AT: Welcome to the Infinite Women podcast. I'm your host, Allison Tyra. And today I'm joined by Barbara Winslow, professor emerita in women and gender studies at Brooklyn College, and founder and director emerita of the Shirley Chisholm Project of Brooklyn Women's Activism to discuss the parallels between the presidential campaigns of Shirley Chisholm and Kamala Harris. So first, if you could give us a bit of background information about Shirley Chisholm and her career and particularly her 1972 presidential bid.

BW: Shirley Chisholm was born November 30, 1924, in Brooklyn, New York, where I live. Her parents were immigrants from the Caribbean, Barbados and Guyana. At a very young age, she went to, because her parents were working class and poor. They couldn't afford to raise, they had three daughters then and they sent the kids to Barbados, where young Shirley and her sister were raised by loving but stern women, her grandmother and her aunt. I'm giving you this background so you can understand why he was so incredibly fierce and gutsy. She's in Barbados at a time in the ‘20s and early ‘30s when the anti-imperialist, anti-colonialist, Black power as well, labor movement and women's movement begins to emerge among Black Barbadians. She never writes about it in any of her works. However, I went to Barbados to do research and I found out that her uncle was the editor of a Black Barbadian newspaper and even as a young girl walking to and from her grandmother's farm into the capital, I think it's Christchurch in Barbados, she couldn't have helped but know that something was going on, that there were strikes, there were sharecroppers. So I believe her seven years in Barbados, especially being raised by two very strong women, shaped her consciousness, both racial, gender and oppositional, shall we say. And the other thing in Barbados is it was a majority Black country, so bus drivers were Black, schoolteachers were Black, even police officers were Black.
And so then she comes back to Brooklyn. She complained that the cold was what got her first but she also came back to a world where she never saw a Black police officer, a Black bus driver. New York City schools were as segregated as any school in Alabama in the ‘40s and ‘50s. So when people talk about how terrible the South was, yes it was, it was terrible and the North was just nominally better but it was completely racially segregated. She goes to Brooklyn College where she becomes active in politics as a student and she joins the debating society, she's in an organization called the Harriet Tubman Society which took up Black issues. World War II is going on and she was involved in campaigns to racially integrate the military. She fought for more Black professors, for Black studies, she campaigned for every woman who ran for public office. None of the sororities would accept African-American women so she founded an African-American sorority. So she was a doer, that is, it wasn't she just protested, she looked for alternatives. She graduates from Brooklyn and she goes into education. There weren't a lot of educational opportunities open for women, even middle-class women in those days and less for Black women. So there was teaching, social work and nursing and she chose to teach and she gets involved in local Brooklyn politics and gets involved with a wave of Black activists who get rid of the all-white or the white-led, I should say, local Democratic Party machine. But what she notices is that the women are relegated to the baking, the fundraising, the envelope stuffing, a lot of things that my generation complained about with new left men. And so she began to organize the women.
And then in 1960 she runs to become a state representative in Albany, the capital of New York and she becomes a very effective legislator. I could go on and on about all the things she did. The most important legislation she co-authored and co-sponsored with three other African-Americans who were in the Albany legislature was a program called SEEK: Seek Empowerment, Education and Knowledge. And the SEEK program provided resources for high school graduates to go to the City University of New York, to enter, to get whatever remediation they needed, whatever mentorship they needed and to stay with them until they graduated. And as a result of the SEEK program, the City University of New York began to look like New York City. It was no longer all white. It became a multiracial university. And then she decides, there was some redistricting that went on and finally a seat opened up in Brooklyn that was clearly designed for a Black representative. Before she asked any of the men in the Democratic Party, the Black men in the Democratic Party, if it was okay, she announced her candidacy for the US Congress. And the story of her running in ‘64

was really an extraordinary story because Mrs. Chisholm, I met her once and I knew we called her that, but Representative Chisholm was very short. She was very slim. She was a very little woman. She was dark-skinned and she had an accent, Barbadian accent and a slight lisp. She was running against a very charismatic, tall, extraordinarily handsome African-American man who had been the head of the Congress of Racial Equality and no one thought she would win except Mrs. Chisholm and her husband Conrad. And why did she know she would win, was because 65% of the registered voters in her district were women. And I don't think she saw herself as a feminist yet, but she ran specifically going after the women's vote. She said, bring a woman to Congress, bring a Black woman to Congress. She also knew James Farmer, who was running against her. He had a big strike against him. He didn't live in Brooklyn and he had a white wife, so that didn't help. She was taunted. She was ignored. The New York Times did one story about the campaign and the headline went, “Woman runs against James Farmer.” Nobody paid attention. And yet when the votes were counted, he's on the front page of The New York Times. And as I wrote in my book, “and her name was mentioned, Shirley Chisholm.”

