

## ★ **Shirley Chisholm: Champion of Black Feminist Power Politics**

**Anastasia C. Curwood**

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Anastasia C. Curwood's vibrant biography of Shirley Chisholm reveals a tenacious congresswoman and presidential candidate.

Curwood writes that Chisholm, the daughter of Caribbean immigrants and a Democratic party trailblazer, possessed a "willingness to speak plainly, take risks, and make provocative decisions." Her parents valued hard work, education, and the potential of the American Dream, despite the racial disparities they faced. After college, Chisholm pursued a teaching career; her later entry into politics was motivated by her desire to help the disenfranchised members of her Brooklyn community.

The book details Chisholm's rise from the New York State Assembly to becoming the first Black woman elected to the House of Representatives. During her seven terms in Washington, Chisholm often encountered more sexism than racism, including resentment from her Black male colleagues. By 1972, Chisholm had published a memoir, *Unbought and Unbossed*, and entered the presidential race. Though she didn't win the Democratic nomination, her groundbreaking, progressive campaign put her in the national spotlight.

Chisholm's agenda included feminism, economic equity, civil rights, and LGBTQ+ rights. She opposed the Vietnam War, and her ability to speak Spanish impressed the Puerto Rican voters in her district. And, despite her "Fighting Shirley" nickname, Chisholm advocated for coalition politics, stressing the need to negotiate beyond party lines.

Curwood captures Chisholm's complexities, from her sharp wit and sharper mind to her unique fashion sense. Chisholm was a political dynamo, yet she valued her privacy and personal relationships. After her retirement from Congress and until her death in 2005, she led a quieter life; she taught and lectured at colleges, and she described herself in later years as a "couch potato" who had lost interest in politics.

A vivid biographical assessment of a remarkable woman, *Shirley Chisholm* reminds us of Chisholm's legacy and makes her absence on the current political scene seem even more profound.

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