

Tribute to Pauli Murray '65 JSD
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Yale Law School Alumni Weekend 2007

In 1965, fifty-five-year-old Pauli Murray became the first African-American to receive her J.S.D from Yale Law School. It was a first for this law school, but for Murray, it was just another moment in a life that had crossed borders at every turn.

Born in the segregated South in 1910, Pauli Murray came of age in an era of civil rights struggle. She was denied admission to the University of North Carolina Law School because of her race and went on to receive her J.D. from Howard, where she won the prestigious Rosenwald Fellowship to study at Harvard Law School. But Harvard refused to allow Murray to enroll for post-graduate study at the school because of her sex. After contesting the decision, Murray earned her LL.M. at Berkeley, and later, with the encouragement of Fowler Harper and Myres McDougal, her J.S.D. from Yale. Murray would go on to become the assistant attorney general for California, a law professor at the University of Ghana, one of the co-founders of the National Organization for Women, a professor of American Studies at Brandeis, and an Episcopalian priest. She not only broke barriers but helped others do so as well, playing a crucial role in developing key arguments of the civil rights and the women's movements—contributions that are only now beginning to receive the recognition they deserve.

As a young law student at Howard, Murray drew from her own experiences with racial discrimination to write a paper that used social science research to attack the legitimacy of the "separate but equal" doctrine. The paper found its way to the NAACP, and ten years later, served as the basis for the plaintiff's brief in *Brown v. Board of Education*.

Murray's role in the women's rights movement was no less central. During the 1960s, while she was a student at Yale, Murray served as a member of the President's Commission on the Status of Women. She drew on the new race discrimination precedents to argue that the Fourteenth Amendment prohibited sex discrimination, demonstrating the ways that sex discrimination resembled race discrimination, and intersected with it. Her 1965 article, "Jane Crow and the Law: Sex Discrimination and the Law," became one of the intellectual cornerstones for sex discrimination jurisprudence, which Ruth Bader Ginsburg acknowledged by including Murray as a co-author of the *Reed v. Reed* brief in 1971. Murray continued to contest constraining understandings of sexuality and sex roles throughout her life.

Murray was a woman ahead of her time in other ways as well. Influenced by her experiences in Ghana in the early 1960s, she became one of the first legal scholars to emphasize the importance of a transnational understanding of the law. In the J.S.D. thesis she wrote for Yale, "Roots of the Racial Crisis: Prologue to Policy,"

Murray took a global perspective, comparing the U.S.' system of chattel slavery to systems of slavery in Africa, Latin America, and elsewhere.

She went on to become a professor in American Studies at Brandeis, where she taught courses in the late 1960s and early 1970s on the American legal system, on law and social change, on women in American society, and on civil rights and the black experience. At the age of 67 Murray broke yet another barrier by becoming one of the first women, and the first African-American woman, to be ordained in the Episcopal Church.

Pauli Murray, distinguished Yale Law School graduate, civil rights activist, feminist, poet, teacher, and priest, died in 1985 at age 74.