By Liz Broadway Brown

In 1981 a group of motivated black women sought to form a voluntary bar organization that would focus on issues concerning women and children, increase black female representation in the judiciary and public office and take a proactive stance on key political issues. Those women went on to found the Georgia Association of Black Women Attorneys (“GABWA”), which today has an active membership of more than 600 women and men focused on fulfilling the organization’s mission of nurturing, supporting and galvanizing the power of black women attorneys, advocating for women and children and empowering our communities.

GABWA revisited its history during the February “Herstory” General Body Meeting held on February 20 at Spelman College, which featured a discussion with past presidents and founding members of the organization who shared their memories, wisdom and vision for the future. The panel was moderated by GABWA Past President JaDawnya Butler and featured Fulton County Superior Court Judge Bensonetta Tipton Lane (GABWA founder), Atlanta Municipal Court Judge Barbara Harris (GABWA founder), Attorney Julie M.T. Walker (GABWA founding member and past president) and Fulton County Superior Court Chief Judge Gail Tusan (GABWA founding member and past president).

The panelists all seemed to agree that prior to the formation of GABWA

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A Special Message From President Tracee R. Benzo

BE BOLD.

Is “Diversity” a bad word?

I grew up with the idea that including others was a good idea. I remember seeing photos of individuals of all walks of life on the covers of my textbooks. When I attended college at Clemson University there was a clear effort to increase the minority population from a mere ten percent. Upon graduation, corporations at career fairs initiated diversity plans to ensure that the workforce reflected the face of the community.

Based on diversity campaigns, I had the opportunity to participate in a leadership development program with Travelers and Citigroup. I vividly remember conversations in the boardroom changing because, as a result of my background and experiences, I was able to add a different perspective. But I had to be bold and speak up! It was clear that diversity initiatives added value to my education.

What happened?

Diversity is having people of different races or cultures in a group or organization. Diversity impacts the quality or state of having many different forms, types and ideas. Today, it seems that including certain individuals is viewed as a deliberate effort to exclude others. Somewhere “diversity” became a passé.

As we celebrated Black History Month, it became clear at our “Herstory” General Body Meeting that as time passes things change but they really seem to stay the same.

GABWA we cannot become complacent when we make gains in life. Complacency is the opiate of all humankind. The fact of the matter is, we are losing ground in our pursuit of justice and equality.

Georgia’s Judicial Nominating Committee has twenty-one members listed on its website. (See http://jnc.georgia.gov). Only one is an African-American man. Do we not deserve at least one African-American woman? Is diversity a bad idea? Would the conversation change with a black woman at the table?

GABWA: Be bold. Speak up!

The Eleventh Circuit has the highest percentage of African-Americans of any circuit in the country. There are 12 judicial seats on the circuit but only one is held by an African-American. President Clinton appointed Judge Charles Wilson, from Florida, in 1999. The number of African-American judges sitting today on the Eleventh Circuit is the same as it was more than 30 years ago. Does this concern you?

GABWA: Be Bold. Speak up!

We should all be focused on ensuring that our judiciary reflects the diversity of our state and nation in order to inspire confidence in our community. Georgia deserves better. In the words of Past President Julie M.T. Walker: “GABWA: be bold . . . be an activist.”

GABWA, our right to vote is under attack. The Georgia State Assembly passed a bill to reduce the number of early voting days from 21 to a mere 6. The NAACP Legal Defense Fund and a coalition of advocacy groups urged the legislature to reject the measure calling it “a frontal assault on the great American democratic process.” The bill is in route to the Senate. (See http://www.brennancenter.org/newsletter/voting-newsletter-two-steps-forward-one-step-back-voting). GABWA, it is imperative that we speak up...now. Politics is simply the means that we use to determine who gets what and when. Our communities depend on us. We must be bold and speak up. It is our mission and duty.

Join us in our cause to effect social change together. www.gabwa.org.

GABWA: Let’s be BOLD Together.
Fulton County Superior Court Chief Judge (and GABWA Past President) Gail Tusan (far right) hosted GABWA’s past leadership and current Executive Board at her home in Atlanta on February 23, 2014, for the annual GABWA Leadership Tea. The purpose of the Tea is to allow GABWA’s historical leadership to fellowship with its new leaders, sharing their wisdom and advice for the year to come.

Above, Left: Vanessa Hickey-Gales talks about the history of GABWA and her experience as a founding member.

Above, Right: Sonja Brown and Jacqueline Bunn take a break from chatting to pose for a quick photo.

