

Representatives Barbara Jordan, Texas; Cardiss Collins, Illinois; Shirley Chisholm, New York, and Yvonne B. Burke, California.

Black Women In Politics

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Three of the four black women in the U.S. House of Representatives came from their state-houses. Shirley Chisholm and Yvonne Burke were in the New York and California Assemblies respectively. Barbara Jordan was in the Texas State Senate.

Shirley Chisholm was a specialist in early childhood education before she decided to enter the political arena. She was a natural for the plunge. Petite in build with an exploring mind and plenty of daring, she started out in the time-honored way of ringing doorbells and holding block meetings in the 12th Congressional District of Brooklyn where she lived. The center of that district is Bedford Stuyvesant where 70 per cent of the population is black and Puerto Rican. Ms. Chisholm speaks competent Spanish, a fact that was in her favor when she ran for the assembly in 1964. Five years later, she set her sights on Congress and in 1970 became the first black woman in history to be elected to the House.

Few people took the feisty congresswoman quite seriously when she confided that she intended to run for President in 1972. The idea of a woman and a black at that was simply incongruous. "When Shirley gets an idea, she digs in with both feet and both hands," said a friend. It might have been added that her whiplash tongue was another sharp weapon.

Candidate For President

Early in 1972, Ms. Chisholm began her campaign for the presidency. The sheer novelty of her attempt landed her on the front pages of the newspapers and the television talk programs for interviews. The politicians stopped laughing when they found that she was dead serious and was working up a sizeable sympathy support.

After the Democratic Convention was over, Shirley retired from the lists to work on another book and to concentrate on her home district. She won reelection handily, but announced later that she intended to retire from politics permanently. Whatever the feelings about her were, she had at least advanced the serious possibility of a woman as president or vice president several stages beyond ridicule.

Reps. Jordan and Burke are both lawyers. Ms. Burke was an attorney for the McCone Commission which investigated the Watts rebellion of 1965. In 1966, she was elected to California Assembly where she served two terms. Combining beauty, brains and wariness, Mrs. Burke has survived the obstacle course of high politics. Recently, she and Rep. Jordan were cited by Harper's Bazaar magazine as two of America's 100 outstanding women.

The Lady From Texas

Barbara Jordan is like Sen. Sam Ervin of North Carolina "constitutionally minded." She constantly quotes from it. In demand as a speaker, the congresswoman from Texas can roll off passages from that document by memory.

It is a pity she says that the framers of the Constitution debated for something like 87 days and while they talked about life, liberty and pursuit of happiness never once condemned the institution of slavery. Had they inserted this, says she, the Civil War might have been averted and slavery abolished four score and seven years before Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation.

Of the six women who participated in the panel on "Black Women in Politics," the least bruised by the rough and tumble of politics was Rep. Cardiss Collins. She was the behind the scenes strategist for her husband, but she, herself, was a long-time government employee. On the contrary, Ethel Allen who came from a solid Democratic family in Philadelphia, was maverick enough to run for office on the Republican ticket.

Her belief in blacks is that they should divide their loyalties more evenly between the two major parties, yet holding on to their independence to become an effective balance of power. The teeming district that she represents in North Philadelphia has 67,000 blacks. It is a tough area, but Ethel Allen is a tough-minded individual who knows her way around in the ghetto.

Flirtation With Danger

Senator Verda Welcome has had her brushes with danger. Several years ago, she was the target of an assassination plot and for awhile had to have bodyguards. At times, she has been on the unpopular side of an issue. She was among the group of black leaders who were chastized by then Governor Spiro Agnew in a famous confrontation where he complained that they were not doing their part to control black demonstrators in the city.

In looking at the role of black women in politics from a non-elective point, one can go back in time to the days of slavery when Sojourner Truth and Harriet Tubman as defenders of liberty who put their own personal safety on the line for what they believed in were, in a sense, practicing the politics of peril in a time when abolition was a flaming issue.

Mrs. Bethune's Leadership

The most consummate black woman non-elected political practitioner in our time was Mrs. Mary McLeod Bethune, friend of presidents, educator and founder of the National Council of Negro Women. Born into humble surroundings, she showed signs of leadership in early childhood. Her thirst for learning extended far beyond her own personal desires. She had dreams of establishing an institution of higher learning for black students too poor to afford an education on their own and later, forging a powerful union of women to uplift themselves and enrich their lives. Both ideas had come to their time. All that was needed was money and support to carry them out.

The story is familiar to most Americans — Mrs. Bethune's long friendship with Eleanor Roosevelt and through her, the confidante relationship with President Franklin Roosevelt, the extraordinary in-

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Jurists Plead For Human Rights

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ter, headquartered in Washington, D.C., and Judge William S. Thompson, secretary-general, also of Washington, expressed the feeling that "Our job is to get nations to accept more international law."

