

SHIRLEY ANITA ST. HILL CHISHOLM,
"FOR THE EQUAL RIGHTS AMENDMENT" (10 August 1970)

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Abstract: Shirley Chisholm's political courage in the face of historic odds earned her the status of political icon. In the speech, "For the Equal Rights Amendment," Chisholm sought to secure equality for women by building a case for the constitutional amendment. This speech highlights Chisholm's skills as a policy debater as she carefully builds an affirmative case for change, refutes opposing arguments, and demonstrates how both women and men are harmed by laws perpetuating sex discrimination.

Key Terms: Shirley Chisholm, Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), Gender, Equality

"That I am a national figure because I was the first person in 192 years to be at once a congressman, black, and a woman proves, I would think, that our society is not yet either just or free."¹

Her voice has been described "as strident as the slight lisp of her West Indian accent could force it to be."² And Shirley Chisholm used this voice to champion the rights of the disadvantaged—racial minorities, women, and the poor. As the first African American woman to be elected to Congress, her fiery, independent presence shocked even the most liberal members of her own political party. Her campaign slogan, "Fighting Shirley Chisholm—Unbought and Unbossed," epitomized a political career of living up to her pledge.³ In her very first speech as a newly elected representative, she violated the congressional norm that first-year members were to be seen and not heard; accordingly, she issued a scathing critique of President Richard Nixon's plans to prioritize an elaborate weapons system over the needs of disadvantaged children. She argued that the government's misplaced priorities of perpetuating an unjust war in Vietnam penalized the poor and cheated other disadvantaged Americans out of their full citizenship rights. She told her audience, "Unless we start to fight and defeat the enemies in our own country, poverty and racism, and make our talk of equality and opportunity ring true, we are exposed in the eyes of the world as hypocrites when we talk about making people free."⁴

Chisholm's candor and political courage in the face of historic odds earned her the status of political icon. According to LaVern McCain Gill, "[s]he was a welcomed and treasured spokesperson for women, blacks, and young people who benefited from her outspoken, trenchant attacks on the white male power base and status quo;" and for "those in power—who bore the brunt of her criticism—she was a constant and formidable agitator, persistent in her challenges, and caustic in her critiques."⁵ As an African American and a woman, she experienced both racism and sexism throughout her career and became a voice for both the

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civil rights and the feminist movements. Ironically, her commitment to both movements sometimes put her at odds with their leaders; she challenged the white privilege of the feminist movement and the male privilege of the civil rights movement.

In her speech, "For the Equal Rights Amendment," Chisholm focused her efforts on securing women's equality by building a case for passage of the Equal Rights Amendment, drawing on rhetorical strategies from the civil rights movement. Chisholm represented a central figure in maintaining the amendment's presence before the U.S. House of Representatives and eventually securing its ratification by the U.S. Congress in 1972. "For the Equal Rights Amendment" is one of three significant speeches Chisholm delivered before Congress during deliberations over the ERA proposal (referred to as the House Joint Resolution 264).⁶ The speech highlighted Chisholm's skills as a policy debater as she carefully built an affirmative case for change, refuted opposing arguments, and demonstrated how both women and men were harmed by laws perpetuating sex discrimination.

Shirley Chisholm's Biography

Shirley Anita St. Hill was born in 1924 to immigrant parents. Her father, Charles St. Hill, a native of British Guiana, and her mother, Ruby Seale, a native of Barbados, had originally met in Barbados but immigrated separately to Brooklyn, New York. Shirley was the eldest of four daughters, and early in her childhood, she was expected to look out for her younger sisters while her parents worked to make ends meet. Her father was an unskilled laborer, first as a baker's helper and then as a factory worker. Her mother worked as a seamstress. Her upbringing instilled in her a militant sense of black pride, primarily because of the influence of her father, a follower of Marcus Garvey. According to Chisholm, her father "was a very proud black man. He instilled pride in his children, a pride in ourselves and our race that was not as fashionable at that time."⁷

