



Judge Doris May Harris (from left), Dr. Sadie T.M. Alexander and Justice Juanita Kidd Stout are among the pioneers of African-American women lawyers. (Photo of Dr. Alexander courtesy of University of Pennsylvania Law School)

*Preserving a Legacy*  
**THE NBA WOMEN  
LAWYERS DIVISION**  

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**PHILADELPHIA CHAPTER**

By Judge Jacqueline F. Allen, Beverly T. Williams and Niki T. Ingram

**T**he National Bar Association (NBA) is the oldest and largest association of African-American attorneys in the United States. This organization was started in 1925 with a mission to advance the science of jurisprudence; uphold the honor of the legal profession; and protect the civil and political rights of United States citizens. As the number of women attorneys increased, the NBA recognized that there was a specific need to support African-American women attorneys, and in 1972, the Women Lawyers Division of the NBA was formed. The NBA Women Lawyers Division operates on a national level with its own officers and board of directors and on a local level through affiliation.

This fall, the Philadelphia chapter of the National Bar Association Women Lawyers Division (NBA-WLD) celebrated its 30th anniversary. The chapter was formed in 1981 by Lydia Y. Kirkland, Angela E. Nolan and Beverly Williams. African-American women attorneys were “summoned” to appear at the group’s first meeting, which was held on July 1, 1981, at the then Temple University School of Law. Fifty women attended that first meeting, where a program planning committee was formed and charged with the responsibility of formulating the structure and goals for the organization. The members of the planning committee were Jacqueline Allen, Joan Brown, Lydia Kirkland, Shawn Lacey, Angela Nolan, Jean Purnell, Covette Rooney, Beverly Williams, and Diane Wilson. On Oct. 8, 1981, the Program Planning Committee hosted the group’s first reception at the University of Pennsylvania Law School as an effort to make the local bar associations

and the African-American legal community aware of its organizing efforts and its proposed agenda.

Since that initial meeting, the local chapter of the NBA-WLD has flourished. Over the last 30 years, the group has focused its efforts on addressing the challenges to advancement in the legal profession faced by women of color in the Philadelphia area. During the early years of the group, there were 100 members. Today, the membership includes a network of more

than 300 lawyers and jurists, who span the gambit of age and experience from law student members to founding members, who are known as the “Vintage Ones.”

The NBA-WLD has worked hard to advance diversity in the local law schools, law firms and corporations through its scholarship programs, continuing legal education seminars, community service projects and networking opportunities. In the words of Adiah Ferron, an attorney with AstraZeneca Pharmaceuticals and a former president of the NBA-WLD Philadelphia, “...I truly feel that I am part of a legal sisterhood. The women of this organization are always there to lend a hand, an ear or words of advice.” This mantra expresses the feeling of the many African-American women whose lives have been impacted by this organization.

The success of the current program, however, is indebted to the legacy of three extraordinary women who reached

out to the group at its inception and served as mentors to the members of the NBA-WLD Philadelphia individually and to the group as a whole. They are Dr. Sadie T.M. Alexander, Judge Doris May Harris and Justice Juanita Kidd Stout. The significance of their roles cannot be overstated. Each of these women are remembered for their contribution.

### Dr. Sadie T.M. Alexander

Dr. Sadie T. Mossell Alexander blazed the trail not only for African-American women lawyers but for women in general. She was a woman of many firsts. Dr. Alexander became the first black woman to graduate from the University of Pennsylvania Law School when she received her J.D. in 1927. She was the first African-American woman to be an associate editor of the school's Law Review. It is interesting to note that before receiving her law degree, Dr. Alexander received a Ph.D. from the University of Pennsylvania in economics and was the first black woman to do so.

Dr. Alexander was the first African-American woman to be admitted to the practice of law in Pennsylvania. She initially joined the law practice of her husband, the late Judge Raymond Pace Alexander, and later became an assistant city solicitor for the city of Philadelphia from 1928 to 1930 and from 1934 to 1938. She was the first black woman to serve as an assistant city solicitor, and for a period of 20 years, she was the only minority woman lawyer in Philadelphia. After leaving the solicitor's office, she returned to practicing law with her husband until his appointment to the Court of Common Pleas bench; she thereafter maintained her own practice for many years. Upon her retirement, she became of counsel to the firm of Atkinson, Myers, Archie and Wallace.

