

Celebrating Our Legacy

PROFESSOR DERRICK BELL (1930-2011) was a civil rights lawyer with the NAACP, a professor, and a civil rights activist. Born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, in 1930, Bell graduated from Duquesne University in 1952. After his military service in the Korean War, Bell graduated from the University of Pittsburgh School of Law in 1957. His first job after law school was at the U.S. Justice Department, although he later resigned from his position after he refused to give up his NAACP membership. In 1960, Thurgood Marshall invited Bell to join the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, where he handled more than 300 school desegregation cases. In 1968, he joined the Harvard Law School faculty, then in 1971 became its first tenured African American professor. Bell is credited as the originator of the Critical Race Theory movement, an academic discipline focused on the intersection of race, law, and power. In 1980, Bell left Harvard to accept the deanship at the University of Oregon School of Law but resigned in protest five years later, when the faculty directed him not to extend an offer to an Asian American female candidate. After his return to Harvard, he took an unpaid leave of absence in 1990 to protest the lack of women of color on the law school's faculty. He never returned. In 1991, he came to NYU School of Law, where he taught for 20 years as a visiting professor. The annual Derrick Bell Lecture on Race in American Society was established in his honor at NYU School of Law in 1995.

JUSTICE SONIA SOTOMAYOR (B. 1954) is the first Hispanic person and third female to be appointed to the U.S. Supreme Court. Born and raised in Bronx, New York, Sotomayor graduated from Princeton University in 1976 and from Yale Law School in 1979. Her first job after law school was as an assistant district attorney in New York. She worked in private practice for several years until 1991, when President George H.W. Bush appointed her to the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York. Sotomayor then became the youngest judge in the Southern District, the first Hispanic federal judge in New York State, and the first Puerto Rican woman to serve as a federal judge. In 1997, President Bill Clinton nominated her to a seat on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit. After a bitter and partisan confirmation battle in the U.S. Senate, Sotomayor observed that Republicans had assumed her political beliefs based on her being a Latina: "It is stereotyping, and stereotyping is perhaps the most insidious of all problems in our society today." Sotomayor was an adjunct professor at NYU School of Law from 1998 to 2007. In 2009, she delivered the keynote address at the BLAPA Spring Dinner. President Barack Obama appointed Sotomayor to the U.S. Supreme Court in 2009, where she continues to serve.



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JUSTICE THURGOOD MARSHALL (1908-1993) was a civil rights lawyer with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and was the first African American appointed to the U.S. Supreme Court. Born in Baltimore, Maryland, Marshall graduated from Lincoln University in 1930. After college, Marshall attended Howard University School of Law, where he studied under Charles Hamilton Houston, the chief architect of the legal strategy to dismantle the "separate but equal" doctrine of legally sanctioned discrimination known as Jim Crow. After graduating first in his class at Howard in 1933, Marshall went on to work for the NAACP. During his career there, he won 29 of the 32 cases he argued before the Supreme Court, including *Brown v. Board of Education*, the landmark 1954 decision that overturned the "separate but equal" doctrine. Marshall was appointed to the Supreme Court by President Lyndon B. Johnson in 1967 and served there until his retirement in 1991.

JUDGE ROBERT L. CARTER (1917-2012) was a civil rights lawyer with the NAACP and a federal judge. Carter graduated from Lincoln University in 1937 and from Howard University School of Law in 1940. A year later, he earned his LL.M. from Columbia Law School. In 1941, Carter joined the U.S. military during the height of World War II. As he would later reflect, it was his experiences in the "Jim Crow Army" that shaped his decision to pursue a career in civil rights. After leaving the military in 1944, Carter joined the NAACP as an assistant to Thurgood Marshall. During his 24-year career there as a lawyer and as general counsel, Carter argued 22 cases before the Supreme Court and won 21. Some of his most notable cases include *Brown v. Board of Education* and *NAACP v. Alabama*. From 1966 to 1971, in addition to having a career in private practice, Carter was an adjunct professor at NYU School of Law, becoming the Law School's first African American professor. While at NYU, Carter also mentored the black law students who later founded the Black Allied Law Students Association (BALSA) in 1969. In 1972, President Richard M. Nixon appointed Carter to the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York, where he served for 40 years. Judge Carter was a longtime friend to Derrick Bell as well as to Judge Constance Baker Motley, and he regularly attended the annual Derrick Bell Lecture on Race in American Society at NYU School of Law.

JUDGE CONSTANCE BAKER MOTLEY (1921-2005) was a civil rights lawyer with the NAACP and was the first African American woman appointed to the federal bench. Motley graduated from NYU in 1943 and from Columbia Law School in 1946, and in 1985 she received an honorary Doctor of Laws from NYU School of Law. When Thurgood Marshall hired her in 1946, she became the NAACP's first female attorney. Motley wrote the original complaint in 1950 for the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision and was the first African American woman to argue a case before the Supreme Court. She would later go on to win nine out

of 10 cases before the Supreme Court, including *Meredith v. Fair*, in which she successfully won James Meredith's admission to the University of Mississippi in 1962. During her distinguished career, Motley earned many notable firsts: In 1964, she became the first African American elected to the New York State Senate, and in 1965, she was chosen as the first African American Manhattan borough president. In 1966, President Lyndon B. Johnson appointed her to the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York, a position she held, including a term as chief judge, until her passing in 2005. As a longtime friend of Derrick Bell's, Judge Motley was a frequent guest along with Judge Carter at the annual Derrick Bell Lecture on Race in American Society at NYU School of Law.

JUDGE CHARLES S. CONLEY '55 (1921-2010) was a civil rights lawyer and Alabama's first African American judge. Born in Montgomery, Alabama, Conley earned his bachelor's degree from Alabama State College, his master's degree from the University of Michigan, and his law degree from NYU School of Law in 1955. Upon graduation from law school, he returned to Montgomery, started his own law practice, and set about becoming a "radical threat to the status quo," according to NYU Law professor Bryan Stevenson. During his long and illustrious career, Conley fought civil rights cases small and large, counseled movement leaders Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. and Reverend Ralph Abernathy, and became Alabama's first elected black judge, in 1972. Conley also played a part in the landmark 1964 Supreme Court case *New York Times Co. v. Sullivan*, representing four ministers, including Abernathy, as co-plaintiffs with the Times. Before his death, Judge Conley gave a \$1.2 million gift to NYU School of Law to endow the Honorable Charles Swinger Conley Scholarship Fund.

JUDGE A. LEON HIGGINBOTHAM JR. (1928-1998) was a lawyer, federal judge, and legal scholar. He graduated from Antioch College in 1949 and from Yale Law School in 1952. In 1962, he was appointed to the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) by President John F. Kennedy, becoming the first African American to serve on the FTC. A few years later, in 1964, President Lyndon B. Johnson appointed Higginbotham to the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania, where he became a federal judge at age 36. Throughout his remarkable career on the bench, in private practice, and as a professor at Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government and NYU School of Law, Judge Higginbotham was a stalwart defender of social justice and equality. In 1991, he wrote "An Open Letter to Justice Clarence Thomas from a Federal Judicial Colleague," expressing his "concern and sorrow that Justice Thomas would turn his back on a century of [racial] struggle." In 1994, Judge Higginbotham helped South Africa's newly elected government draft its constitution. He also attended the annual Derrick Bell Lecture on Race in American Society at NYU School of Law.