

RACIAL INEQUALITY: OUR FIRST YEAR IN REVIEW



Honorable Constance Baker Motley

By HON. BARRY F. ARMATA, VANESSA AVERY, AND CECIL J. THOMAS

LAST MAY, THE SHOCKING MURDER OF GEORGE FLOYD AWAKENED A COLLECTIVE consciousness in this country about the devastating, and often lethal, effects of racism. Mr. Floyd was one among countless other Black men and women who have been killed in similarly shocking and tragic ways. And yet, because of the circumstances of Mr. Floyd's death, we were able to bear witness to just how little value his life held to those who participated in his killing, and to those who stood by watching it occur. Mr. Floyd's death rightfully shocked our collective conscience and renewed an ongoing battle for civil rights and equality in this country, and around the globe.

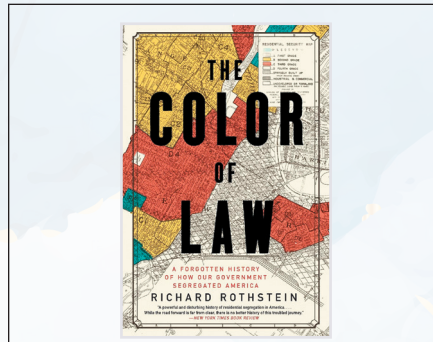
Mr. Floyd's death, as well as the deaths of Ahmaud Arbery and Breonna Taylor and so many others, together with multiple national civil protests that occurred, served as a wake-up call, inviting us to engage in a long-overdue reckoning with the manifestations of structural and systemic racism that continue to exist today. As part of this movement, the Connecticut Bar Association and Connecticut Bar Foundation joined together last July to launch the Constance Baker Motley Speaker Series on Racial Inequality ("the Series"). The Series has continued as an ongoing forum for the Connecticut legal community to explore issues of racial inequality and systemic racism throughout this past year.

On the evening of Tuesday, June 15, 2021, we invite you to join us for the summative event of the first year of the Series, which will feature an address by Richard Rothstein, author of *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America*, a discussion between Professor Rothstein and Chief Justice Richard Robinson of the Connecticut Supreme Court, and a panel discussion evaluating our collective efforts to combat structural and systemic racism this past year. While there is much progress to be made in our ongoing quest for racial equality and justice, we hope that this event will allow us a collective moment to pause, reflect on how we got here, and consider the road ahead.

Honoring Judge Constance Baker Motley

The Series is named in honor of the Honorable Constance Baker Motley, a trailblazer who was responsible for numerous landmark court victories in the civil rights movement before becoming the first Black woman appointed as a federal judge in the country.

Constance Baker Motley was born and raised in New Haven and attended New Haven public schools before attending college at Fisk University and New York University. She then became the first Black woman to attend and graduate from the Columbia University School of Law. Judge Motley began her legal career at the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, where she argued and won numerous seminal civil rights court victories. During this time, Judge Motley litigated over 200 desegregation cases in 11 southern states. She argued ten cases before the United States Supreme Court, winning all but one (which was later overturned in her favor). Judge Motley went on to become the first Black woman ever elected to the New York State Senate and then to be elected as Manhattan Borough president. In 1966, she was appointed to the federal bench by



The first 100 attendees of this seminar who request a copy of featured speaker Richard Rothstein's book, The Color of Law, will receive a free copy. Not attending the conference? Visit ctbar.org/Motley-Series to register to attend.

President Lyndon Johnson, and she continued as a federal judge for 38 years, ultimately becoming chief judge before taking senior status.

Judge Motley maintained her Connecticut roots throughout her career. She was married to her husband, Joel Motley, Jr., in New Haven, and maintained a seasonal home in Chester throughout much of her life. Her funeral, in 2005, was held in the same New Haven church where she had been married in 1946.