Dr. Alexander dedicated much of her life to advancing civil liberties and equal rights. President Truman appointed her to his Commission on Civil Rights. She also served as a member of the Philadelphia Commission on Human Relations and was the chair of that commission from 1962 to 1969. When she was appointed in 1962, she was the only black woman to have chaired such a commission. As a member of the Fellowship Commission, she helped to draft a section of the Home Rule Charter of 1952. Dr. Alexander also helped to found the Greater Philadelphia Branch of the American Civil Liberties Union and for many years was an active member of its board of directors. In 1980, she was appointed chair of the White House Conference on Aging by President Carter.

Dr. Alexander was one of the original supporters of the NBA-WLD and helped the organization to shape its goals

and objectives. Because of the support she provided, in 1984 the NBA-WLD established the Sadie T.M. Alexander Book Scholarship as a tribute. Each year the organization, in conjunction with the six area law schools, selects six law students whose proven ability and potential for professional success in the practice of law best epitomizes the achievements of Dr. Alexander. Shelley R. Smith, the current city solicitor, is one of the past recipients of this scholarship. The choice of a book award as a way to honor Dr. Alexander was made because of her love of reading. Her daughter Rae Alexander Minter said, "The scholarship would have special meaning for my mother because she knew the importance of the written word and how its meaning and interpretation could benefit or be deleterious, particularly to those marginalized by society."

Cassandra Georges, a young lawyer in private practice and a former president of the NBA-WLD, commented, "I learned about Dr. Alexander's long list of accomplishments while fundraising for the Alexander Civil Rights Chair at Penn Law. Even though I never met Dr. Alexander, she touched my life through her example. She showed such poise and perseverance in the face of adversity and discrimination. She opened the door for me as a black woman to graduate from Penn Law, to be admitted to the Pennsylvania Bar, and to pursue my own practice as a solo practitioner. It is an honor and privilege to follow in Dr. Alexander's trailblazing footsteps."

### Judge Doris May Harris

Judge Doris May Harris was a native Philadelphian who graduated from Overbrook High School. She received her BA *magna cum laude* from Howard University and her law degree from the University of Pennsylvania Law School in 1949, the second black woman to do so.

Judge Harris was admitted to the Pennsylvania Bar in 1950. Before becoming a judge, she served as an attorney advisor to the United States Government Regional Counsel of the Price Stabilization, assistant city solicitor for the city of Philadelphia, attorney for the United States Small Business Administration, and assistant general counsel for the School District of Philadelphia. She was a founding partner of Norris, Schmidt, Green, Harris, Higginbotham and Brown, which many consider to be Philadelphia's first African-American law firm. She was a rarity in being a named female partner in a law firm.

Judge Harris was appointed to the Court of Common Pleas in 1971. During her years on the bench, she was involved in numerous professional and community activities. She served on the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency, the Judicial Planning Commission of Pennsylvania, and the

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National Council of Negro Women. She was a member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Penn Towne Chapter of LINKS Inc., and served on the boards of many organizations including the Women's Christian Alliance and the Executive Board of the United Way.

