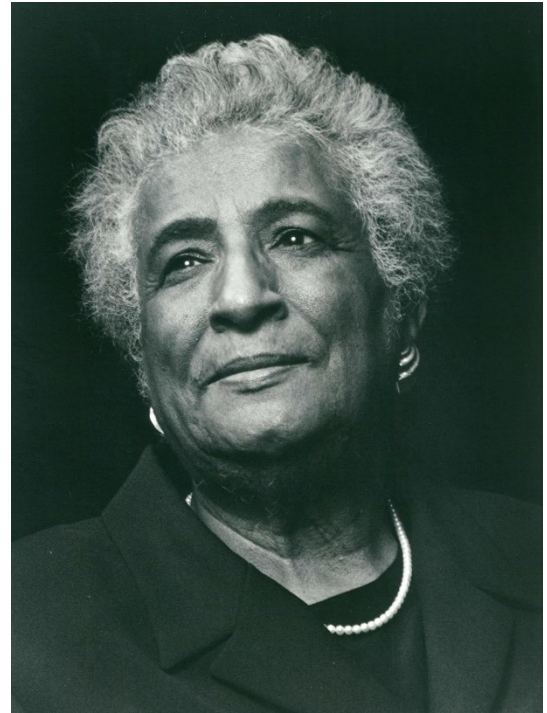




CONSTANCE BAKER MOTLEY

Constance Baker Motley was born on September 14, 1921 in New Haven, Connecticut. Almost 45 years later, on August 30, 1966, she was confirmed by the United States Senate to the United States District Court for the Southern District of New York. Her confirmation was a watershed moment. It marked the first time in American history that a Black woman would serve on the federal bench. *Judge* Constance Baker Motley didn't just open the courthouse doors to Black women in the legal profession—she also opened chambers to Black women judges and jurists. She was, and remains, a trailblazer whose legacy abides and endures to this very day.



Motley—the daughter of immigrants—graduated from New York University in 1943. Three years later, she received her J.D. from Columbia Law School and soon embarked on a legal career with the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund that took her to the frontlines of the fight for racial equality and before the Supreme Court of the United States. She helped author the argument against “separate but equal” in *Brown v. Board of Education*, represented Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and led litigation that desegregated public accommodations and integrated universities across the south. And, of the ten cases she argued before the Supreme Court—as the first Black woman to do so—Motley won nine. When the Supreme Court decided *Batson v. Kentucky* in 1986, reversing its decision in *Swain v. Alabama* nearly two decades prior, Motley went ten for ten.

On January 25, 1966, President Lyndon B. Johnson nominated Motley to the Southern District of New York. Eight months later, the Senate confirmed her by voice vote. In 1982, Judge Motley became Chief Judge and remained so until she took senior status October 1, 1986. Judge Motley served with distinction until her death on September 28, 2005.

The four decades Judge Motley served on the bench reflect her deep respect for equal justice under the law and her even deeper commitment to civil rights. She was a fair, skilled, dignified, and conscientious jurist, and approached her role as a judge with the same diligence, fortitude, and work ethic that she had as an advocate. Her legacy, however, is much more than the 2,500 cases she decided—and those she litigated before she joined the bench herself. It is also that she inspired generation after generation of Black women and men to do the same.