Above: Fulton County Superior Court Judge Kimberly Esmond Adams, Divida Gade and Fulton County Superior Court Chief Judge Gail Tusan show off their fashionable ensembles.

Left: Tori Silas prepares refreshments prior to the start of the Leadership Tea.
 panelists discussed the Brooks v. Georgia Board of Elections litigation, judicial appointments after Brooks, the importance of diversity on the bench, and federal appointments. The panel's moderator, Kimberlyn Carter, Director of Strategic Partnerships for the Bibb County Board of Education, opened the discussion with Leslie M. Poll of the NAACP Legal Defense Fund who brought attention to the current state of affairs of the judiciary and shocking statistics regarding the lack of diversity on the bench.

By Candice D. McKinley

On Saturday, February 22, 2014, Advocacy for Action (AFA) — an organization formed to be a voice on behalf of the community to advocate for a diverse and representative state and federal judiciary — facilitated its second seminar, “Diversity on the Bench II,” at New Pilgrim Missionary Baptist Church in Macon, Georgia.

AFA's panelists discussed the judiciary and the lack of diversity on both the state and federal levels. AFA convened two panels that included a diverse group of attorneys, legislators, faith leaders, and community advocates from around the state.

The first panel, “The Changing Judicial Landscape,” focused on the Brooks v. Georgia Board of Elections litigation, judicial appointments after Brooks, the importance of diversity on the bench, and federal appointments. The discussion opened with Ms. Leslie M. Poll, NAACP Legal Defense Fund, who discussed the current state of the judiciary. She provided these alarming facts:

**State Appointments**

- In the last decade, no African American attorney has been appointed to the Fulton County Superior Court bench. The last African American appointed to the Fulton County Superior Court bench was in 2002 by Governor Barnes.
- As of 2012, only six out of 20 judges on the Fulton County Superior Court are African American.
- In the 49 judicial circuits that have 205 Superior Court Judges, there are only 19 African American judges—12 of which are in Fulton and DeKalb.
- Bibb County, which has a black population of 53 percent, has had just one African American judge in its history. Currently, there are no African American judges and there has never been an African American woman on the court.

**Federal Appointments**

- There has never been an African American woman appointed to any federal court in Georgia.
- The Northern and Middle Districts have only two African American judges.
- Out of the 35 judges who have been appointed in the Northern District of Georgia since the court's inception in 1948, only three were African American.

Reverend Timothy McDonald, Pastor of First Iconium Baptist Church, former President of the Concerned Black Clergy, and representatives of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) sat down with Valerie Jar-

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rett, President Obama’s Senior Advisor, to discuss the lack of diversity on Georgia’s federal bench and the current vacancies.

Reverend McDonald said the meeting did not result in any immediate outcomes but he went on to describe the distinction between “Suite Heat vs. Street Heat.” He defined “Suite Heat” as the collective efforts of the legal, legislative, and faith communities to get legislation drafted and judicial candidates on the “short list.” “Street Heat” is the grassroots movement to inspire the people to turn out, vote, and apply pressure to the issues that directly affect our community.

At the first Diversity on the Bench seminar in November 2013, Derrick Boazman of CBS Atlanta’s WAOK radio said “…we do not want 2020 to come and not do anything about this dire issue, we have a bench that is making decisions about our day-to-day lives and our children’s future that does not remotely resemble our community.”

Charles Johnson, Partner at Holland and Knight, shed light on the critical role of Georgia’s Judicial Nominating Commission (JNC), which is responsible for vetting and recommending judges for appointment to Governor Deal. Currently, there is only one African American on the committee which has twenty-one members.

On February 28, 2014, AFA filed a lawsuit against the JNC for noncompliance with an Open Records Request. This is a courageous step forward for our community to demand the documentation concerning the actual candidate pool of who applied and who has been appointed by the JNC.

The second panel, “Where Do We Go From Here: Plan of Action for 2014 and Beyond,” included Attorney Francys Johnson, State President of the Georgia NAACP, Councilwoman Elaine Lucus, Macon City Council, and Attorney Mawuli M. Davis, Partner at the Davis Bozeman Law Firm. The panelists challenged the audience to get the message of judicial inequality out to the masses.

During the engaging discussion, the panel defined politics as the process which determines who gets what, when, and why. Undoubtedly, politics has a direct effect on the judicial selection process.

What are we doing to change the narrative that has played out in the state of Georgia?

