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BLACK WOMEN IN LAW

By BARBARA J. WILLIAMS

"Democracy alone is the method of showing the whole experience of the race for the benefit of the future and if Democracy tries to exclude women or Negroes, or the poor or any class . . . then that Democracy cripples itself and belies its name."
W. E. B. Dubois, *Darkwater*

WERE HE TO ANALYZE the legal profession, Dubois the sage, the critical observer of society's contradictions, would be equally concerned about the exclusion of women from the practice of law. The legal profession is both white and male dominated. But today, as always, there are women — young, gifted and black — who have transcended the chauvinistic and exclusionary nature of the legal profession, and, in their own way, are attempting to humanize and radicalize it. The women presented in this section are simply a few examples of the black women around the country who are attempting to make laws relevant to the black aspirations.

In paying tribute to women who have courageously attempted to use the tools of the profession on behalf of the poor and minorities, it is only proper that a feature story on the philosophy and works of Constance Baker Motley — Black woman, Black judge — should be presented in this issue. Also presented will be the involvements of a number of activist black women lawyers across the nation who are attempting in different ways to create a just legal system.

COMING TO GRIPS both with their role as women and as lawyers, this new breed of legal activists has refused to get caught up in the rhetoric of the role of black women in the feminist movement or the relation between activist black women and black men. Both are important questions which they have attempted to answer by action — not words.

To the question of the role of black women to black men they say: **THERE IS NO PROBLEM BETWEEN BLACK MEN AND BLACK WOMEN. THE PROBLEM IS BETWEEN BLACK PEOPLE AND WHITE SOCIETY.** To get hung up on the defection of a few black men to white women, or whether sisters or brothers should lead the struggle is to pledge allegiance to continued rhetoric in the midst of the battlefield. The point has been clearly stated by Dr. Nathan Hare, long active in the struggle for black liberation, "We are all soldiers." (*THE BLACK SCHOLAR*, November 1970).

While this section focuses attention on the involvements of just a handful of black women lawyers around the country, they are but a few representatives of a larger number of sisters in the profession who have been black and beautiful for a long time. To white women they say: "We are feminists but we come from a very different historical perspective from that of white women, making coalition possible only when the interests of black people can also be advanced through the feminist movement." To black men they say: "We still have a long way to go — let's go together." And to white society they say: "The struggle has only begun; there are many more where we come from!"