And in ‘68, she is the first African American woman elected to Congress, obviously from Brooklyn. And she was working class, daughter of immigrants. It really was an amazing story. She gets to Congress and is as confrontational and as oppositional as anything. She also was treated terribly, just terribly. The US Congress has what is called a seniority system. Mrs. Chisholm called it the senility system. And the famous story about her is they put her on the agricultural committee. And of course, she joked, she said, “a tree may grow in Brooklyn, but it's not an agricultural place.” And then she said, “well, I'll be on it as long as I can be on the food stamp committee. And they wouldn't put her on the food stamp committee.” So she stopped. She said, “I'm not going to be on it.” And she finally got on the Veterans Committee and some other committees. But she was, and good for her, a real pain in the butt. And she was totally admired. Her first staff were all women. And that was shocking. Nobody had ever done that. The people who worked for her adored her. She was fun to be with and as well as a very serious Congressperson. And she begins thinking about the presidential run in as early as ‘70. She writes a book called *Unbought and Unbossed*, because that was her slogan, Unbossed, which sort of resonates with the idea that she wasn't anybody's slave and unbought the same sort of thing. But she also believed that she could be part of a coalition of those young people who were fighting against the war in Vietnam, the people involved in the Black freedom struggle, older people, certainly the women's movement. And she starts campaigning. And she gets the most opposition from Black men. The most well-known feminist who wouldn't support her was Bella Abzug. Gloria Steinem was a Chisholm delegate from New York. So she supported her and wrote speeches for her. And Steinem has always admired and respected Chisholm and vice versa. She runs a campaign. And I think once she starts, she realizes she's clearly not going to win. But she runs because she wants to be able to go to the convention with delegates.

She has a wonderful and devoted staff, no money, and they're wonderful and devoted but completely disorganized. Our women's liberation group, Seattle Women's Liberation Center, $15 in cash. And for a group like ours to send somebody $15, it was like sending somebody $100 or something like that. She campaigned first in Florida. And the stories, you have to chuckle. She was very gutsy and plain spoken. She spoke to a group of elderly Jewish people. And she was a supporter of the state of Israel. But she also talked about the plight of the Palestinians. So at that point, then she probably lost the Jewish vote, southern Florida. And then in northern Florida, I don't know how much you know or your listeners know, but the bad joke about Florida is it's like Alabama. And she is at one campaign stop, and she's speaking under a Confederate statue. And the Confederate soldier has a gun. And in the ‘40s, there had been a race riot and a lynching in that town. And here she is speaking. So you get a sense that this woman had guts. She was courageous. And she wrote in her book, *The Good Fight*, that an elderly African-American man went up to her and said, “I never thought I would see this day.” So everybody I've ever interviewed about Mrs. Chisholm says the only thing that came close to her campaign was Barack Obama's. And I think probably the same was true with Harris. One thing the two had in common, they didn't get to be president, which is the country's loss. But the crowds were excited.

They were sympathetic. They were large. But large crowds don't always indicate the vote, as we've seen. So she goes into the convention. She has 151 delegate votes. And she gets sold out by the men, Ron Dellums, who was the left-wing Congress person from California was supposed to put her name in nomination. The McGovern forces went to Dellums and said, “if you put her name in nomination, you will be finished in the Democratic Party.” And so he capitulated. (AT: And Dellums was a Black man, correct?) Yes, yes. Dellums was Black, and he was sympathetic to the Black Panther Party. I think he was in Democratic Socialists of America too. But when Shola Lynch, who did a wonderful documentary about Chisholm, tried to get Dellums to talk about why he didn't do it, he just wouldn't answer. And finally said, “I had a bad cold.” So they all were cowards. This did not happen with Harris this time. She was not treated as terribly as Mrs. Chisholm was.