Despite the family's best efforts, the St. Hill's struggled financially and decided to send three of their young daughters back to Barbados to live with their grandmother until the family was on more stable economic footing.⁸ Chisholm credited this move to Barbados, where she attended "strict, traditional British-style schools," with the development of her superior speaking and writing skills.⁹ The St. Hill family was reunited after six years but continued to struggle financially. Upon graduation from high school, Chisholm was offered scholarships to Vassar and Oberlin colleges. However, due to her family's financial situation, she could not afford the room and board and instead chose to go to Brooklyn College, where she earned a bachelor's degree in sociology with a minor in Spanish. She went on to earn a master's degree in early childhood education from Columbia University.¹⁰

The possibility of a career in politics first entered Shirley Chisholm's consciousness when Louis Warsoff, a political science professor, suggested that her strong debating skills and analytical mind prepared her for a life in politics. While pursuing her degrees, she joined the Harriet Tubman Society, where she heard people other than her father "talk about white oppression, black racial consciousness, and black pride."¹¹ She also became a member of the Political Science Society and the college Debating Society. After graduation, she established a reputation as an authority on child care in New York City and immersed herself in local politics and community organizing. Her primary goals were fighting ignorance and poverty at all levels

of society. Her efforts were more often thwarted than aided by the Democratic political machine in Brooklyn. With the support of progressive white and black voters, however, she formed the Unity Democratic Club as an alternative organization for social change and community mobilization. She revealed in her memoirs the effect of such battles on her political approach: "My frustrations at trying to operate through channels and following the prescribed procedures, and failing to get any action, have radicalized me."¹²

Chisholm finally decided to test the political waters for herself in 1964 when the Assembly seat in her district became available. She soon found that getting elected as a woman was an uphill battle. She wrote, "I met with hostility because of my sex from the start of my first campaign." Once, while canvassing from door to door, she was accosted by an older gentleman who exclaimed, "'Young woman, what are you doing out here in this cold? Did you get your husband's breakfast this morning? Did you straighten up your house? What are you doing running for office? That is something for men.'"¹³ Despite the sexist attitudes, Chisholm waged a long, hard campaign and won by a "satisfying margin" in a three-way contest, receiving 18,151 votes to the Republican candidate's 1,893 votes and an independent candidate's 913 votes.¹⁴

Chisholm spent four years in the New York Assembly where she developed a clear set of legislative priorities centering on "the development and implementation of human service programs for women, minorities, and the poor."¹⁵ Chisholm was particularly proud of two bills: one that established SEEK, a program designed to identify disadvantaged youths while they were still in high school and offer them an opportunity to go to college, and another that changed the discriminatory practice of revoking tenure for female teachers whose careers were interrupted by pregnancy.¹⁶

Chisholm's reputation for frankness and her political independence earned her the unanimous endorsement of a citizen's screening committee after redistricting allowed for a new Twelfth District seat in the U.S. House of Representatives. Yet, her refusal to abide by the rules of party leaders meant that she was often on her own during the campaign. Her Republican opponent was James Farmer, the former national chairman of CORE (the Congress of Racial Equality); his campaign played upon gender biases, characterizing Chisholm as a "bossy female" and "a would-be matriarch."¹⁷ Chisholm turned the tables on Farmer and demonstrated that there was great political power in courting and motivating women's organizations. With that base of support, which combined with her strong debating skills and her fluency in Spanish (an asset in the Spanish-speaking sections of her Bedford-Stuyvesant district), Chisholm soundly defeated Farmer in the 1968 election, receiving 66 percent of the vote. With her victory, Chisholm became the first African-American woman elected to the U.S. Congress.¹⁸

Once in Washington, "Chisholm practiced the maverick, true-to-herself conscience politics" she had perfected at the local level. She saw herself more as an advocate than a legislator.¹⁹ She wrote, "I did not come to Congress to behave myself and stay away from explosive issues so I can keep coming back . . . My most valuable function, I think, is as a voice."²⁰ Her public speaking and debating skills in particular were central to Chisholm's success as a politician. Writing in her autobiography, she explained: "When I get on a platform, I am transformed; I have even been called Messianic!"²¹

