

Constance Baker Motley (1921-2005) was a trailblazing black woman lawyer in the forefront of most of the major civil rights cases of the mid-twentieth century.

Constance Baker was born in New Haven in 1921 to parents who had immigrated from the island of Nevis. After completing schooling in New Haven, Baker attended Fisk University and received a degree in economics from New York University. She earned her degree from Columbia Law School in 1946 and joined the legal team at the NAACP's Legal Defense Fund. The LDF's first female attorney, Motley eventually became Associate Counsel, LDF's principal trial lawyer. In 1949, she married Joel Wilson Motley.

Motley wrote the draft complaint (1950) for the case that became *Brown vs. The Board of Education* and, as James Meredith's lead counsel, saw to the desegregation of University of Mississippi in 1962. Motley was the first woman of African descent to try a case before the U. S. Supreme Court and distinguished herself by winning nine of the ten civil rights cases she argued there.

In 1964, Motley became the first African American woman elected to the New York State Senate. Chosen Manhattan Borough President in 1965, Motley was the first woman to serve as president of any New York City borough. In 1966, President Lyndon B. Johnson appointed Motley a district judge for the United States District Court Southern District of New York, the first African-American woman to serve as a federal judge. She became the chief judge of the Southern District in 1982 and continued to serve as a senior district judge until her death in 2005.