AT: Well, I do have to say that although there was not a lot of Black men being outspoken against her, there certainly were some. But it is worth noting that in addition to white women just being awful, like, let's own that. But interestingly, more Black men voted for Trump in this election than did in the previous two elections that he ran in. And so only I think 79% of Black men voted for Harris compared to 91% of Black women. It was not just that people were publicly opposing her, that you would have thought that either because of race or gender would have supported her. But, and I don't think we had that as much with Harris, it wasn't the public. But with Chisholm, it was also that behind-the-scenes maneuvering and sort of betrayal that isn’t public.

BW: Oh yeah. Right, right. No one said about Harris, oh, we want a woman president, not that one. That's what they said about Chisholm, Black men. And that's what people said about Hillary Clinton. Oh, we want a woman president, just not that one. But I think misogyny played a huge role in Harris's defeat. I remember listening to men and women say, “well, I can't vote for Harris. She couldn't stand up to Putin.” And you're sort of sitting and thinking, (AT: Have you seen the other guy?”) Yeah, no, exactly. I guess the word is cognitive dissonance or whatever it's called. But I think it shows for people who just listen to one kind of news, six to eight hours a day, I think it played a big role in people literally thinking they could just say, well, Harris can't stand up to Putin.

AT: The excuse is just blatantly absurd. Like, if you stop and think about it for even one second. (BW: Yes, exactly.) Something that I also find interesting in comparison to Clinton, because Clinton had been involved in politics in the public eye for decades. But as you mentioned Chisholm was the first Black woman elected to Congress in 1968. Kamala Harris was only the second Black woman elected to the Senate in 2016. And when they ran, both of these women had been in in politics for less than a decade. And so there was a lot less baggage that you could pull out. Like that was one of the things I really noticed with the Harris campaign was they were really struggling to find anything resembling dirt on her. And my favorite was they tried to talk about how one of her several generations removed ancestors was a slave owner. And everybody's like, “um, do you know anything about African-American ancestry?” A lot of Black folks are walking around with white slave owner antecedents.

BW: It's called rape. (AT: Yeah, exactly.) I'll say something. And believe me, I'm very, very critical of Hilary Clinton. So don't think I'm a big supporter. But I think the Clintons for the right wing in this country, in other words, the Republican Party, they saw Bill as the epitome of the ‘60s drugs, sex and rock and roll. Now he did like rock and roll and was a bit of a predator. He didn't take drugs or he didn't inhale. And then Hilary Clinton represented angry, bull-busting feminazism. I'm very critical of her and Clinton's, their neoliberalism. But when she was in the Senate, she had a very progressive voting record. She was hawkish on foreign policy. And when I would try to argue with people, I would say, “I'll bet I picketed her office more than you have.”

AT: Since we're getting into the question of white women, I will fully own as a white woman. A majority of white women voted against Harris. And similarly, Chisholm, we can talk about how the Congressional Black Caucus

didn't endorse her, but neither did NOW.

BW: California NOW endorsed her and campaigned for her. I think national Now didn't endorse any candidates. The most disgraceful was Bella Abzug. But Betty Friedan was sympathetic. Steinem was a delegate. A number of Republican women supported Chisholm. By the way, so did Rosa Parks. So did Dolores Huerta. So did our women's liberation group, Women's Liberation Seattle. And a lot of the radicals, the white women in the left feminist movement did. But we were not a majority. We never were. Sometimes I think when people go after, “well, white women,” not you, of course, “white women didn't support Chisholm.” It's a way of saying, “see what's wrong with feminism.” And I don't think that's the point. We never were the majority. We never came close to being the majority. I think the explanation that I would give is both racism and male supremacy. I think that's the reason, that the idea of a Black woman, they couldn't imagine it. And the majority of women who did vote for Trump were married. So they're used to male domination. And the fact that there were even ads that said, “you don't have to vote the same way your husband did” was pretty extraordinary. And you heard Republican men saying, “if my wife votes for Harris, I'm going to divorce her.” I'm not defending, “white women” because we have our history that we have to deal with. And I think it's mainly feminist women like you, like myself, like the women, the white women I know, we're the most self-critical and we're the ones who are trying to write the history correctly and pointing out where we where we failed, where we were tone-deaf, where we didn't listen, where we should have just said, let the women of color lead, and we don't need to talk so much.

AT: I think any group has self-aware critical thinkers and other people who are not. That's any group, regardless of the criteria. But what's interesting when you when you step back and look at it is that white women have consistently benefited from, like individually, like they're not benefiting all womankind, but they don't care about that, right? They benefit personally. So it's interesting to know things like women like Elaine Chao, who was Department of Transport last time, women like his incoming chief of staff is the first woman chief of staff. He appointed the first woman head of the CIA. I'm not saying any of these are good people.

