



Judge Motley

Many people have never heard of Constance Baker Motley, even though her career included numerous historic achievements. She was a lawyer and judge who fought for civil rights and educational equality. She won awards for her important work and her contributions to society.

Constance was born in Connecticut in 1921. Her parents had come to the United States from the West Indies. Her father worked as a chef at Yale University. She was very good at school but didn't have enough money for college, so she became a housekeeper.

When Constance was 18, she made a speech at a local community center. A businessman who owned the center was impressed with her intelligence. He offered to pay for her to go to college. Constance went to Fisk University but did not like living in the south. After two years she transferred to New York University.

Constance graduated in 1943 and became the first African American woman to attend Columbia Law School. She was also the first African American woman elected to the New York Senate and the first African American woman to serve as a federal district judge.

In her early career, Constance worked as a lawyer with the NAACP. She was the only woman on the legal team of the famous case *Brown v. Board of*



Education. She won 9 of out 10 cases that she argued in front of the U.S. Supreme court.

As a lawyer, and later as a state senator and a federal judge, Constance fought for civil rights and against segregation. She fought for Martin Luther King's right to march in Georgia and for the right of Black people to eat at whites-only lunch counters in Alabama. She won many cases focusing on school desegregation and equity in college admissions.

Constance was inducted into the National Women's Hall of Fame in 1993. She received the Presidential Citizens Medal in 2001. In 2003, the NAACP gave her their highest honor, the Spingarn Medal. Constance's achievements were many. It is important that we know her name.



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NAME: _____ DATE: _____

1. Why did Constance become a housekeeper?
 - a. She wasn't smart enough to go to college
 - b. She didn't have enough money to go to college
 - c. She wanted to be a chef like her father
 - d. She made a speech at a local community center

2. Which of the following cases was NOT mentioned as one that Constance worked on?
 - a. Brown v. Board of Education
 - b. The right for Martin Luther King to march in Georgia
 - c. Desegregation of whites-only lunch counters in Alabama
 - d. Desegregation of restaurants in Memphis

3. Which of the following firsts did Constance NOT achieve?
 - a. First African American woman to become a state senator
 - b. First African American woman to attend Columbia Law School
 - c. First African American woman to become a Supreme Court justice
 - d. First African American woman to serve as a federal district judge

4. Why do you think Constance didn't like it at Fisk University?
 - a. There was more segregation in the south
 - b. It was too hot in the south
 - c. There were no other African American people in the south
 - d. There were no lawyers in the south

Instructions for teachers:

These questions can be used to assess understanding of the reading passage.

The item in bold is the correct answer for each question.

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