

Honoring the Unsung Heroes

Margaret Brent Awards Celebrate 15th Anniversary

By Stephanie B. Goldberg

August 2005 marks the 15th anniversary of the Margaret Brent Women Lawyers of Achievement Awards—a milestone in the history of the ABA Commission on Women in the Profession, which came into being in 1987 to assess the status of women lawyers and identify obstacles to their advancement.

Named after the first woman to practice law in colonial America, the Margaret Brent Awards show a more festive side of the Commission, looking forward toward a brighter future while paying tribute to the past.

“This is the centerpiece of what the Commission is trying to accomplish—recognizing spectacular women who truly have been pathfinders, who moved women into the profession through their actions and commitment,” says Commission Chair Diane C. Yu.

It’s a unique event, combining the warmth of a family affair with the inspirational quality of a prayer meeting. Each year, a rapt audience that bridges both the generation gap

and the gender gap hears the life stories of five extraordinary women of remarkable achievement in the legal world. The event includes speeches by Commission members and award recipients, a video presentation introducing each honoree to the audience, and a keynote address by prominent lawyers such as former U.S. Attorney General Janet Reno or this year’s special honoree, Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton (D-NY), the Commission’s first chairperson (see the profile of Senator Clinton on page 8).

“I’ve always found the event deeply moving,” says Stanford law professor Deborah Rhode, who chaired the Commission from August 2000 to August 2002. “The stories are genuine and so inspiring. And the recipients are extremely generous in sharing credit, which distinguishes it from many other awards’ ceremonies.” Rhode says the Margaret Brent Awards luncheon reflects “the best of the legal profession and the women’s movement.”

Many in attendance get misty-eyed, including Yu herself, who admits, “It’s rare that I’m not searching for Kleenex. I get re-inspired and rejoice in how fortunate we are to have these wonderful women share their stories.”

Honorees Represent “Firsts”

As in years past, the 2005 honorees have compiled an impressive list of “firsts:”

- **Loretta Collins Argrett**, mediator and ethics consultant, is the first African American to serve as assistant attorney general of the U.S. Department of Justice’s Tax Division.
- **Mary B. Cranston**, chair of Pillsbury Winthrop, is the first woman to lead one of the nation’s top 100 law firms.
- **Carolyn Dineen King**, chief judge of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit, is the first woman to serve as chair of the executive committee of the U. S. Judicial Conference.

• **Judith L. Lichtman** was the first president of the National Partnership for Women and Families in Washington, D.C., the primary force behind the passage of the Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993.

• **Mary Ann McMorrow**, chief justice of the Supreme Court of Illinois, is the first woman to head any branch of government in that state.

That's not to say the awards are given out solely for shattering the glass ceiling.

From the first, the awards were intended "to honor women who had not merely advanced their career but had touched other women's lives, brought them along, and mentored them," recalls Washington, D.C., lawyer Corey Amron, who chaired the Commission from 1991 to 1994.

Amron credits Clinton and the Commission's first director, Elaine Weiss, now CEO of the Illinois CPA Society, with conceiving the idea for the awards. Surprisingly enough, the proposal garnered scant enthusiasm when it was introduced, Amron recalls.

"When Hillary and Elaine came up with the idea, the Commission greeted it with great skepticism," Amron says. "We talked about it for quite a while. The initial reaction was not positive: 'The last thing the ABA needs is another award. What if we gave a luncheon and no one came?'"

Celebrating Unsung Heroes

Weiss recalls brainstorming with Clinton at the Rose Law Firm in Little Rock, Arkansas, in December 1990. "We didn't want to be a group that was always talking about barriers," says Weiss. "This was a way of celebrating the tremendous accomplishments of unsung heroes who deserved greater recognition."

The awards were envisioned, in part, as a kind of oral "herstory" project to identify women who might not be well known nationally

but who had made a profound difference within their particular communities. "I thought it was a brilliant idea," says Amron. "There was a real appetite for women and their stories."

Weiss's historical research led to the selection of Margaret Brent as the award's namesake. Connecticut artist Joy Wolke was commissioned to design the award, which consists of two beveled pieces of glass intersecting a jagged glass pyramid. According to a statement by the

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artist, the design "visualizes the strength of women in the profession and their ability to create wholeness from the fragility that is life and the law."

The Commission received 75 applications the very first year. They expected a crowd of 250 for the awards luncheon but were shocked to see nearly double that number waiting to be admitted on the day of the event. Instead of turning the overflow crowd away, additional space was opened up and everyone was seated. From then on, the luncheon has drawn crowds of 1,400 or more, according to ABA Meetings and Travel Director Marty Balogh.

