. . . Congresswomen

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"stained-glass") was so impressive and solemn that citizens responded to her with great respect. A woman listening on radio remarked, "I heard her speak and thought it was God!"

As a member of the influential steering and policy committee of the House Democratic Caucus, Representative Jordan, according to the Wall Street Journal achieved "in one congressional term more honor and perhaps more power than most members of Congress can record in a lifetime."

As vice-chairman of the Texas Democratic Party, she delivered the keynote speech at the Democratic Convention, receiving a standing ovation. Her universal acceptance as a woman, a national political figure and a black extended to conservative publications, and if illness had not struck, Barbara Jordan might well have been nominated as the first black on a national ticket.

A Texas author, J. Frank Dobie, describes a man who would not run out on you: "He'll do to ride the river with. Ride it for liberty, ride it for academic freedom, ride it for good school teachers to keep them from being bullied around, ride the river for the glory of Texas and these United States of America." And that certainly describes a Texas woman named Barbara Jordan.

Shirley Chisholm was the first black woman ever to be elected to Congress. In 1972, she became the first black woman ever to run for president. She did not get nominated, but she achieved what she hoped for, "to get people moving in the direction of believing that a woman and a black could run for president."

"Unbought and Unbossed," was the title of her autobiography, and her campaign slogan. She was always independent. Never a favorite of the Democratic machine, Shirley Chisholm summoned up the nerve to run against civil rights leader James Farmer in 1968 for her neighborhood's House of Representatives seat. She ran and she won!

In Congress, she supported legislation benefitting society's disadvantaged. Chisholm had a seat on the House Rules Committee and acted as secretary of the House Democratic Caucus.

"Of my two 'handicaps,'" she wrote, "being female put many more obstacles in my path than being black . . . Racism is so universal in this country, so deep-seated and widespread, that it is invisible because it is so normal."

But the country is changing. Chisholm was actively involved in the Rev. Jesse L. Jackson's campaign for president. She speaks of witnessing the growth and development of "many people in this country who now ignore the color of a candidate's skin." Struggle was vital for women and blacks to get what they achieved in the 1960s and 1970s, she says. We couldn't sit back and wait for decisions. "The Civil Rights Act did not occur coincidentally, but resulted from the efforts of workers, black and white."

In our nation, she insists, "the underutilization of women is a tragic consequence of societal norms. Women, like blacks, are victims of their own perceptions — the internalized expectations of society — about what they can and cannot do."

Born in 1924, Shirley Chisholm was the daughter of an unskilled laborer from Guayana and a mother from Barbados who did other people's housework. The impoverished Bedford-Stuyvesant area of Brooklyn, New York, where Shirley Chisholm was born, later became her constituency for seven congressional terms. As a child, Shirley was sent to her maternal grandmother in Barbados, and her early education marked her speech with a slight accent of the West Indies.

She won a scholarship to Brooklyn College and graduated cum laude in sociology. Later she taught in a nursery school while earning a master's degree in elementary education from Columbia University.

Shirley Chisholm has never minced words. She takes a strong stance on the repeal of all United States laws dealing with abortion. She has little patience with militant males who look on such repeals as a form of "genocide."

"Come on! Which is more like genocide, rearing unwanted children in frightful slums or the conditions I fight for in which the full range of family planning service is freely available to women of all classes and colors? Let's make available effective contraceptions! And let's extend safe, legal termination of undesired pregnancies."

Shirley Chisholm long ago observed, "Women are a majority of the population. But we are treated like a minority group. The prejudice against us is so widespread that, paradoxically, most women don't know it exists. Women are paid less for doing the same work as a man. Some women are as quick as any male to condemn a woman who ventures outside the limits of the role men have assigned to females: that of toy and drudge."

In her lectures, she warns women, "Look to no man for approval of what you're doing. Look only to your conscience and your God."

She heeds her own advice, and lives her own life. In 1982, she decided not to run again for Congress. She regards the Reagan's administration's complete "decimation of social programs that had taken a decade to produce," as "heartless, and callous of human beings." She could not continue to bring back to "the jobless, homeless and hopeless of Brooklyn the tragic messages from Washington." And she needed time for her second husband, Arthur Hardwick who was critically injured in an auto accident.

For some years, she taught at Mount Holyoke College in Massachusetts, and now hopes to devote time to writing her third book, "The Illusion of Inclusion." Political activities always remain on her agenda. Meanwhile, the first black woman ever to run for the presidency continues to urge women to work into administrative and decision-making positions. "And stay unbought and unbossed!"

Black history is part of our history.

Just look into the history of AT&T, and you'll find that the story of our beginnings could be written in Black history books, too.

That's because the man who drew the plans for Alexander Graham Bell's first telephone set was Lewis Latimer, a talented Black draftsman and inventor. His drawings accompanied the patent application that started this whole business of telecommunications.

As an associate of Thomas Edison, Latimer also patented an electric lamp switch and socket and wrote the first textbook on the Edison electric system.

During Black History Month, AT&T is especially proud of the contributions of Lewis Latimer and other Black Americans. We're also proud to have a history of providing an environment in which every person can reach his or her fullest potential.

As we look forward to new generations of pioneers, it's good to remember the gains that people like Lewis Latimer already have brought.

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