Chisholm served as representative for her district from 1970-1982. In 1972, she launched an historic campaign for the U.S. presidency. As the first African American to run for president as a member of a major political party, she was both celebrated and reviled by her fellow Democrats. She was harshly criticized by members of the Democratic Party and the party's black caucus for "messing things up," because even though politicians and civil rights leaders thought it was time for an African American to run for president, many preferred to have an African American *man* run for president. Chisholm revealed in her autobiography that some of her fellow black caucus members even "hinted that I would sell out black interests if they came into conflict with those of women."²² This notion that Chisholm's loyalties would be split between race and gender was a clear and on-going obstacle that she faced throughout her political career.²³

The Equal Rights Amendment

Chisholm was always outspoken on women's issues and her own identification as a feminist. She consistently remarked that she had suffered more discrimination as a woman than as an African American. In the introduction of her autobiography, she wrote: "Of my two 'handicaps,' being female put many more obstacles in my path than being black."²⁴ While serving in Congress, Chisholm, along with Betty Friedan, Bella Abzug, and Gloria Steinem, formed the National Women's Political Caucus, a non-partisan effort to involve women in more substantive roles in politics.²⁵ One avenue for increasing women's roles and ensuring their rights in society as a whole was the push for an Equal Rights Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

The Equal Rights Amendment was written by suffragist Alice Paul. It was first proposed by the National Women's Party in 1923 "as the next step toward winning full equality for women under the law after the passage of the nineteenth amendment," which guaranteed women the right to vote.²⁶ Supporters of the amendment believed that the right of suffrage was only the first step in securing women full equality. The proposed constitutional amendment stated its purpose simply: "Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex."²⁷ Proponents argued that such an amendment was necessary to eliminate state and national laws that discriminated on the basis of sex and gender.

Advocates of the ERA ensured that the amendment was introduced in each session of Congress since 1923, and although it was favorably reported on by the House Judiciary Committee twice and by its subcommittees on many occasions, the amendment did not reach the House floor until the 91st Congress.²⁸ In 1969, Martha Griffiths (D-Michigan) secured the required number of signatures to discharge the petition from the Judiciary Committee and to bring it to the House floor for debate.²⁹ The revitalized push for the Equal Rights Amendment in the late 1960s marked the beginning of what many identify as the contemporary women's rights movement. Like its nineteenth century counterpart, the new feminist movement had its roots in the civil rights movement for racial equality.³⁰ According to Dorothy McBride Stetson, the federal government's support for Civil Rights legislation in 1964 created an opportunity for women's rights leaders to hitch "a piggyback ride on the civil rights movement" and redesign their cause "as a legitimate part of the overall demand for equality."³¹ The demand for gender

equality along with racial equality, however, caused tensions between the movements. According to Stetson, African American advocates sometimes saw women's rights leaders as "representative of white American middle-class interests." Others feared that adding women's issues to the agenda would only increase conflict between women and blacks. Black women, "subject to the intersection of both race and gender discrimination," would then be "forced to choose sides" when such conflicts intensified.³²

The controversy over the relationship between the women's movement and the Civil Rights Act of 1964 mirrored the controversy over passage of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments in the aftermath of the Civil War. During that earlier debate, some women's rights activists, like Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, saw an opportunity to secure universal suffrage for women as well as blacks. Others argued that including women in the proposed amendments would jeopardize their passage and they fought for securing rights for African American males first. With the writing of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments, Congress departed from previous constitutional practice by including the word "male" multiple times in the text. In the body of the Constitution, the words "men" or "women" were never mentioned. Instead, the words "people," "persons," "representatives," "members," and "citizens" were featured.³³ Thus, for the first time, women were explicitly excluded from constitutional protections.

