



Chester Museum at The Mill

Chester Historical Society

Press Release

From: Chester Historical Society

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Celebration to Mark New Constance Baker Motley Forever Stamp



A celebration of the new first-class “Forever” stamp honoring Constance Baker Motley, a pioneering Civil Rights leader and federal judge, will be held at the Chester Meeting House (4 Liberty St) on Saturday, February 17, from 3 to 5 pm. All are welcome.

The stamp, which will be issued February 1 by the U.S. Postal Service, is the 47th in the Black Heritage series, and joins those of Martin Luther King, Rosa Parks and John Lewis.

Honored as the first Black woman federal judge, a ground-breaking Civil Rights attorney, and the first Black woman to argue before the U.S. Supreme Court, Motley was a native of New Haven, and a 40-year resident of Chester, CT (1965-2005).

Co-sponsored by the Chester Historical Society, the Chester Land Trust and the Sari A. Rosenbaum Fund for Women and Girls at the Community Foundation of Middlesex County, the event includes a brief speakers’ program and interactive audience discussion based on film clips from the PBS documentary on Motley, “Justice is a Black Woman.”

“We’re thrilled that Judge Motley is receiving the national recognition she so richly deserves,” said Marta Daniels, Curator of the Constance Baker Motley Archive at the Chester Historical Society. “Largely unrecognized at the time, she was a vital leader in the Civil Rights movement, and a powerful legal force in the southern court room during school desegregation. This new stamp helps focus public attention on her distinguished efforts.”

For 10 years after the 1954 Supreme Court school desegregation decision, *Brown v. Board of Education*, Attorney Motley travelled the Deep South enforcing it, winning over 200 legal cases, including 10 at the U.S. Supreme Court. She also litigated every major

campaign of the Civil Rights era, helping win victories in the Montgomery Bus Boycott (1955), the Lunch Counter Sit Ins (1959), the Freedom Riders (1961), and in Dr. King's Albany, GA and Birmingham, AL desegregation efforts (1957-1963). Dr. King was so appreciative of Motley's Birmingham efforts, he provided her two tickets to sit among the dignitaries during his 1963 March on Washington, where he gave his "I Have a Dream" speech.

"When our Land Trust established the *Constance Baker Motley Preserve* on her former Chester property, and the CT Freedom Trail designated it as a state heritage site where visitors could learn about Motley's enormous achievements, we were delighted," said Jenny Kitsen, VP of the Chester Land Trust. "Now, with her stamp available in every Post Office in America, her life of accomplishments will get greater exposure."

Cynthia Clegg, President and CEO of the Community Foundation, and home to the Sari A. Rosenbaum Fund for Women and Girls, said, "As a vivid and inspiring model for women and girls everywhere, Constance Baker Motley's life shines like a bright star. Our Fund was established to support programs that empower women and girls to be self-reliant and reach their potential. Constance Baker Motley offers an excellent example."

The brief family-and-friends speakers' part of the program will include: **Constance Royster**, the niece and namesake of Judge Motley, who is a lawyer and civil rights advocate working in New Haven; **Marilyn Ford**, a Quinnipiac University Law School Professor, and close friend of the Baker-Motley family; and **Amy Gibbs**, United States Postal Service Strategic Communications Specialist for Connecticut, who will speak briefly about the stamp's origins and significance in the Black Heritage series.

All three will field audience questions prompted by their reflections, and by the short feature clips of Motley's life to be shown from the award-winning, PBS documentary, "Justice is a Black Woman," produced by Quinnipiac University.

The event is free and open to the public; food and refreshments will be offered. Other celebrations will be held in NY City on Jan. 31, and in New Haven on Feb. 1. Motley stamps are available on line, and at your local post office starting Feb. 1. For further information contact: marta.daniels@snet.net

To learn more about the life and legacy of Constance Baker Motley and her time in Chester, go to www.chesterhistoricalsociety.org; to learn about Chester's *Motley Preserve*, go to www.chesterlandtrust.org; to learn about the Sari A. Rosenbaum's Fund for Women and Girls, go to: <https://middlesexcountycf.org>

Snow date: Feb. 24 Check CHS website day of event: www.chesterhistoricalsociety.org