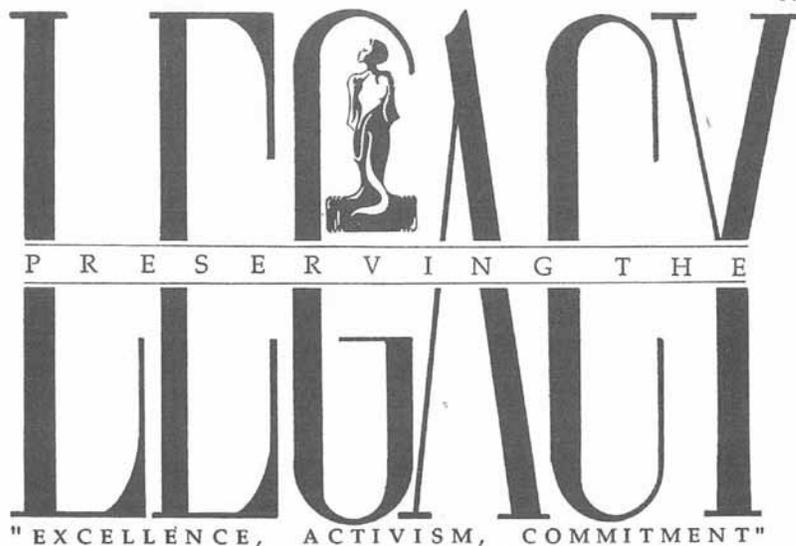
Until her death in April 1985, Judge Harris was a mentor to as many of the NBA-WLD members as she could squeeze into her busy schedule on the Court of Common Pleas bench. Upon her death, she left behind a legacy of professional excellence and commitment to education. On Feb. 28, 1989, in her honor and memory, the organization presented a portrait of Judge Harris to the Court of Common Pleas. That same year the group established an annual award in Judge Harris' memory. The Judge Doris May Harris Image Award recognizes an African-American women attorney who best personifies the values held by Judge Harris. Recipients of the Harris Image award include Charisse Lillie, vice president of community investment, Comcast, and executive vice president of the Comcast Foundation; Dean of the Beasley School of Law at Temple University; Dean Phoebe Haddon of the University of Maryland Law School; and Audrey Talley, a past Chancellor of the Philadelphia Bar Association and partner at Drinker Biddle & Reath LLP.

"As a young lawyer, I was blessed with amazing role models and mentors. Some of my early mentors, Judge Clifford Scott Green and Judge A. Leon Higginbotham Jr., often told me great stories about Judge Harris' talents as a lawyer, judge and community activist. I was humbled and honored to receive the award in her name. I continue to aspire to the high standards she set and met in her professional life," Lillie said.

Judge Harris was known as "mentor in chief" to African-American women lawyers in the Philadelphia area. Retired Judge Kathryn Lewis, who was her former law clerk, reflected:

"Judge Harris was a self-appointed committee of one who dedicated herself to erecting a bridge for African-American women to enter the legal profession. It was one thing to build a bridge, but Judge Harris was dedicated to helping young women successfully navigate

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the often shark-filled waters that described the practice of law for women, particularly African-American women. She was known for her intellect, impeccable style, keen insight, especially in matters involving juveniles, but notable was her decision to hire and mentor African-American women immediately after law school. Her standards were high; she expected her law clerks to exhibit integrity, professionalism, and to pursue excellence. Her law clerks went on to the bench, private practice, and a variety of positions."

Judge Harris' demonstrated deep commitment and tireless service to the community and was a motivating force in the organization's establishment of various community outreach activities such as:

- Establishing a pro bono legal defense fund to represent the poor;
- Establishing a mentoring initiative with teenage girls at the Harriet Tubman House;
- Partnering with the Say Yes To Education and Tell Them We Are Rising Programs sponsored by the Philadelphia Bar Association/Philadelphia Futures;
- Adopting students at the John Wanamaker Middle School; and
- Conducting holiday toy and book bag drives for children at area homeless shelters.

Judge Harris' legacy lives on through these initiatives of the organization.

#### **Justice Juanita Kidd Stout**

Justice Juanita Kidd Stout was born in Wewoka, Okla. in 1919. Not one to allow societal prejudices to limit or deny her ambitions, she left Oklahoma at age 16 to find an accredited college that would admit African-American women. In 1939, she earned her Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Iowa. She received her J.D. degree in 1948 from the University of Indiana and received her LL.M. from the same school in 1954.

In September 1959, only five years after she had passed the Pennsylvania bar exam, Gov. David L. Lawrence appointed Kidd Stout as a judge of what is now known as the Municipal Court of Philadelphia. That November, she won a 10-year term on the court and became the first African-American woman appointed or elected judge of a court of record. In 1969, Kidd Stout was the first African-American woman to be elected to the Philadelphia Court of Common Pleas. In 1988, she was appointed to the Pennsylvania Supreme Court and became the first African-American woman in the United States to serve on a state Supreme Court.

Justice Stout received many awards, including Justice of the Year by the National Association of Women Judges

(1988), the Sandra Day O'Connor Award (1994) by the Philadelphia Bar Association, and was designated as a "Legend of the Bar" (2002) by the Philadelphia Bar Association as part of its 200th Anniversary celebration. Documents concerning Justice Stout's life as a jurist are now housed in the Library of Congress (the Juanita Kidd Stout Collection consists of 35,000 items).