In the case of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, the prohibition of sex discrimination did ultimately make it into the bill, but it soon became clear that the federal agency charged with the enforcement of the provisions, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), did not take sex discrimination seriously. For example, the EEOC "left protective labor laws intact and refused to ban sex-segregated job advertisements."³⁴ Out of concern over this lack of enforcement emerged the National Organization for Women (NOW), which began its own civil rights movement for women. According to Stetson, the leaders of NOW, "many of whom had already had experience in the civil rights campaign," adopted the same language of "individualism and equality that had been so effective in the struggle for racial integration."³⁵ NOW began documenting the various ways in which women continued to be discriminated against under various state laws; women continued to be excluded from jury service in several states, for example, while other states allowed women to be excluded from jobs requiring the lifting of more than 35 pounds. Still other states maintained that longer prison sentences for women than for men did not deny women's equal protection under the law.³⁶

The ERA ultimately proved a divisive issue for the women's rights movement primarily because some feared it would eliminate necessary protective legislation for women workers. Supporters of the amendment argued that laws "limiting night work or setting minimum wage levels for women workers did more harm than good by restricting opportunities for women workers."³⁷ Over time, the issue became mired in conflicting conceptions of women's equality and disagreements over the best way to improve the legal status of women. The ERA also drew opposition from those who perceived it as focused exclusively on the needs and economic interests of already privileged, white women. Chisholm's outspoken support for the amendment worked to overcome that concern, as she demonstrated how the ERA might benefit long neglected groups of women. In particular, she connected her support for the ERA to her efforts to extend minimum wage laws to domestic workers. Shirley Downs notes that Chisholm functioned as "the bridge in the women's movement between minority women and

low-income white women, on the one hand, and the white middle-class women who [had] been the leaders of the movement."³⁸ She brought such credibility as an advocate for women and the economically disadvantaged to her support for the ERA during her August 10, 1970 speech.

Understanding the Rhetorical Power of the ERA Speech

Chisholm spoke frequently on the issue of women's rights, and she was an outspoken proponent of the Equal Rights Amendment. Chisholm's main purpose as a member of Congress was to "put into practice legislation that would help to empower people on the margins of society."³⁹ Chisholm's popularity as a speaker among such marginalized groups was understandable. Her audience for this speech, however, consisted of her white male colleagues primarily—an audience with which she enjoyed less popularity and greater controversy as a speaker. Always a woman of conviction, Chisholm often shocked her colleagues with her defiance of the rules of decorum and her constant attacks on the hierarchies and traditions of Congress. Throughout her political career, she incurred such labels as "headstrong, pugnacious, egotistical, overbearing, expedient, power-hungry, brazen, peevish, and pushy."⁴⁰ And on at least one occasion, Chisholm reported that she heard a fellow member of Congress tell another, "You know, she's crazy!"⁴¹

In addressing this skeptical and oppositional audience, Chisholm relied primarily on her education, experience, and talent as a policy debater to create a persuasive case for ratifying the ERA. Chisholm's speech, "For the Equal Rights Amendment," represented one of the best illustrations of her argumentative skills. In the speech she built a powerful case for the ERA through stock issues, keen refutation of opposing arguments, and an effective strategy for debunking the myth that the ERA was just a "woman's issue."

Constructing a Stock Issues Case

Because of her debate background and experience, it is not surprising to see Chisholm's skillful use of deliberative stock issues in crafting her argument on behalf of the Equal Rights Amendment. Stock issues in deliberative or policy debate can be traced to the Greek and Roman theories of "stasis."⁴² A stasis was known as a "stopping point" or halt that revealed a point of controversy (an issue) that acted "as a focus or center for opposing contentions." Standard stock issues were developed for forensic, epideictic and deliberative rhetoric and offered "focal points for opposing views" on a given subject.⁴³ According to Ray Nadeau, classical theories of stasis for deliberative oratory initially centered around four issues: Is it just and/or lawful? Is it expedient and/or necessary? Is it easy and/or possible? Is it honorable and/or pleasant? To these four, Hermogenes added a fifth: what is the anticipated effect of the proposed policy? As such, contemporary "deliberative speakers, legislators, and debaters are following a tradition that is at least 2500 years old."⁴⁴ Contemporary debate theorists and practitioners relabeled and merged the classical stasis into the stock issues of significance, inherency, solvency, and disadvantages.⁴⁵

