



CHANGING THE FACE OF DEMOCRACY: SHIRLEY CHISHOLM AT 100

The First Major Museum Exhibition Focusing on the Life and Legacy of the Barrier-Breaking Leader

NEW YORK, NY (June 2024) – Celebrating more than a century as New York’s storyteller, the **Museum of the City of New York** presents, ***Changing the Face of Democracy: Shirley Chisholm at 100***, which is on view through July 20, 2025. As the first major museum presentation dedicated to the legendary Shirley Chisholm, it delves into the life and legacy of this trailblazing legislator, whose contributions to our nation’s public policy endure today.

Changing the Face of Democracy: Shirley Chisholm at 100 marks the centennial of the late Chisholm’s birth. It seeks to ignite the same charismatic spark and passion for democratic processes that fueled Chisholm’s policy work and grassroots campaigning. The exhibition unfolds in the Museum’s second-floor North Gallery, inviting visitors to immerse themselves in the multi-dimensional story of this barrier-breaking figure. Fully bilingual, exhibition text is offered in English and Spanish.

Presented in collaboration with the **Shirley Chisholm Project on Brooklyn Women’s Activism at Brooklyn College**, the exhibition promises a multifaceted exploration of Chisholm’s journey via three captivating sections: *Brooklyn Life*, *Political Career*, and *Legacy*. It weaves a tapestry of Chisholm’s life and times using historical artifacts, photographs, archival footage, and art.

Supported by an Honorary Committee including **Secretary Hillary Rodham Clinton, Senator Chuck Schumer, Senator Kirsten Gillibrand, Congressman Hakeem Jeffries, Dr. Una S.T. Clarke, Gloria Steinem**, and more, ***Changing the Face of Democracy: Shirley Chisholm at 100*** examines the impact of a woman whose advocacy shaped politics and policies. It highlights Chisholm’s Caribbean heritage and her position as a diasporic figure, delving into her pioneering significance as the first Black woman Brooklyn sent to the state legislature, the first Black woman elected to Congress, and her groundbreaking presidential campaign in 1972. Moreover, it underscores how her legacy reshaped American democracy for future generations of politicians and ordinary citizens alike.

Dr. Sarah Seidman, Puffin Foundation Curator of Social Activism and co-curator of the exhibition, notes, "In ***Changing the Face of Democracy: Shirley Chisholm at 100***, we aim to explore Shirley Chisholm’s endeavors and her enduring influence. From championing causes like reproductive justice, tackling food insecurity, to advocating for voting rights, the exhibition examines how this singular figure emerged from diverse New York networks to serve as a catalyst for change. These networks illuminate Chisholm’s impact on the past, present, and future of New York City."

Dr. Zinga A. Fraser, co-curator of the exhibition and Assistant Professor in the Africana Studies Department and Women's and Gender Studies Program, as well as the Director of the Shirley Chisholm Project on Brooklyn Women's Activism at Brooklyn College, shares, "The inclusion of the Chisholm Project's oral histories in the exhibition serves as poignant reminders of Chisholm's contemporary relevance, underscoring not only her groundbreaking achievements but also the ongoing resonance of her legacy globally. Showcasing Chisholm as a figure whose influence transcends generations, ***Changing the Face of Democracy*** hopes to inspire a new wave of political engagement, reaffirming the enduring relevance of her contributions."

Key highlights include:

- **Rarely exhibited paintings** from the 1970s by **Faith Ringgold**
- A costume worn by **Regina King** in the 2024 Netflix film "Shirley"
- **A vibrant Carnival headdress** designed by **Kenneth Antoine**, paying homage to the annual West Indian Day Parade, which Chisholm helped establish in Brooklyn in 1969.
- **Memorabilia from Chisholm's inaugural presidential campaign**
- Portrait of Shirley Chisholm by **Sherman Beck**
- **A collection of photographs and mementos from Chisholm's early life**, including her wedding portrait and college diploma
- Materials from Chisholm's first political campaign intended to topple machine politics in Brooklyn
- **An iconic image of Chisholm** captured by the renowned photographer **Richard Avedon**
- **Oral histories that offer personal insights into Chisholm's enduring legacy**, featuring contemporary perspectives from figures such as **Gloria Steinem, Sonia Sanchez, David Dinkins, and Basil Paterson**

The Museum has organized panel discussions, film screenings, and more that will bring the public together with leading scholars and culture workers to expand upon stories featured in the exhibition including a **gathering the week of U.S. Election Day 2024 and a family-friendly program on Chisholm's birthday on November 30, 2024**. An additional highlight is "[New York on Film: The Fight for Rights](#)," which focuses on New York civil rights leaders Bayard Rustin and Shirley Chisholm. Through screenings of two feature films, an exhibition tour, and a performance, explore how Chisholm and Rustin — two barrier-breaking organizers from New York who advocated for equality, racial equity, and worker's rights— navigated their own marginalization in political spaces.

As well, throughout the exhibition, the Museum's Frederick A.O. Schwarz Education Center will organize field trips and professional development seminars connecting students and teachers to what Chisholm experienced, stood for, and accomplished throughout her life. More details to be announced at www.mcny.org.

"Shirley Chisholm was a fierce defender of her borough, a captivating orator, shaper of policy, and powerful voice for New Yorkers," remarks **Stephanie Hill Wilchfort**, the Ronay Menschel Director and President of the Museum of the City of New York. "This exhibition and our related programming strive to connect New Yorkers

to their political and social history, aiming to foster understanding of today's electoral process and underscore the importance of civic engagement in our city."

Changing the Face of Democracy: Shirley Chisholm at 100 is co-curated by Zinga A. Fraser, PhD and Sarah Seidman, PhD, and the exhibition was designed by WSDIA (We Should Do It All).

Changing the Face of Democracy: Shirley Chisholm at 100 is made possible by the National Endowment for the Humanities: Democracy Demands Wisdom.

Additional support is provided by the Lily Auchincloss Foundation, Dobkin Family Foundation, The Puffin Foundation, Ltd., The Barbara Lee Family Foundation Fund at Fidelity Charitable, an Anonymous Family Foundation, and the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the New York City Council.

About The Museum of the City of New York

For more than 100 years, the Museum of the City of New York has fostered an understanding of the distinctive nature of urban life in the world's most influential metropolis. *Time Out New York* named its blockbuster centennial show, *This Is New York: NYC in Art and Pop Culture*, as the best exhibition of 2023. Moreover, the Museum previously earned the title of "Best Museum" in *Time Out New York's* "Best of the City 2021" as well as multiple American Alliance of Museums (AAM) awards. To connect with the Museum's award-winning digital content, visit www.mcny.org, or follow us on Instagram and X/Twitter at @MuseumOfCityNY and on Facebook at [Facebook.com/MuseumOfCityNY](https://www.facebook.com/MuseumOfCityNY).

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