

“When I was in law school, I felt, up ‘til this day, 60 years probably after Shirley Chisholm, that there was no space for me. You know, there is this idea of what there is to be a lawyer and I didn’t fit that because I don’t look the part. People would look at me with, sometimes, contempt. They would make comments about how I got there, you know. And none of it was necessarily true. They would question why I was there and make backhanded comments about affirmative action or something. I mean I’m very supportive of affirmative action, I think it’s important that we have diversity in our classrooms but realistically, I came there with probably higher grades than they did. I worked for that spot. And then to be told that I didn’t earn it? It’s degrading. It’s very very degrading.

“But regardless, I’m still a lawyer at the end of the day, like Shirley Chisholm still was a Congresswoman. At the end of the day, the way you address me is esquire at the end of my name. So, to break those barriers and still move on, ‘cause I was told to drop out of law school, even before I had grades, by professors. Just because I didn’t fit the part, I didn’t fit it. And I think that’s a thing that a lot of women of color will have to face and still face. And that’s something I don’t want the next generation to deal with.

“You know, growing up in South Ozone Park, I never had to deal with something like that. Because the people all looked like me, I never had to answer as to why I’m here. But then, coming out of here I have to constantly answer?”