Councilwoman Lucus emphasized the need to pay close attention to all elections in Georgia. One election to note is the upcoming Senate race with Democrat Michelle Nunn, who, if elected, will balance out an office that has been dominated by two Republicans who have participated in selecting the slate of candidates for life-time appointments to the Federal Bench.

Attorney Francys Johnson presented a two-tiered approach to fulfilling AFA’s mission: (1) create of a pipeline to judgeschip and (2) sacrifice to serve. Attorney Johnson noted that he chose to practice in Statesboro because he wanted to serve his community and encouraged the audience to do the same for the greater good of our communities at large.

Similarly, Attorney Davis provided concrete examples of how we can work collectively to reproduce effective programs that will allow the statewide expansion of the judicial pipeline.

Attorney Davis highlighted GABWA’s Professional Development Academy (PDA) and Judicial and Public Office Academy (JPO), as well as the Gate City Bar Association’s Summer Internship Program, as programs that provide opportunities for minority lawyers to hone their legal skills and learn the unspoken rules of law that are needed to be successful.

Councilwoman Lucus articulated that a solid connection to the community is vital in order to get any type of sustainable result.

Connect, stay informed, and get involved with Advocacy for Action at http://advocacyforaction.com/
**Member Spotlight**

**Attorney McFadden: The “Give -Backer”**

This month we put the spotlight on GABWA past president, Jamala McFadden.

A graduate of the University of Michigan School of Law and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Ms. McFadden is a founding Partner of McFadden, White, Sprattlin & Davis. In addition to serving as GABWA’s 30th President, Ms. McFadden is the Immediate Past President of Outstanding Atlanta and an alumna of L.E.A.D. Atlanta. She also founded a scholarship for college-bound teenage parents in her hometown of Chicago.

We caught up with Ms. McFadden recently and talked with her about her service to GABWA, what makes her happy, and what she believes is the greatest challenge for black women attorneys in the twenty-first century.

**Q: You served as GABWA’s 30th president. How did it feel to become a part of GABWA’s history and legacy?**

A: Phenomenal. I very much appreciate the opportunity to have been a part of a leadership team that continued and built upon GABWA’s successes. I am exceedingly proud of the work we did during 2011, from developing the Judicial & Public Office Academy and graduating its first class, to executing simultaneous 5th Thursday luncheons in various locations to meet our members where they are, to leaving more than $30,000 in GABWA’s coffers to help propel us to the next level with proposed projects like hiring an executive director.

**Q: What do you believe is the greatest challenge for black women attorneys in the twenty-first century?**

A: Raising African-American male children in our homes and communities.

**Q: What advice would you offer an attorney who is considering leaving a firm and starting a private practice?**

A: Get as prepared as you possibly can. Spend time learning your craft. Nurture your contacts. SAVE MONEY. Get a line of credit, mortgage, etc. while you’re still with your firm. Talk with people who do what you want to do – on the level that you want to do it. Ask them what they did and what they wish they had done sooner. Ask them about their challenges and for their advice. Two of my greatest resources during that process are now my partners.

**Q: What makes you happy?**

A: My son, his upcoming graduation from Morehouse College (woo hoo!), his entrepreneurship, and the fact that he is a great human being. Aside from that, sunshine, beautiful beaches, crisp white wine, live music and dance. The combination of all of the above = my paradise.

**Q: Describe yourself in one word.**

A: “Giver-backer”

- SmMiracle Johnson
THE GEORGIA ASSOCIATION OF BLACK WOMEN ATTORNEYS PRESENTS

LEAN IN (or Out)
Forum

PANELISTS:

KAT COLE
President
Cinnabon

PATRICE PERKINS-HOOKER
VP and General Counsel
Atlanta Beltline, Inc.
President-Elect
State Bar of Georgia

BIZUNESH SCOTT
Partner
Steptoe & Johnson
(also Former Advisor to President Obama)

LINDA T. WALKER
Magistrate Judge
U.S. District Court
Northern District of GA

CHRISTOPHER ALLISON
Director of Adolescent Education
NBA Players Association

KEVIN FINKE
VP, Global Brand Management
NCR Corporation

THURSDAY, MARCH 20, 2014
6:00 PM - 8:00 PM
SUTHERLAND | 999 PEACHTREE STREET | ATLANTA, GA 30309
Seating is limited. RSVP today at RSVP@GABWA.ORG
Special thanks to our sponsor:

SUTHERLAND
John Marshall Law Student Shares Post-Interview Thoughts

By Arletha Wilson  
John Marshall Law School

On February 1, 2014, I, along with more than fifty law school students from across the state of Georgia, participated in the GABWA/Gate City Mock Interview and Resume Writing Workshop hosted at King and Spalding LLP.