In a stock issues case, one of the first things an advocate must do is establish that there is a significant need for change. Chisholm established the significance of this need in the first

paragraph of her speech by appealing to her audience's commitment to equality and freedom—arguments that also called to mind recent advancements on civil rights and issues of race. She argued that while the nation had virtually overcome its prejudices in terms of religious preferences and political beliefs, and with progress being made toward the elimination of racial discrimination, only one group still experienced significant barriers to equality. This particular group, she charged, faced "the most subtle, most pervasive and most institutionalized form of prejudice that exists" (1)⁴⁶—discrimination based on sex. Indeed, she noted, "discrimination against women, solely on the basis of their sex, was so widespread that it seemed to many persons normal, natural and right" (1).

Throughout the speech, Chisholm enumerated how women were *harm*ed by this seemingly "natural" discrimination in the workforce, the legal system, the educational system, and the military. For example, Chisholm demonstrated how women were hurt by unfair labor laws that prevented them from working overtime, limited their choice of occupations, and often relegated them to low wage jobs with minimal opportunities for advancement. She also argued that excluding women from the selective service not only prevented them from assuming the "great responsibility" of serving their country, but also excluded them from the many benefits that accompany military service, like opportunities for education and training as well as medical assistance (10). She invoked the Labor Department's own employment and salary statistics as evidence of the pervasiveness of the problem.

A second stock issue is to prove that inherent barriers exist which prevent the present system from solving the problem. The status quo was unable to alleviate the problem, Chisholm suggested, because the problem was structurally and attitudinally inherent to the current system. In other words, existing laws and long-standing, cultural attitudes toward women perpetuated the inequities. Chisholm showed how current constitutional guarantees were neither clear nor applied consistently when it came to women. For instance, she explained that while the Fifth and Fourteenth Amendments were supposed to guarantee due process of law, women were still "excluded from some state colleges and universities." In some states, she continued, restrictions were placed on "a married woman's right to engage in independent business," and in some legal cases, women had received "heavier criminal penalties" than men who had committed "the same crime" (3). Later in the speech she asserted that recent civil rights acts also were not sufficient to ensure full equality. She revealed that both the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1963 Equal Pay Act were "limited in their coverage—for instance, one excludes teachers, and the other leaves out administrative and professional women" (21).

Once Chisholm had established the problem and shown how it was unlikely to change under the status quo, she moved on to the next step in a stock issues argument: describing the solution and explaining its desirable effects and advantages. Chisholm spent the rest of the speech seeking to establish the efficacy of the ERA to attend to the harms experienced by women; she also sought to emphasize the positive legal, economic, and psychological effects for both women and men that would result from its passage and implementation. For example, she argued that focusing "public attention on the gross legal, economic, and social discrimination against women by hearings and debates in the Federal and State legislatures would result in changes in attitude of parents, educators, and employers that would bring about substantial economic changes in the long run" (16). Yet because the proposed ERA already had provoked so much controversy, Chisholm also took a somewhat different approach

to defending her solution. Focusing on what she considered to be misguided attacks on the ERA, she made the case for the amendment primarily by refuting the arguments of its opponents.