BW: Well, he likes a certain kind of woman. And he has certain kind of women around him.

AT: Yeah. And I was actually discussing with someone else about how many women know how to handle men like Trump, right? Because we've all known men like him. A lot of us have had bosses like him. And so it is actually kind of fascinating to look at that aspect of things. But when it comes down to it, whether we're talking about suffragists, excluding Black women from that movement, or people like Betty Friedan was a huge homophobe, or today's TERFs, there are always women in these movements who see other women as less valid or less important, as they themselves are. And it's usually like the women with privilege who see others that way. So it is an unfortunate reality that we have to acknowledge. So when I'm looking at these parallels, right, the biggest thing that gets me is how far we have not come in more than 50 years between Chisholm's campaign and Harris's. And being both a woman of color, specifically a Black woman, and female, is what Mary Church Terrell referred to as the double handicap. Obviously, today, we'd call it intersectionality. But Chisholm herself even said in 1970, of the two handicaps, being Black is much less of a drawback than being female. And it got me thinking about milestones, right? So the the 14th amendment passed in 1868, 50 years before women got the vote in 1919. We had two black men elected to Congress in 1870, almost 100 years before Chisholm, and almost 50 years before Jeanette Rankin, the first woman who was white, in 1916 (BW: and also an out lesbian, a socialist, a feminist and a pacifist.). She was the only person in Congress to vote against both world wars. But also, when we're looking at the Supreme Court, Thurgood Marshall was appointed in 1967. Sandra Day O'Connor wasn't appointed until 1981. (BW: And by Reagan.) Oh, don't get me started on Reagan. We're not going there. Not going there. And then Sonia Sotomayor, who was our

first woman of color on the Supreme Court, wasn't appointed until 2009. And our first Black woman, Ketanji Brown Jackson, wasn't until 2022. And, and again, we have Obama was elected in 2008. And bare minimum, it's going to be at least 20 years before we have a woman in the White House.

BW: I think white women would vote for a white would vote for a Republican woman.

AT: It also becomes a question of how many Democrats think that it's not worth the “risk” of running a woman after both Clinton and Harris lost.

BW: I think if Nikki Haley had run, I think she definitely would have defeated Biden, and I think would have defeated Harris. And I'm not sympathetic at all to Nikki Haley.

AT: But it's just a question of who's going to win. And something I've noticed in the aftermath of the election, there was all this finger-pointing on Democrats’ part, like you've got people saying, “oh, you're too far left, and you're not centrist enough.” And it's like, she was endorsed by prominent Republicans. It does not get more centrist than that.

BW: Everything she got accused of by centrist Democrats, of the Democrats got accused of, she didn't do. She didn't raise the issue of trans. The only thing he really was strong on, thank goodness, was on reproductive rights. And it turned out that that was very low on the list of what people cared about.

AT; Well, one of the fascinating things about reproductive rights specifically is the degree of hypocrisy and privilege involved, right? So you hear all these stories about women who were out protesting one day, and then were inside the abortion clinic the next week, needing their services while telling the doctor, “you're going to go to hell” after they've performed the procedure that she asked for. And the fact that women with privilege will always be able to travel wherever they need to go, they will be able to access these services. It is depressingly not that surprising that it wasn't as big of an issue as it should have been.

BW: It's very interesting what you said about the hypocrisy, because there have been a number of Republican Congressmen who the news reported that they took their girlfriends, they were married - their mistresses, I hate that word - to abortion clinics, and nobody cared. And when I was growing up and abortion was illegal, I was middle-class, you could go to Puerto Rico and get an abortion. And the hospital that provided the abortions, there's a wing for the middle class women who went to get abortions, and then the other wing was for the Puerto Rican women who were being sterilized. I was very pleased that Harris used Shirley Chisholm as a reference, but I really think her legacy only came to light in, it didn't continue. She literally, once she left Congress in ‘82, she disappeared and she disappeared from the memory. People did not know who she was until all of a sudden women in the Democratic Party sort of learned about her. Shola Lynch did that wonderful documentary in ‘05, *Chisholm ‘72: Unbought and Unbossed*. I started the Project, and as a result, the Albany legislators made November 30th Shirley Chisholm Day. We always had a big event at Brooklyn College, and we brought people like Gloria Steinem, Anita Hill. I mean, we made a very big deal about it. And over time, I think people sort of went, “oh, wow.” When I first raised having the Shirley Chisholm Project at Brooklyn College, half the women's studies faculty had never heard of her. And they were all the ones who were under 50. Now everybody knows about her. And she's getting the recognition she deserved. I don't believe Carol Moseley Braun when she was elected to the Senate, first African-American woman. I don't believe she referenced Chisholm. I looked for that. And I know that she and Barbara Jordan did not get along. Obama never mentioned Chisholm. So I think that this idea of the legacy, that the only African-American in Congress who constantly referenced Chisholm was Barbara Lee, because she worked on her campaign in ‘72. And that's