On that crisp Saturday morning, the law students, ranging in years of dedication to the study of law, converged on the masterful building donned in what we thought was our best business and professional attire, to meet with some of the greatest legal minds in the profession. I can speak for myself when I say that I was nervous; however, the attorneys were extremely approachable (after the mock interview, of course) and emptied into each of us a wealth of experience and keen knowledge pertaining to the how’s, when’s, where’s, what’s and why’s of preparing to enter the field of law.

We received honest insight about our attire, physical appearance, how we spoke, posture, eye contact, color schemes, how best to answer difficult questions, and what information to take out of your interview conversation, and the list goes on as it pertains to the candid manner in which each of the attorneys addressed what they saw as our needs, strengths and weaknesses.

Each of the lawyers in my interview provided a unique perspective that ultimately gave me great interviewing techniques and a more polished resume. Other law students that I spoke with after the workshop shared this sentiment. Having the benefit of three attorneys from diverse practice areas and work settings, truly enhanced my “take-aways” and gave me some satisfaction in knowing that I was at least on the right track in my future law career.

I, along with all of the current law students, recognize that the programming provided by GABWA and Gate City whether in tandem or separate, is beyond beneficial as we pursue legal careers. The pearls or nuggets of wisdom passed down by these members is truly invaluable and we are eager to put the new information into practice and then to reach back and positively influence others as they travel along this law school road.
**You Go, Girl!**

**“Honorable Mentions”**

GABWA’s *Legally Speaking* (Kenya Johnson and Sonja Brown) was nominated for Atlanta Interfaith Broadcasters’ Programmer of the Year Award. The 2014 AIB Allen Awards will be held on March 25 at 11:30 a.m. at Second-Ponce de Leon Baptist Church Fellowship Hall in Atlanta.

**Julie M.T. Walker** was selected as a 2014 Honoree by the Howard University Alumni Association’s Alumni Club of Atlanta. She will be presented her award at the 147th Charter Day on March 15. Mayor Kasim Reed will also be recognized.

**Stephanie Woods Miller** was appointed to the Georgia State Advisory Committee of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. The Commission is an independent, bipartisan commission of the federal government created in 1957 and charged with monitoring federal civil rights enforcement.

**Jacqueline Bazy** was selected to serve as Secretary of the Board of Directors for Women in eDiscovery's Atlanta chapter and recognized in the Atlanta Business Chronicle.

**Marquetta J. Bryan** received a Justice Robert Benham Award for Community Service. Since 1998, these awards have been presented to honor lawyers and judges in Georgia who have made significant contributions to their communities and demonstrate the positive contributions of members of the Bar beyond their legal or official work.

**Sonja Brown** was named Deputy Chief of Special Victims Unit & Community Outreach in the Office of the DeKalb County Solicitor-General.

Do you know someone who deserves an “Honorable Mention”? Send an e-mail to gabwanenewsletter@gmail.com.

**HERSTORY: These Women Wanted to Be Leaders, Not Simply the Worker Bees**

Continued from Page 1

they saw a need for a bar organization that thought differently and was focused on issues that truly mattered to women and children. They wanted to be leaders and not just the “worker bees.” They wanted to take positions on political issues and were not afraid to ruffle feathers. They wanted to be agents for change and they sacrificed themselves for the good of the membership and the community.

- “Develop a vision and don’t quit until it is achieved.” GABWA Founder, Atlanta Municipal Court Judge Barbara Harris.
- “GABWA from the beginning was bold and that is what we need to remain.” Avarita Hanson, GABWA Past President

Many found a “home” in GABWA. “GABWA is the daughter I never had, the sorority I never pledged and the sisterhood that help me develop my legal career and socially,” said Walker.

Judge Tuson had fond memories of GABWA and the support system it has provided throughout her career from law firm associate to now Chief Judge of the Fulton County Superior Court. She said her vision for the future of GABWA was “another thirty years of close relationships and opportunities that you did not know were yours to claim.”

Attorney Walker gave the current membership a charge: “I want the vision of activism to resonate henceforth. . . . We must be activists and we must be bold. We can’t be scared to make some noise.”