Refuting Opposing Arguments

Chisholm addressed the issue of solvency primarily through a strategy of direct refutation and the use of *prolepsis*—foreseeing and forestalling potential objections to a position.⁴⁷ Throughout the speech, Chisholm identified three principal oppositional arguments to the ERA and then offered a powerful counter argument to each of those positions. First, Chisholm addressed the argument "that this amendment will not solve the problem of sex discrimination" because you cannot legislate people's hearts and minds (2). Using analogous reasoning, she asserted that if such an argument were advanced against a civil rights bill, "as it has been used in the past—the prejudice that lies behind it would be embarrassing" (2). While she conceded that laws "will not eliminate prejudice from the hearts of human beings," Congress could not use that as an excuse or as a "reason to allow prejudice to continue to be enshrined in our laws—to perpetuate injustice through inaction" (2). At the end of her speech, Chisholm seemed to suggest that there may indeed be a link between government actions and the hearts and minds of constituents. Chisholm quoted renowned law professor Leo Kanowitz to make the point that laws can sometimes influence how people think about their fellow citizens:

As long as organized legal systems, at once the most respected and most feared of social institutions, continue to differentiate sharply, in treatment or in words, between men and women on the basis of irrelevant and artificially created distinctions, the likelihood of men and women coming to regard one another primarily as fellow human beings and only secondarily as representatives of another sex will continue to be remote. (26)

Chisholm also addressed the common oppositional argument that the ERA would result in a state of confusion and excessive litigation to determine its legal and practical meaning. Chisholm advanced exactly the opposite argument: that the amendment was "necessary to clarify the countless ambiguities and inconsistencies" in the current legal system (3). She explained that current laws regarding women's employment, service on juries, and access to education varied widely from state to state, and that the laws' inconsistency was proof that such limitations on the basis of sex were irrational and in need of revision. Rather than create confusion and additional litigation, she suggested, the ERA would provide a clear, overriding constitutional guarantee of equality under the law.

Finally, Chisholm sought to refute the argument that the ERA would eliminate much needed protective legislation for women workers. This argument, one of the first advanced in opposition to the ERA, dominated the opposition's rhetoric and was based on the assumption that women, as the weaker sex, were more likely to be exploited in the workplace by unscrupulous employers. Laws distinguishing between the sexes were thus written to "protect" women workers and to ensure that someone (the government) was looking out for their best interests (since they could not be trusted to look out for themselves). In responding to this

argument, Chisholm worked to expose the ways in which such an argument was based on antiquated views of the sexes and "pre-scientific beliefs about psychology and physiology" (20). In refuting such claims, she advanced the argument that "protective" legislation actually harmed women and, by exclusion, also harmed men. She exclaimed: "No one would condone exploitation. But what does sex have to do with it? Working conditions and hours that are harmful to women are harmful to men; wages that are unfair to women are unfair for men" (19). As an alternative, she advocated protecting and rewarding all people equally, which in her view was exactly what the ERA would do: "The choice of occupation would be determined by individual capabilities, and the rewards for equal work should be equal" (19).

Debunking the Myth of the "Woman's Issue"

The idea that women workers needed special protection was just one of the sexist stereotypes that Chisholm sought to debunk in this speech. She also challenged several other common assumptions about sex and gender throughout the speech. However, the most important myth that she challenged was the idea that the ERA was a "special interest" amendment, reflecting the concerns of only a narrow segment of society.

As already noted, Chisholm responded to concerns about protective labor laws for women by pointing out that both men and women were harmed by unfair labor practices. She developed this idea that "sex prejudice cuts both ways" in other parts of the speech as well (17). For example, she reminded her audience that only men were held responsible for the nation's defense under the requirements of the Selective Service Act. Chisholm argued this was an arbitrary form of discrimination that placed an undue burden on men. Explaining her point, she claimed: "Each sex, I believe, should be liable when necessary to serve and defend this country" (17). In addition, Chisholm criticized laws governing the legal guardianship of children and alimony as discriminatory against men. Instead, she argued, both sexes should have "a responsibility for the support of children" (18). She also argued that when it came to survivor benefits, the ERA would ensure that the husbands of female workers who died would be entitled to the same death benefits as the widows of male workers.

