



Legislation Text

File #: Res 1195-2005, **Version:** *

Res. No. 1195

Resolution commemorating the life and mourning the death of Constance Baker Motley.

By Council Members James, Barron, Clarke, Comrie, Fidler, McMahon, Palma, Recchia Jr., Sears, Weprin and Jackson

Whereas, Constance Baker Motley, the first African-American woman appointed to the federal judiciary, died on September 28, 2005, at the age of 84; and

Whereas, Constance Baker Motley was born in New Haven, Connecticut on September 14, 1921, to parents who had immigrated from the tiny Caribbean island of Nevis at the beginning of the 20th Century; and

Whereas, Constance Baker Motley attended local schools in Connecticut in what was then an overwhelmingly white community, experiencing discrimination for the first time at the age of 15 when she was turned away from a public beach because she was black; and

Whereas, After graduating from high school, Constance Baker Motley enrolled at Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee, and then transferred to New York University where she earned a degree in economics in 1943; and

Whereas, Constance Baker Motley earned a law degree from Columbia University in 1946, the same year that she married her husband, Joel Wilson Motley, a real estate and insurance broker; and

Whereas, Constance Baker Motley began her legal career as a law clerk in the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (“NAACP”) Legal Defense and Educational Fund, where she worked with Thurgood Marshall and Jack Greenberg; and

Whereas, Over a twenty year period with the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Constance Baker Motley served as a staff member and an Associate Counsel, assisting in the landmark school

desegregation case *Brown v. Board of Education*; and

Whereas, Constance Baker Motley was one of the first women to argue cases before the United States Supreme Court, winning nine of the ten civil rights cases she argued before the Court, including James H. Meredith's successful attempt to attend the University of Mississippi in 1962; and

Whereas, In 1964, Constance Baker Motley became the first African-American woman elected to the New York State Senate; and

Whereas, In 1965, Constance Baker Motley became the first African-American woman to serve as Manhattan Borough President, a position that guaranteed her a voice in New York City's Board of Estimate, the former local government body that made many important decisions for the entire City; and

Whereas, As Manhattan Borough President, Constance Baker Motley drew up a seven point program for the revitalization of Harlem and East Harlem, successfully securing \$700,000 in funds to plan for those and other underprivileged areas of the City; and

Whereas, In 1966, Constance Baker Motley became the first African-American woman to serve in the federal judiciary when she was appointed as a judge by President Lyndon B. Johnson; and

Whereas, In 1982, Constance Baker Motley became the first African-American woman to serve as Chief Judge of the United States District Court for the Southern District of New York, the largest federal trial bench in the country, a position she held until she assumed senior status as a judge in 1986; and

Whereas, In 1993, Constance Baker Motley was inducted into the National Women's Hall of Fame, a fitting tribute to a woman who through her contributions to the legal profession and the struggle for civil rights, helped make possible what once may have seemed impossible; and

Whereas, On January 5, 2001, President Bill Clinton awarded Constance Baker Motley with the Presidential Citizens Medal, an award that is given by the President of the United States in recognition of United States citizens who have performed exemplary deeds of service for our nation; now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the Council of the City of New York commemorates the life and mourns the death of

Constance Baker Motley.

LS#3553

RA

10/4/2005

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