

Short Essay: Shirley Chisholm: Fighter for Human Rights

Congresswoman Shirley Anita St. Hill Chisholm was the first African-American woman elected to Congress. Chisholm was a founding member of the Congressional Black Caucus and the first African-American to make a serious bid for the Presidency of the United States. She was born in New York City on November 30, 1924. She grew up in Barbados and in Brooklyn, New York. Chisholm worked as a teacher while earning her master's degree in elementary education.

Prior to her 1968 election to Congress, Chisholm was an education consultant and former member of the New York State Assembly. She won the Congressional race against the odds of both her race and sex, and went on to make a name for herself as a fighter for human rights and dignity. She served the United States House of Representatives for seven terms, from 1968-1983. Chisholm made history by nationally campaigning for the Democratic Party nomination for President, the first black woman to seek the nation's highest office.

As a member of Congress, Chisholm was an effective advocate for the needs of minorities, women, and children. She served on the Education and the Workforce Committee, Committee on Rules, and Committee on Veterans. Chisholm co-founded the National Political Congress of Black Women, supported the Equal Rights Amendment, the National Organization of Women, and the Congressional Black Caucus. She retired from Congress in 1983, to teach politics and women studies at Mount Holyoke College and continued to advocate for education. Representative Shirley Chisholm died on January 1, 2005.