Selecting the five annual honorees has always been a challenging task, say former Commission members. "The problem is achieving ethnic, racial, professional, and geographic diversity," Amron says.

Fellow chair Laurel Bellows, who led the Commission from August 1994 to August 1997,

agrees. "There were always an abundance of judicial candidates and a shortage of women in law firms who were noted for helping other women," she notes.

Remarkable Women, Unique Stories

Over the first 15 years, many extraordinary women would come to the fore, such as 86-year-old Louise Raggio, who received a Margaret Brent Award in 1995. Raggio was profiled by Elizabeth Vrato in *The Counselors* (Running Press 2002), along with 17 other Margaret Brent Award recipients.

Raggio says she aspired as a young woman only to be a lawyer's wife, but after her husband experienced financial reverses, she realized she would have to go to work to help support their family. Raggio attended law school at night and became Dallas's first female criminal prosecutor when a feminist judge challenged her boss to hire a woman.

As a private practitioner, she was deeply frustrated by the antiquated state of Texas law: a married woman was not allowed to sign contracts or sell property without her husband's consent. She worked tirelessly to convince the legislature to revise the law, which it did in 1967. Despite such triumphs, Raggio was conflicted deeply by the demands of being a working mother. "I used to shudder to think what the local headlines would say if my kids ever got into trouble," she told Vrato.

Another remarkable woman is Hauwa Ibrahim, 37, the first woman attorney in Nigeria and the defender of 10 women sentenced to death under Islamic law for forfeiting their chastity through rape or adultery. In September 2003, Ibrahim secured the acquittal of Amina Lawal, who was sentenced to death by stoning for adultery because she bore a child out of wedlock. Ibrahim was a Margaret Brent Award honoree in 2004.

“I was imagining that Amina could be a unifying factor for this country,” Ibrahim told PBS’s Frontline in January 2003. “That in our diversity, we will see the human factor through the case of Amina.”

“Ibrahim has represented the world’s most pitiful defendants,” Karen Mathis, the Denver lawyer who chaired the Commission from August 1997 to August 2000, noted in her keynote address to the International Bar Association’s

“It’s both a call to action and a recognition of the job to be done.”

—Bellows

Women Lawyers’ Conference in June 2003. “She works on many of these cases without fees and is a hero to many,” Mathis said.

Perhaps the most controversial honoree has been Professor Anita Hill, who came to national prominence in 1991 when she accused Justice Clarence Thomas of sexual

harassment prior to confirmation of his appointment to the U.S. Supreme Court. “It’s a fair criticism,” says Weiss, who points out that Hill received her award for contributing to public understanding of harassment rather than for taking a political stand. Amron will never forget escorting Hill through the hotel lobby as a steady stream of people approached to thank her. “It was an amazing transformative experience. She had a very calm and serene aura about her.”

Personal Courage and Persistence

Yu’s most memorable moment was seeing the woman she nominated, California Supreme Court Justice Joyce Kennard, receive an award. Kennard’s story is an especially poignant one.

The second woman to sit on the California Supreme Court, Kennard was born on the island of Java during World War II. Her father died in a Japanese concentration camp while Kennard and her mother were consigned to an internment camp. As a teen, she lost part of her leg to cancer.

In 1961, she was allowed to emigrate to America, where she became a legal secretary who worked her way through college and law school. Appointed by Gov. George Deukmejian to the municipal court, appeals court, and California Supreme Court, she personifies the American Dream. “She touched all of us with her story of personal courage and persistence, and she inspired us,” Yu recalls.

Nothing, however, compares with the experience of receiving the Margaret Brent Award, says Bellows, who was honored by the Commission in 2001. “It is overwhelmingly the highlight of my career,” says the Chicago lawyer. “It signifies that you have been recognized for doing something you really believe in, and it inspires you to keep fighting and taking unpopular stands.”

“That’s really the point of the event,” she says. “It’s both a call to action and a recognition of the job to be done.”

Stephanie B. Goldberg is a legal affairs journalist based in Chicago and is a former member of the Perspectives editorial board. Her work has appeared in the New York Times, BusinessWeek, the Chicago Tribune, and many legal publications.

THE FIRST WOMAN LAWYER IN AMERICA

Margaret Brent is noted for being the first female property owner and lawyer in America as well as the first woman to request a seat in the state legislature. One of 13 children, she was born into a wealthy family in Gloucester, England, in 1601, and she emigrated to the newly founded colony of Maryland in 1638. Brent, a Catholic, left her home country along with a sister and two brothers, hoping to increase the family fortune and escape religious persecution. She and her sister established a family farm, “the Sisters Freehold,” on land granted by Lord Baltimore, a distant relative who oversaw the colony from England. Their estate grew to several thousand acres, placing them among the largest property owners in the colony.