Many of the judges and attorneys in today's courtrooms can attribute a milestone or two to this role model who accomplished much "just because she wanted to." Justice Juanita Kidd Stout was a mentor, friend and guiding light for lawyers in Philadelphia, especially the co-founders of NBA-WLD Philadelphia. Judge Jacqueline Allen, a co-founder, reflects that "Judge Stout was known to all of us as the judge's judge – she was indeed my role model and mentor – her picture hangs in my robing room today, and her favorite document, the "Judge's Prayer," is on my desk – you could say that – she 'watches' over me. I am mindful of the tremendous legacy that she left behind and seek to emulate her life in all that I do." In addition to being a mentor and role model, Judge Stout, during the early years of the organization, carved out a specific role as the organization's self-appointed "watchdog" in that she scrutinized and critiqued the organization's every effort to ensure that all activities were of the highest caliber. It was not at all unusual to receive a phone call from Justice Stout, which usually began with the opening phrase, 'Now, ladies, ...was fine, but in the future, you may wish to consider...'

"Justice Stout was far more than a woman of firsts. She was a warrior for dignity, self-respect and decency in the face of the onerous burden of racial discrimination she endured. I

think of her as a brave woman. She left Wewoka, Okla., at the age of 16 to attend college because no college in Oklahoma admitted blacks. Her journey was a marathon. She was a teacher and secretary before she attended law school. She stayed the course and, as a result, accumulated an impressive array of firsts: first black woman appointed to the bench in Philadelphia, then first black woman elected judge in the U.S.," Talley said in explaining why Stout was so revered.

Let us all be mindful of Judge Harris' sage advice, "Let us always reach back."

To ensure that Justice Stout's remarkable legacy of accomplishments is carried forth by women of color as they enter the profession she so dearly loved, in 2008 the NBA Women Lawyers Division Philadelphia Chapter began awarding a tuition scholarship in her honor and memory.

Since the inception of the National Bar Association Women Lawyers Division Philadelphia Chapter in 1981, a generation of African-American women attorneys has entered the profession standing on the shoulders of Dr. Sadie

T.M. Alexander, Judge Doris May Harris, and Justice Juanita Kidd Stout. These three icons would each be proud of the seeds they have sown. Let us all be mindful of Judge Harris' sage advice, "Let us always reach back." ■

*Judge Jacqueline F. Allen sits in the Court of Common Pleas, Civil Division. Beverly T. Williams is in private practice in Montgomery County and is a former deputy director at the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine. Niki T. Ingram is assistant director, Workers' Compensation and Employment Law Department at Marshall, Dennehey, Warner, Coleman & Goggin and a member of the Editorial Board of The Philadelphia Lawyer.*

## NBA Women Lawyers Division Philadelphia Chapter

### African-American Female Attorneys in Philadelphia By the Numbers: Then and Now: 1981-2011

Key Positions	Then (As of 1981)	Now (As of 2011)
Partners in Major Law Firms	1	5
Judges on Bench, Philadelphia	2	20 (includes 1 federal judge)
Corporate Leaders	0	4
Law School Deans	0	2
City Solicitor	1	4
Chancellor, Philadelphia Bar Association	0	1
President, Philadelphia Bar Foundation	0	1

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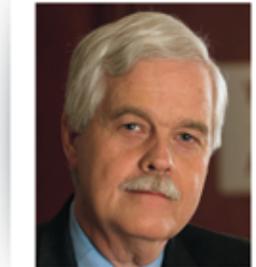
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### EDITOR

David G. Ries, Esq.

Mr. Ries is a partner in the Pittsburgh office of Thorp Reed & Armstrong, LLP, where he practices in the areas of environmental, commercial, and technology litigation. He has frequently addressed e-discovery issues in his practice and serves on the new panel of E-Discovery Special Masters for the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Pennsylvania. Mr. Ries received his J.D. from Boston College Law School in 1974 and his B.A. from Boston College in 1971.

### AUTHORS

The Honorable  
Mark I. Bernstein  
Edward Butkovitz  
David R. Cohen  
Damian L. DiNicola  
Stuart C. Gaul, Jr.  
Bree D. Kelly  
Daniel R. Miller  
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Alysia Solow



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