By emphasizing how men had been harmed by sex discrimination as well as women, Chisholm ultimately was able to challenge the idea that the Equal Rights Amendment pitted women against men. Throughout the speech, Chisholm explained the relevance and significance of the ERA to the lives of women, but she also invited her audience to consider the ways in which men might benefit from a constitutional amendment eliminating sex discrimination from the nation's legal system. Ultimately, she showed how society as a whole was hurt by laws that limited individual potential by perpetuating "artificial distinctions between persons" (20). Quoting Leo Kanowitz again, Chisholm stated, "When men and women are prevented from recognizing one another's essential humanity by sexual prejudices, nourished by legal as well as social institutions, society as a whole remains less than it could otherwise become" (26).

Finally, Chisholm issued a call to action, encouraging her audience to see themselves as completing the work of the Founding Fathers. While the Founding Fathers proclaimed a commitment to equality, their ideals were not fully implemented because of the biases of their own times. Chisholm reminded her audience that at the time the Constitution was drafted,

"there were no black Founding Fathers, there were no founding mothers—a great pity, on both counts" (24). The work of forming a more perfect union fell to later political leaders, and the time had finally come to extend the protections of the Constitution to *all* classes of citizens. As Chisholm put it: "The time is clearly now to put this House on record for the fullest expression of that equality of opportunity which our founding fathers professed" (22). The House of Representatives did just that on the very day Chisholm delivered her speech, voting 350-15 to approve the resolution. A month later, 50,000 women marched for equality in New York City, and the push for ratification of the ERA was underway.⁴⁸

Chisholm's ability to define the problem, provide a rationale for change, refute opposing positions, and demonstrate the clear advantages of the ERA made her a force to be reckoned with in the U.S. Congress. She proved to be a tireless advocate for the rights of women and other disadvantaged groups. Her speech, "For the Equal Rights Amendment," is just one example of her rhetorical prowess and her prodigious efforts to ensure that the nation lived up to its ideals of equality and justice for all.

Chisholm's life experiences and her arguments exposed the ways in which even in a time of great advances in civil rights, women's rights were often still denied. Shiela F. Harmon-Martin writes, "The twin legacies of racism and sexism in the United States have had a double impact on black women and have shaped the focus and extent of their involvement in the political processes of our country."⁴⁹ As the only African American woman serving in Congress at the time, Chisholm was in a unique and credible position to denounce both racism and sexism from a position of institutional power. She exposed the ways in which the experiences and legacies of racism and sexism were interconnected in our political history, and she challenged the enduring American political understanding that defined "African American progress as male and feminist progress as white."⁵⁰ Chisholm represents one of those rare leaders who dedicated her life to eliminating oppression in all of its forms.

Epilogue

After rejecting a military exemption rider, the House of Representatives again approved the ERA in the fall of 1971.⁵¹ On March 22, 1972, the amendment was approved by the full U.S. Senate and sent to the states for ratification. Many states quickly ratified the amendment and approval seemed imminent. However, ERA opponents, led primarily by Phyllis Schlafly and her Stop ERA movement, successfully halted the progress toward ratification. In 1982, after a deadline extension, the amendment was still three states short of the number needed for ratification; the amendment consequently failed as a result. The ERA has been reintroduced in every session of Congress since but has been held up in committee each time.⁵²

In 1982, the same year that the ERA's ratification deadline expired, Shirley Chisholm announced her retirement from Congress. Her retirement came as a shock to many, but Chisholm indicated she was ready to move on to the next phase of her life. Her decision was influenced by a mixture of factors including increasing disillusionment with Congress and changes in her personal life. Her second husband had been severely injured in an automobile accident and she felt compelled to spend more time with him.⁵³ Her post-congressional career took her back into education, where she held the position of Purington Professor of Politics and Women's Studies at Mt. Holyoke College in Massachusetts. She was also a visiting scholar at

Spelman College. She co-founded the National Political Congress of Black Women in 1984, and in 1984 and 1988 she campaigned on behalf of presidential candidate Jesse Jackson. In 1993 she was offered the position of ambassador to Jamaica by President Bill Clinton, but health problems prevented her from accepting the position. Reflecting on her decision not to accept the position, Chisholm stated, "My day has come and gone. I continue to be a mentor. I am helping a number of younger black men and women who are running for offices on the local level. I help to teach them how to prepare speeches. I'm a teacher. At heart, I have always been a teacher."⁵⁴ After a life of helping others, Chisholm retired to Daytona, Florida and died in her home on January 1, 2005 at the age of 80.