Both were reelected by the Conference, and both along with retired U.S. Supreme Court Chief Justice Earl Warren and U.S. Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall were honored with citations by the host Ivorians.

Peace at Home

In one of the main speeches on the Conference's program, Justice Marshall told the delegates: "Peace begins at home, and it is responsibility of the Bench and the Bar to rededicate themselves to succeed in our quest for 'Peace Through Law.'"

In a plea for universal implementation of the Declaration of Human Rights, Chief Justice Warren said:

"It is especially fitting that we should gather together here on the continent of Africa. This is not just because some of the most urgent problems of human rights — ranging from apartheid to near-genocide — confront us on this continent. Hopefully, our being here may encourage restraint on those given to bigotry and to the torture and killing of their fellow men."

In the resolutions, the delegates condemned "all forms of terrorism," and recommended the adoption of "general principles, standards and rules that will develop and enhance the ability of states, international organizations and individuals to prevent such acts through national and international sanctions."

Gay Receptions

The talk and the mood of the sessions were serious, but delegates had ample opportunity to enjoy the splendors of the Ivory Coast.

A holiday atmosphere prevailed in the evenings when they were guests of President Felix Houphouet-Boigny of the Ivory Coast and the Honorable Alphonse Boni, president, Supreme Court of the Ivory Coast, had elaborate outdoor garden receptions.

At these gay affairs, they watched the African dancers and musicians as they dined, wined and conversed.

This marked the first time the law gathering had been held on the African continent, and there was every indication that Africans will play a major role in any peace movement.

60 Students

A feature of this renewal of these biennial conferences was the attendance of some 60 law students from the United States. Most of them traveled here via a chartered plane as special guests of the World Peace Through Law Center.

They also organized a youth chapter, electing Ruth Worthy of Washington, president, with Walter Stone of Providence, Rhode Island, secretary-general; Wilhelm H. Joseph and Djamio Jean Abel, vice presidents of the Americas and Africa, respectively.

It was an inspiring conference,, and those attending will long remember the Abidjan Assembly. The big hope is that it has made some inroads in the quest for peace.

Women Act On Issues Collectively

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fluence which she was able to wield in making appointments and getting such programs as the National Youth Administration funded. Bethune Cookman College at Daytona Beach, Fla. was her educational arm.

But the seat of power was in Washington and the force behind it was the National Council of Negro Women. No other black woman before nor since has enjoyed so much concentration of power in a single individual. The legacy Mrs. Bethune left behind included the National Council of Negro Women to carry on in a leadership role. New programs of far-ranging effect have been implemented under the administration of Dorothy I. Height as national president.

Tribute To Mrs. Parks

One could go on with a long list of modern day black women who have contributed to black political growth. Tribute must be paid to Rosa Parks who started a revolution with her tired feet on a Montgomery bus back in 1955. The boycott over her arrest and jailing set in motion the forces of change leading up to the 1965 Voting Rights Act.

What we have witnessed most recently is a new direction in politics. Coming out of the protest movement, it is significant no so much for the personalities, but for its collective character. In 1964, during the Democratic National Convention at Atlantic City, the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party made such strong demands for reform of the delegate credentials system that a compromise had to be worked out whereby it go into effect in 1968. The articulate spokeswoman in the challengers was Mrs. Fannie Lou Hamer of Rulesville, Miss. Would anybody ever forget her impassioned plea for justice?

It was in 1966 that the full effect of the new dimension in political force manifested itself. It came from the least known common denominator — welfare recipients, mostly black, mostly women. The instigator was Dr. George Wiley, a young former professor of chemistry at Syracuse University who left the academic world for social action. He became associate national director of CORE, resigned from that post to form the National Welfare Rights Organization.

This was the legion of the forgotten, the sullen, brooding mass, caught in the web of poverty with no escape. But George Wiley came along and began talking about rights. Where in the world were there rights for those on welfare? Wasn't the government taking care of all those lazy people who wouldn't work? Suddenly, the invisible poor were visible and present in the halls of Congress, the statehouses, city hall chambers. They talked about legal rights and residency requirements and guaranteed annual incomes and such.

That was the new political force, mostly black, mostly women. George Wiley is dead now. The organization is rent with dissension; but "once learned, always learned," as the saying goes.

Women Are Issue Conscious

Black women are more issue conscious than ever. Right now their distrust of government, along with black men, is four times greater than that of whites, according to a University of Michigan survey. What this means in political prognosis is not necessarily a complete withdrawal from the electoral process. It could lead to more sophisticated patterns of voting, including ticket-splitting and a move to a more independent stance, rather than being the exclusive property of one party.

Whatever happens, black women are sure to become more politically conscious on such issues as education, child development, jobs, health and housing and the trend is to act collectively on these matters.

Black women are becoming more active in the League of Women Voters, a non-partisan organization. Mrs. Faye Williams of Indianapolis and a board member of the league, headed a nation-wide survey three years ago on voting patterns.