An educated woman, Brent appeared in provincial court 124 times between 1642 and 1650 to col-

lect debts on behalf of herself and her family. So great was her skill that Leonard Calvert, the colony’s governor and Lord Baltimore’s brother, named her executor of his estate in 1647 as he lay on his deathbed. Her most formidable task was finding funds to pay an army of mercenaries who quelled a Protestant-led rebellion that had lasted for two years. She was able to pay them by dipping deep into Calvert’s assets, but she alienated Lord Baltimore in the process. In 1648, she asked for two votes in the legislature, one as a property owner and another as Calvert’s attorney, but was refused.

Having fallen out of favor with Lord Baltimore, Brent, along with her sister and a brother, moved to northern Virginia in 1650. She established a plantation named “Peace.” Never married, she died in 1671.

—Stephanie B. Goldberg



Margaret Brent Women Lawyers of Achievement Honorees 1991–2004

2004

SPECIAL AWARD: **Hauwa**

Ibrahim, human rights attorney, Lagos, Nigeria

Marina Angel, professor, Temple University School of Law, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Teveia R. Barnes, president, Lawyers for One America, San Francisco, California

Linda A. Klein, managing partner, Gambrell & Stolz, LLC, Atlanta, Georgia

Catherine A. Lamboley, senior vice president and general counsel, Shell Oil Company, Houston, Texas

Chief Justice Jean Hoefler Toal, South Carolina Supreme Court, Columbia, South Carolina

2003

Hon. Martha Craig Daughtrey, U.S. Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit, Nashville, Tennessee

Charyle O. Farris, Law Office of Charyle O. Farris, Wichita Falls, Texas

Joanne Garvey, partner, Heller Ehrman White & McAuliffe LLP, San Francisco, California

Colleen Khoury, dean, University of Maine School of Law, Portland, Maine

Michele Coleman Mayes, senior vice president and general counsel, Pitney Bowes, Stamford, Connecticut

2002

Annie Brown Kennedy, partner, Kennedy, Kennedy, Kennedy and Kennedy, Winston-Salem, North Carolina

Hon. Eleanor Holmes Norton, representative from the District of Columbia, U.S. House of Representatives

Myrna Sharon Raeder, professor, Southwestern University School of Law, Los Angeles, California

Judith P. Vladeck, Vladeck Waldman Elias & Englehard PC, New York, New York

Hon. Rya W. Zobel, judge, U.S. District Court for the District of Massachusetts, Boston, Massachusetts

2001

Laurel Bellows, partner, Bellows & Bellows, Chicago, Illinois

Irma Herrera, executive director, Equal Rights Advocates, San Francisco, California

Hon. Gabrielle Kirk McDonald, special counsel on human rights, Freeport-McMoran Copper & Gold Inc., New York, New York

Hon. Mary Schroeder, chief judge, U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit, Phoenix, Arizona

Marna Tucker, partner, Feldesman, Tucker, Leifer, Fidell & Bank LLP, Washington, D.C.

2000

Sheila L. Birnbaum, partner, Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom, LLP, New York, New York

Shirley M. Hufstедler, senior counsel, Morrison & Foerster, LLP, Los Angeles, California

Hon. Judith S. Kaye, chief judge, Court of Appeals of the State of New York, New York

Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, U.S. Supreme Court, Washington, D.C.

Dovey J. Roundtree, general counsel, National Council of Negro Women, Charlotte, North Carolina

1999

Barbara Allen Babcock, Judge John Crown Professor of Law, Stanford Law School, Stanford, California

Carol E. Dinkins, partner, Vinson & Elkins, L.L.P., Houston, Texas

Justice Carol W. Hunstein, Supreme Court of Georgia, Atlanta, Georgia

Pauline A. Schneider, partner, Hunton & Williams, Washington, D.C.

Hon. Norma L. Shapiro, U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia

1998

SPECIAL AWARD: **Justice Claire L'Heureux-Dubé**, Supreme Court of Canada, Ottawa, Ontario (retired)

Maureen Kempston Darkes, president, General Motors of Canada, Ltd., Oshawa, Ontario

Justice Bernette Joshua Johnson, Louisiana Supreme Court, New Orleans, Louisiana

Irma L. Rangel, state representative, Texas House of Representatives, Austin, Texas (deceased)

Judith Resnik, Arthur Liman Professor of Law, Yale University Law School, New Haven, Connecticut

Judith A. Winston, executive director, The President's Initiative on Race (now partner, Winston, Withers & Associates), Washington, D.C.

