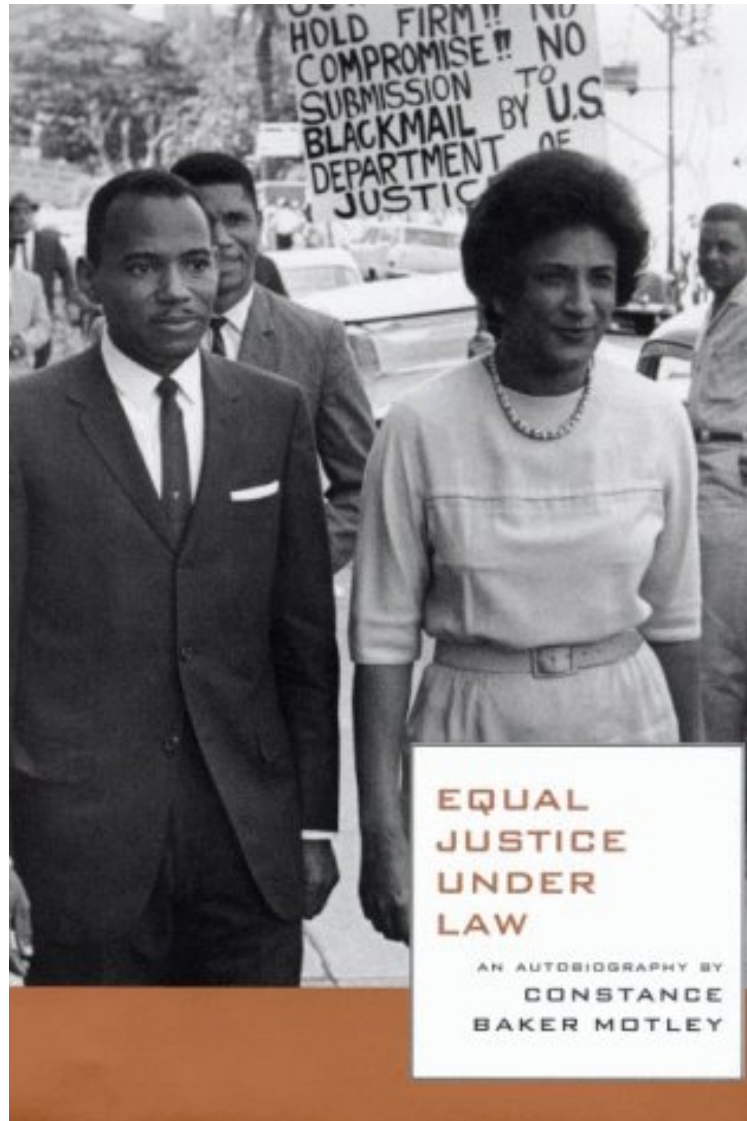


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Equal Justice Under Law: An Autobiography

Constance Baker Motley

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This wise and affecting memoir is the inside story of the great efforts leading up to the Supreme Court's decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954 and the fight to implement it-and its implications for affirmative action and black poverty today. A black woman who moved in the corridors of power in the middle of this century, Constance Baker Motley has been a pioneer in both black civil rights and women's rights. As the key attorney assisting Thurgood Marshall at the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, she argued a dozen cases before the Supreme Court (winning all but one), and her representation of James Meredith in his bid to enroll in the University of Mississippi made her famous. Subsequently, as Manhattan borough president and a U.S. district court judge, she has fulfilled the highest aspirations of our legal and political system. This book, the most detailed account to date of the legal conflicts of the civil rights movement, is also an account of Motley's struggle, as a black woman, to succeed, a record of a life lived with great courage and responsibility.

.com Much like the Delany sisters of Brooklyn, Constance Baker Motley was one of the first black women to overcome the barriers of race and sex to become a leading figure in her field of expertise. In the mid '60s, Motley became the first black female senator, the first black woman elected to the office of Manhattan borough president, and the first woman appointed to the federal bench. Now a senior judge in a U.S. District Court of New York, Motley looks back on a lifetime of unprecedented achievements and gives personal testimony to some of the greatest moments in the civil rights movement in her autobiography, *Equal Justice Under Law*. Her story is an impressive one: she dramatically recounts sitting on-stage with her son as Martin Luther King Jr. gave his "I Have a Dream" speech and recalls the traumatic times in Mississippi that led to the murder of her colleague and friend, Medgar Evers. She served on the NAACP's Legal Defense and Education Fund, fought alongside Thurgood Marshall in *Brown v. Board of Education*, and made 10 other appearances before the Supreme Court. Fascinating as Motley's life has been, those with some prior knowledge of civil rights may fare best with this book, considering its weighted language and complex prose--an expected caveat, considering the author has spent her life steeped in the language of law. From Publishers Weekly Motley has a remarkable r?sum? Achieved judge of the New York Southern Federal District Court, and the first black female Manhattan Borough president and New York State senator. More remarkable was her 20-year service as civil rights lawyer alongside the legendary Thurgood Marshall as a member of the NAACP's Legal Defense Fund. Key cases helped desegregate public schools and state universities, including the landmark Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*, in 1954. One of 12 children from a relatively poor New Haven family, Motley studied at Nashville's all-black Fisk University then at Columbia Law School. Her account of the early legal work that helped lay the foundations of the civil rights movement makes interesting reading despite excessive detail at times. In contrast, she writes frankly about Marshall's temper, her disdain for certain judges appointed by President Kennedy, tensions with Sen. Robert F. Kennedy after opposing his political wishes in New York politics and slights by the white legal establishment in New York City. Even more important are Motley's reflections on what's happening today to the principles around which she dedicated her career. She is critical of the current Supreme Court's stance on affirmative action and does not hide her contempt for Justice Clarence Thomas. She argues eloquently for government vigilance in monitoring the unfinished struggle against racial discrimination. Photos. Movie rights to Marcia Paul, Kay, Collyer and Boose. Copyright 1998 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Library Journal A 1994 New Yorker profile turned the spotlight on Motley, whose remarkable career had proceeded with little notice from the public at large. Appointed a federal judge in 1966, the first black woman to achieve that position, Motley had been a member of the winning legal team for *Brown v. Board of Education* and dozens of other key Civil Rights cases in the 1950s and early 1960s. A New Haven childhood, an education at Fisk University and Columbia Law School, and a spell of state and city politics in New York are the other components of her autobiography. As chief counsel for James Meredith in the integration of the University of Mississippi and as one who knew Thurgood Marshall, Medgar Evers, Martin Luther King, and other giants, the author possessed splendid raw materials. Unfortunately, Motley's talent for memoir falls short of her gift for the law, and most readers will find themselves but sporadically engaged. Frequent stops to discuss legal points make her book suitable for law collections, and any women's studies or African American studies collection will be incomplete without it, but a better firsthand account of Civil Rights litigation for general readers is Jack Greenberg's *Crusaders in the Courts* (BasicBks., 1994). A Robert F. Nardini, North Chichester, NH Copyright 1998 Reed Business Information, Inc.