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Notes

1 Shirley Chisholm, *Unbought and Unbossed* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1970), xi.

2 Hope Chamberlin, *A Minority of Members: Women in the U.S. Congress* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1973), 325.

3 Chisholm, *Unbought and Unbossed*, 69.

4 Chisholm, *Unbought and Unbossed*, 97.

5 LaVern McCain Gill, *African American Women in Congress: Forming and Transforming History* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 17.

6 The other two speeches include: "Equal Rights for Women," *Congressional Record*, 91st Cong., 1st Sess., 1969, 115, pt. 10: 13380-13381; and "Equal Rights Amendment," *Congressional Record*, 92nd Cong., 1st Sess., 1971, pt. 27: 35314-35315.

7 Chisholm, *Unbought and Unbossed*, 14.

8 Chisholm, *Unbought and Unbossed*, 4.

9 Chisholm, *Unbought and Unbossed*, 8.

10 Chisholm, *Unbought and Unbossed*, 23, 28.

11 Chisholm, *Unbought and Unbossed*, 23.

12 Chisholm, *Unbought and Unbossed*, 112.

13 Chisholm, *Unbought and Unbossed*, 53.

14 Chisholm, *Unbought and Unbossed*, 54.

15 Reba Carruth and Vivian Jenkins Nelson, "Shirley Chisholm: Woman of Complexity, Conscience, and Compassion," in *Women Leaders in Contemporary U.S. Politics*, eds., Frank P. LeVeness and Jane P. Sweeney (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1987), 15.

16 Chisholm, *Unbought and Unbossed*, 61.

17 Chisholm, *Unbought and Unbossed*, 74.

18 Rudolf Engelbarts, *Women in the United States Congress, 1917-1972* (Littleton, CO: Libraries Unlimited, 1974), 106.

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33 "The Evolution of the Amendment," 164.

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36 National Organization for Women, "ERA Position Paper, 1967," in *Public Women, Public Words: A Documentary History of American Feminism*, Vol. III, eds. Dawn Keetley and John Pettegrew (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002), 251-258.

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39 Kathryn Anne Canas, "Barbara Jordan, Shirley Chisholm, and Lani Guinier: Crafting Identification through the Rhetorical Interbraiding of Value" (Ph.D. diss., University of Utah, 2002): 140.

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42 See for instance, Ray Nadeau, "Hermogenes on 'Stock Issues' in Deliberative Speaking," *Speech Monographs* 25 (1958), 59-66; Ray Nadeau, "Classical Systems of Stases in Greek: Hermagoras to Hermogenes," *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 2 (1959), 51-71; Bill Harpine, "Stock Issues in Aristotle's Rhetoric," *Journal of the American Forensic Association*, 14 (Fall 1977), 73-81; Jeanne Fahnestock and Mari Secor, "Toward a Modern Version of Stasis," in *Oldspeak/Newspeak: Rhetorical Transformations*, ed., Charles Kneupper (Arlington, VA:

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45 See for instance, Lee Hultzen, "Status in Deliberative Analysis," in *The Rhetorical Idiom*, ed. Donald C. Bryant, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1958), 97-123; Robert Rowland, "Debate Paradigms: A Critical Evaluation," *Conference Proceedings--National Communication Association/American Forensic Association* (Alta Conference on Argumentation, 1981), 448-475.

46 Here and elsewhere passages from Chisholm's "For the Equal Rights Amendment" are cited with reference to paragraph numbers in the text of the speech that accompanies this essay.

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49 Shiela F. Harmon-Martin, "Black Women in Politics: A Research Note," in *Black Politics and Black Political Behavior: A Linkage Analysis*, ed. Hanes Walton, Jr. (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1994), 209.

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54 In Gill, *African American Women in Congress*, 34.