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The Legal Defense Fund (LDF) Celebrates the new Stamp Honoring the Legacy of Constance Baker Motley

Today, the United States Postal Service unveiled its 47th Black Heritage stamp which honors the iconic life and legacy of Constance Baker Motley, the second woman lawyer at the LDF and a legal trailblazer in the United States.

LDF President and Director-Counsel Janai Nelson issued the following statement:

“Black women have long been unheralded heroes in the civil rights movement and the issuance of this Black Heritage stamp bearing a portraiture of Constance Baker Motley is a firm and resounding acknowledgment of the importance of Judge Motley’s work and reinforces her place among the icons who moved us forward in the march toward justice for Black people in America. Judge Motley’s life offers a roadmap for me and the countless Black women of this movement who navigate what is often a bruising march toward true civil rights and justice. Her life is a study of brilliance, strength, and determination. I am proud to walk the halls of the institution she helped to shape, and the work of the movement she so passionately and skillfully helped to advance. As we move into Black History Month, which will be followed by Women’s History month, it is important to recognize just how much our history matters. Judge Baker defied expectations and in so doing has pushed the United States to be a better version of itself.”

Judge Motley’s began her career at the LDF and spent 20 years doing work that helped to make LDF one of the most respected civil rights institutions in the world. She drafted the model complaint and other essential materials in the landmark LDF case Brown v. Board of Education, which changed the landscape of the United States. Judge Motley was a brilliant legal mind who sued the University of Mississippi for denying James Meredith entrance; sued the state of Mississippi on behalf of the “Freedom Riders” and represented Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. following his arrest for marching in Birmingham, Alabama and became the first Black woman to argue a case before the Supreme Court where she won nine out of the 10 cases argued before the court, which later overturned the one case she “lost” in her favor.

In 1966, Judge Motley was nominated to a seat on the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York and following extensive roadblocks she became the first Black woman on the federal bench. She rose to chief judge in 1982, senior judge in 1986 and was awarded the Presidential Citizens Medal in 2001 by then President Bill Clinton. Judge Motley died on September 28, 2005.

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