

Margaret Bush Wilson: Advocate, Counselor, Friend

Many fine attorneys have passed through the J. Reuben Clark Law School as students, teachers, and friends. Margaret Bush Wilson, a past member of the law school's Board of Visitors and a Distinguished Visiting Professor, is among the finest of friends. Mrs. Wilson has aimed her tireless energies at providing our student body with new insights into the practice of law. She has also given unfailing service on the Board of Visitors, offering criticism of our faults, always tendered with wise counsel for improvement.

The Board of Editors of the *BYU Journal of Public Law* is pleased to publish the remarks of Mrs. Wilson presented in her address to the student body at the conclusion of a recent visit. Mrs. Wilson shares the human story of *Shelley v. Kraemer*,¹ as only a front row player could. Before presenting the text of her lecture, we invite you to learn more of this remarkable woman and attorney. As she has honored us with her friendship, we now honor her as our friend.

Mrs. Wilson's resume reflects a lifetime of service to her profession and community. Beyond her years of private practice as senior partner in the firm of Wilson and Associates, she has been involved in government service in the Legal Division of the Rural Electrification Administration, has served as an Assistant Attorney General of Missouri, and has been a Legal Service Specialist in the State Technical Assistance Office of the War on Poverty. Mrs. Wilson also has contributed to education in many diverse roles, serving as an instructor in the CLEO law school preparation program at St. Louis University and as program administrator in the Missouri Department of Community Affairs. In addition to her service to the J. Reuben Clark Law School, she sits on numerous other college boards, including St. Augustine's College, Webster College, Washington University, and the Association of Episcopal Colleges.

Mrs. Wilson has been recognized by several civic organizations for her community service and is the recipient of honorary degrees from divers universities, including Boston University, Washington University, Talladega College, and Alabama State University. Her civic service extends into many quarters: she sits on the board of directors of the

1. 334 U.S. 1 (1948).

Police Foundation, Institute for Civil Justice, and the James T. Bush Center for Law, Social Change and Conflict Resolution.

Margaret Bush Wilson is perhaps best known for her legendary service to the NAACP. In her own words, the acronym represents the National Association for the Advancement of Civilized Persons. Mrs. Wilson was inculcated from an early age with the desire to work for change. She was blessed with parents who taught values which undergirded her career of service. Her mother, Berenice Casey Bush, was an active member of the Executive Committee of the St. Louis NAACP in the twenties and thirties. Her father, James T. Bush, was a pioneer real estate broker in segregated St. Louis. His legacy is now memorialized at the University of Missouri-St. Louis with the James T. Bush Center for Law, Social Change and Conflict Resolution. Mrs. Wilson has been instrumental in focusing the Center on developing housing delivery systems to better serve the poor.

After graduating with honors from Talladega College with a degree in economics, Margaret Bush Wilson received her legal training at the Lincoln University School of Law. As a young lawyer, she was called upon by her father to incorporate the Real Estate Brokers Association of St. Louis. Mr. Bush was founding president of that organization and a moving force in the litigation leading to the Supreme Court decision in *Shelley*.

Her early legal career often took her out of the comfort of her home territory in St. Louis and into the Boot Heel of Missouri to represent blacks when no other attorneys were willing to venture forth. Long-time legal associate and friend, Charles Oldham, notes that she is "always unflappable in court, and most of the time in private life . . . on occasion [raising] her voice above its normal ladylike volume" when confronted by those who oppose civil rights progress. Mr. Oldham and his wife Marian describe her as a "fearless fighter . . . independent and . . . without fear of retaliation or loss." Mrs. Wilson is a sophisticated attorney who has mastered the skill of making the law respond to the needs of her clients.

Mrs. Wilson is equally adept at challenging traditional notions of justice within the intellectual realm. As a member of the board of directors for America's premier criminal justice think tank, the Police Foundation, she has brought a personal understanding of the dynamics and destructive nature of racism to bear in developing policy components of modern law enforcement. The Police Foundation's president, Hubert Williams, relates how Mrs. Wilson "engages some of the best thinkers . . . on the finer points of policy formation" and has directed them at improving police interaction with inner-city communities. She has broadened the foundation's research to emphasize the police culture and

its effect on minority communities and police accountability.

Margaret Bush Wilson has taken her battle for equality and dignity beyond the courtroom and universities and into the corporate board rooms of America, sitting as a director for many businesses. Richard J. Mahoney, Chairman of the Board and Chief Executive Officer of the Monsanto Company, tells how Mrs. Wilson refined corporate attitudes toward employees. Several years ago, the Monsanto board of directors was considering closing a European plant. In explaining plans for shifting personnel and assisting those who would lose jobs, one executive noted that there were "perhaps one hundred people redundant" working in this particular facility. Mrs. Wilson stopped him short. "Young man," she said, "there are no redundant people in this world; there are people misplaced, there are people who have yet to find another opportunity, but there are no redundant people."

Mr. Mahoney noted that, for all the effort to assist displaced employees, the company had depersonalized them, remembering only the numbers. The company rethought corporate policy and behavior toward thousands of workers. As the company faced new challenges to maintain its international position, Monsanto was guided by the simple, direct words of Margaret Bush Wilson: "There are no redundant people in this world."

Margaret Bush Wilson is a person of formidable inner strength, possessing grace and dignity earned through long years of commitment to the struggle for equal justice for all. Forty years removed from the era of *Shelley v. Kraemer*, our society and legal system face discrimination delicately cloaked in a subtle and obscure fashion. Although now we honor Margaret Bush Wilson with words, perhaps the greatest honor we can bestow will be manifest in years to come as we follow her lead and exercise our legal skills and intellect, and the inspiration gently and generously nurtured by her, to uncloak the dream for all.

Kenneth R. Wallentine
Editor-in-Chief