Judge Motley's former Chester home was recently selected as a historic site for the Connecticut Freedom Trail, "a state designation that places it among a select few sites that celebrate extraordinary individuals whose lives expanded the circle of freedom and opportunity for all Americans."¹ Part of her former property now forms the Constance Baker Motley Preserve in Chester, which is open to the public and serves as an ongoing testament to her life and accomplishments.²

We hope that the Series is a fitting tribute to the life and accomplishments of Judge Constance Baker Motley, and that her life's work is an inspiration to all of us to

continue the fight to root out racism in all its many forms. We are grateful to Judge Motley's son, Joel Motley III, for his ongoing support for the Series as it has taken shape over the past year.

The Series in Review

The Series launch took place in July of 2020, featuring a candid conversation between Chief Justice Richard Robinson and Justice Maria Kahn of the Connecticut Supreme Court, with Professor Marilyn Ford and Dean Emeritus Timothy Fisher serving as moderators. The series continued with individual sessions on housing segregation, voting rights and political access exclusion, educational inequalities, land use and zoning reform, a two-part presentation on policing and race, employment law, language bias, consumer finance, the insurance industry, and the jury selection process. You can access all of the Series sessions on the CBA website at ctbar.org/ConstanceBakerMotleySeries.

The series has also featured a number of virtual roundtable discussions, allowing for further feedback, reflection, and exchange on the topics covered within the Series. Each session of the Series has drawn hundreds of participants. Our hope is that this focused opportunity for education will increase awareness, foster dialogue, and prompt much-needed action towards a more just and equitable society. Student leaders from our local law schools (Quinnipiac University, the University of Connecticut, Western New England University, and Yale University) have also participated in the development of the Series, so that future generations of lawyers can have important conversations around these vital topics.

Acknowledgments

Each session of the Constance Baker Motley Speaker Series has been organized by subcommittees of highly dedicated attorney and judge volunteers, who have helped shape the series, select topics,



The Constance Baker Motley Speaker Series

identify speakers, and participate in panels themselves. The series would also not be possible without the dedicated staff of the Connecticut Bar Association and Connecticut Bar Foundation. Amani Edwards, Tom Genung, and Phanny Cahill of the Connecticut Bar Association, along with Natalie Wagner, Liz Drummond, Sarah Caputo, and Veatrice Carabine of the Connecticut Bar Foundation, have worked tirelessly all year to ensure the ongoing success of the Series. We are deeply grateful for their time and effort.

Looking Forward

The Series has just begun the exploration of how structural racism affects so many fundamental aspects of our systems of law, democracy, and civil society. We hope that the education provided through the Series has prompted

heightened awareness, which in turn will prompt action and much-needed change.

As we reflect upon the Series, we acknowledge that there is much that has not yet been addressed. For this reason, we are excited that the Series will continue in the years to come, as a continued joint effort of the Connecticut Bar Association and Connecticut Bar Foundation. While others will eventually take up the charge of leading and shaping the series, we have been deeply grateful for this opportunity to honor the life, legacy, and work of Judge Constance Baker Motley.

Thank you for your ongoing and enthusiastic support for the Series. We hope you will join us on the evening of Tuesday, June 15, 2021, as we bring the first year of the Constance Baker Motley Speak-

er Series on Racial Inequality to a close and take some time to reflect together on where we have been, and where we have yet to go. ■

Hon. Barry F. Armata, Vanessa Avery, and Cecil J. Thomas have served as the co-chairs of the Constance Baker Motley Speaker Series on Racial Inequality during the 2020-2021 bar year. Judge Armata is the chair of the Connecticut Bar Foundation James W. Cooper Fellows. Attorney Avery is the vice president of the Connecticut Bar Foundation. Attorney Thomas is the president-elect of the Connecticut Bar Association and co-chair of its Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee.

NOTES

- 1 <http://www.chesterlandtrust.org/motley-preserve---the-ct-freedom-trail.html>
- 2 Constance Baker Motley | Connecticut History | a CTHumanities Project; Constance Baker Motley — CT Women's Hall of Fame (cwhf.org); Constance Baker Motley | Connecticut History | a CTHumanities Project; Constance Baker Motley: A Warrior for Justice | Connecticut History | a CTHumanities Project

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