1997

SPECIAL AWARD: **Roberta**

Cooper Ramo, past president, American Bar Association, Albuquerque, New Mexico

Evelyn Gandy, first woman lieutenant governor of Mississippi, Hattiesburg, Mississippi

Jamie S. Gorelick, vice chair, Fannie Mae, and former U.S. deputy attorney general (now partner, Wilmer, Cutler, Pickering, Hale & Dorr), Washington, D.C.

Antonia Hernandez, president and general counsel, Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (now president and CEO, California Community Foundation), Los Angeles, California

Hon. Joan Dempsey Klein, presiding justice, California Court of Appeals, Los Angeles, California

Drucilla Stender Ramey, executive director and general counsel, Bar Association of San Francisco, California (now acting executive director, National Association of Woman Judges, Washington, D.C.)

1996

Hon. Rosemary Barkett, U.S. Court of Appeals for the Eleventh Circuit, Miami, Florida

Justice Beryl Levine, North Dakota Supreme Court, Palo Alto, California (retired)

Nina Miglionico, partner, Miglionico & Rumore, Birmingham, Alabama

Lynn Hecht Schafran, director, National Judicial Education Program/NOW Legal Defense and Education Fund, New York, New York

Patricia Schroeder, U.S. House of Representatives, Denver, Colorado (retired)

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MARGARET BRENT HONOREES

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1995

SPECIAL AWARD: Hon. Bella

Abzug, former congresswoman and co-chair, Women's Environment & Development Organization, New York, New York (deceased)

Justice Shirley S. Abrahamson, Wisconsin Supreme Court, Madison, Wisconsin (now chief justice)

Mahala Ashley Dickerson, partner, Dickerson & Gibbons, Anchorage, Alaska

Lani Guinier, professor, University of Pennsylvania Law School, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (now professor, Harvard Law School, Cambridge, Massachusetts)

Louise B. Raggio, president, Raggio & Raggio, Inc., Dallas, Texas

Ada Shen-Jaffe, director, Evergreen Legal Services, Seattle, Washington

1994

SPECIAL AWARD: Barbara

Jordan, professor, LBJ School of Public Affairs, University of Texas, Austin, Texas (deceased)

Nancy L. Davis, former executive director, Equal Rights Advocates, San Francisco, California

Jean E. Dubofsky, attorney, sole practitioner, Boulder, Colorado

Justice Margaret Hilary Marshall, former vice president and general counsel, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts; Supreme Judicial Court, Boston (now chief justice, Massachusetts Supreme Court)

Vilma S. Martinez, partner, Munger, Tolles & Olson, Los Angeles, California

Hon. Patricia McGowan Wald, U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit, Washington, D.C.

1993

SPECIAL AWARD: Hon. Janet

Reno, U.S. attorney general, Washington, D.C.

Hon. Betty Weinberg Ellerin, associate justice, appellate division of the Supreme Court of New York, New York

Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, U.S. Supreme Court, Washington, D.C.

Elaine R. Jones, director-counsel, NAACP Legal Defense & Educational Fund, New York, New York (retired)

Justice Joyce L. Kennard, California Supreme Court, San Francisco, California

Esther R. Rothstein, partner, McCarthy and Levin, Chicago, Illinois (deceased)

1992

SPECIAL AWARD: Anita F. Hill

former professor, University of Oklahoma College of Law, Norman, Oklahoma (now professor of law, social policy, and women's studies at the Heller School for Social Policy and Management, Brandeis University, Waltham, Massachusetts)

Margaret L. Behm, partner, Dodson, Parker & Behm, Nashville, Tennessee

Hon. Betty B. Fletcher, U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit, Seattle, Washington (now senior status)

Herma Hill Kay, dean and professor, University of California School of Law, Berkeley, California

Rep. Patsy Takemoto Mink, U.S. House of Representatives, Honolulu, Hawaii (deceased)

Justice Leah J. Sears, Supreme Court of Georgia, Atlanta, Georgia (now chief justice)

1991

Hon. Phyllis A. Kravitch, U.S. Court of Appeals for the Eleventh Circuit, Atlanta, Georgia

Andrea Sheridan Ordín, attorney, private practice (now with Morgan Lewis), Los Angeles, California

Justice Rosalie Wahl, Minnesota Supreme Court, St. Paul, Minnesota (retired)

Jeanette Rosner Wolman, attorney, Baltimore, Maryland (deceased)

Marilyn V. Yarbrough, former dean, University of Tennessee College of Law, Knoxville, Tennessee (deceased)