a wonderful story. Barbara Lee was at Mills College. I believe she was the president of the student body. She also was the president of the African-American student group. I think she was a woman on welfare and she had a child. And she was interested in the Chisholm campaign. And she invited Chisholm to come and speak at Mills. And she went up to her and said, “I want to work on your campaign.” And Mrs. Chisholm said to her, “have you registered to vote?” And she hadn't. She said, first you have to register to vote. And I really have always admired Barbara Lee. She came and spoke for our project as well. She was the one who sort of kept her memory alive, but and the other people who did were people who actually knew and worked with her.

AT:So as we're looking at how far we we haven't come and going back to all the Democrats looking to try to blame the party or the campaign rather than acknowledging that racism and sexism are still major issues. I guess the question is, where do we go from here? Because it's been 50 years. And yes, Harris made it to the number two spot. But we've seen two of the most qualified candidates in history, both losing to a failed businessman whose own advisors have called him a fascist.

BW: A convicted felon! I totally, totally agree with you. Now as to where we should go from here, I'm going to plug my book, *Revolutionary Feminists*. When I was writing my book about the women's liberation movement in Seattle, it was sort of finished before Dodd, for example, I think the day it went to press, Dodd and we quickly fixed something. But we did so much in such a short period of time. By 1975, I'm not saying people weren't homophobic, but there was support for lesbian and gays. You didn't have trans coming yet, but they're still, in terms of the progressive movement, abortion was legal. Title IX, sexual harassment was becoming a crime. I mean, there were things happening and attitudes had changed. How I raised my daughters was totally different from how my parents raised me and my parents were quite liberal. I was raised to become a good wife and my kids, I raised them that they had to have a life. And if marriage wasn't part of it, it wasn't the end of the world, that sort of stuff. And then all of a sudden, I think my book comes out in ‘23 and sort of like, oh, shit, everything we did seems to have been erased.
And one of the things I wrote about in the end of the book is that when the left in the United States was defeated in the ‘70s, early ‘70s, Nixon went after the Black freedom struggle and he was very successful. And I argue as a historian that the Black movement in the United States is the spinal column, so to speak, of progressive politics. And as the movements got defeated, the Democratic Party became more important. And in my years in the 60s, we didn't rely on the Democratic Party. We didn't rely on the courts. We didn't rely on national organizations. And I think the big mistake, activists, center left to the left, the mistake was to give up on the grassroots organizing. And unfortunately for us, that's what the right wing did and they started getting control of school boards and local institutions and strengthen the right wing and the churches while NOW took over the feminist movement and focused solely on the ERA, which I'm not opposed to, but I don't think an ERA has any meaning whatsoever in the context of tremendous economic inequality. It's like the French philosopher who said, the law in all its majesty allow rich and poor alike to sleep under bridges. So, abortion can be legal, but if it costs $500, that doesn't mean it's accessible. And I'm sort of trying to get my bearings because like most everybody I know are utterly devastated. I advocate, I argue that we have to focus on the local and the grassroots. If you like electoral politics, run for your school board, run for your library board, don't run away from it, run for city council, keep it local. And I think we have to find ways to protect health, education, welfare, and the arts. Healthcare in the United States is getting so corporatized and just like the universities. And so students are clients, patients, it's all, if everything is for-profit, it's all going to go down the tube. We have to find ways to organize effectively and locally, and it's going to be a long, hard slog. I'm not going to see good results. I may not live that long. Hopefully my two kids who are both active in their teachers unions will be able to make some progress.

AT: Join us next time on the Infinite Women podcast. And remember, well-behaved women rarely make history.