Judge Lane echoed Walker’s sentiments: “Continue to be agents for change and continue to be GABWA,” she said.
In January, the Fulton County Superior Court elected Deputy Chief Judge Gail S. Tusan as the next Chief Judge. Judge Tusan took her post on February 1, 2014 and was honored during a Change of Gavel Ceremony held on February 6 at the Assembly Hall of the Fulton County Government Center.

Judge Tusan joined the Fulton County Superior Court bench in 1995 and will serve a two-year term as Chief Judge. In this role, Judge Tusan will serve as the lead judicial administrative officer of the Atlanta Judicial Circuit.

The Chief Judge is charged with ensuring the judiciary operates efficiently in Fulton County, while providing equal justice and fairness to those who come before the Court.

The Chief Judge also ensures that the administrative tasks of the Court are carried out effectively.

“For the past eighteen and ½ years, I have proudly served with my Superior Court colleagues and look forward to this new opportunity of service on our collective behalf. As Fulton County becomes increasingly more diverse and today’s economy forces growing numbers of citizens to prosecute their legal claims without legal representation, our judicial system must continue to improve in its accessibility for everyone. As Chief Judge, I commit to building on our court’s valuable community partnerships, but also to identify new ways to collaborate with Fulton County’s justice partners throughout the state with the goal of delivery of transparency, accountability and best practices. The Superior Court of Fulton County belongs to the citizens of this great state and our courthouse doors are open to all,” said Tusan.
—UPCOMING EVENTS—

**March 9**
Legally Speaking March episode  
Where: on AIB: Comcast Cable (Channel 5); AT&T U-Verse (Channel 6); Charter Communications (Channel 22) or live stream at www.aibtv.com.  
Time: 9:30 p.m.

**March 11**
GABWA Membership Mixer, Rockdale County  
Where: Ruby Tuesday’s (Hwy 138)  
Time: 6-8 p.m.

**March 13**
GABWA Membership Mixer, Gwinnett County  
Where: Footprints Café (Lawrenceville)  
Time: 6-8 p.m.

**March 15**
Augusta Chapter Event: Youth Summit  
Where: A.R. Johnson Magnet School

**March 20**
General Body Meeting (Lean In Forum)  
Where: Sutherland  
Time: 6-8 p.m.

**March 26**
Joint Membership Mixer with Gate City Bar Association  
Where: Cafe Circa, 464 Edgewood Avenue SE, Atlanta  
Time: 6:30 p.m. to 9:30 p.m.

**March 27**
GABWA Augusta Region Membership Mixer  
Where: French Market Grille  
Time: 5:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.

THANK YOU!!

GABWA would like to thank the following sponsors for supporting our February programming:

- Sutherland
- King & Spalding
- Bey & Associates
- Hasner Law
- Chief Judge Gail S. Tusan
- AfiSalsa
- Spelman College
- Eraji Media

Members of GABWA’s Historical Leadership Share Their Wisdom

_Aoura _Fanis, _Chairman_  
_Founding Member and Past President, 1996_

"Much in life is dependent upon the attitude with which you approach circumstances. We are each the master of our own destiny. In the end, hard work and determination do make the difference. Keep working hard toward your goals and keep going strong every step of the way always with an attitude of determination and success. And remember, a journey of a thousand miles is accomplished one step at a time."
The Georgia Association of Black Women Attorneys ("GABWA") was founded in 1981 by a group of African American women who sought to form a voluntary bar organization that would (1) focus on women and children's issues, (2) increase black female representation in the judiciary and in public offices, and (3) take a proactive stance on political issues. Today, GABWA has an active membership of women and men who strive each day to fulfill the organization's mission: to nurture, support and galvanize the power of Black women attorneys, advocate for women and children and empower our communities.

GABWA is open to all persons, regardless of race or sex. Become a member today! www.gabwa.org/dues.php

WHAT ARE THE REQUIREMENTS FOR A VALID WILL IN GEORGIA?

1. You must be at least 14 years of age.
2. You must have a decided and rational desire as to the disposition of your property.
3. You must execute your will freely and voluntarily.
4. Your will must be in writing and signed by you.
5. Your will must be attested and signed in your presence by at least two competent witnesses.

Source: State Bar of Georgia.
For more information on wills, visit http://www.gabar.org/newsandpublications/consumerpamphlets/wills.cfm.

GABWA:
P.O. Box 4381
Atlanta, GA 30302

GABWA Foundation:
P.O. Box 7381
Atlanta, GA 30309

Phone: 678-825-5675
E-mail: contact@gabwa.org

GABWA Newsletter Chair:
Liz Broadway Brown
gabwanewsletter@gmail.com