto of a national school lunch bill](#). Chisholm was the first Black woman to serve on the House Rules Committee and was a founding member of the [Congressional Black Caucus](#) and the [Congressional Women's Caucus](#). In 1972, Chisholm became the first Black woman to seek a major party's nomination for U.S. president when she [declared her candidacy for the Democratic presidential nomination](#). At the Democratic National Convention she earned ten percent of the total delegate votes which was impressive considering her name appeared on just 12 primary ballots, she lacked significant campaign funding, and was not invited to participate in televised primary debates. Strained relationships within her party caused by her presidential campaign, combined with a growing national conservative movement, made Chisholm's later years in the House a struggle. In 1982, Chisholm declined to seek re-election. President Bill Clinton later nominated Chisholm as U.S. Ambassador to Jamaica, but she declined the opportunity and chose to remain retired. "[Unbought and Unbossed](#)" Shirley Chisholm as a "female first" was an unapologetic crusader for the causes she believed in. She understood that "if you really care about the country and you want to affect change you have to embrace everybody."

### Civics Challenge: Search & Learn

Current racial makeup of the U.S. Congress:	
Current racial make up of your state legislature:	
Number of women of color elected to Congress from your state:	



Lou Frey  
Institute