

Justice Older than the Law: The Life of Dovey Johnson Roundtree

By Katie McCabe and Dovey Johnson Roundtree

University Press of Mississippi

Margaret Walker Alexander Series in African American Studies

ISBN 978-1-60473-132-3, hardback, \$30

Book News for Immediate Release

The autobiography of a ground-breaking civil rights crusader, lawyer, and ordained minister

Justice Older than the Law: the Life of Dovey Johnson Roundtree, (University Press of Mississippi) tells the story of the fearless civil rights warrior who shattered Jim Crow in the World War II military and in the courtrooms of the Nation's Capital and led the vanguard of women ordained to the ministry. In a richly voiced first-person account written with National Magazine Award-winner Katie McCabe, Dovey Roundtree has created an intimate history of America that reads like a novel, capturing the sweep of nine tumultuous decades and a vision of justice that goes far beyond the law.

The product of an extraordinary ten-year collaboration between McCabe and Roundtree, ***Justice Older than the Law*** illuminates both the personal journey of one unstoppable woman, and the larger story of the country's struggle for social justice. Called "American history and human history at its very best" by the Harvard Du Bois Institute's founding committee chair Dr. Walter Leonard, the book has been lauded by such prominent academics as Johnnetta Betsch Cole and such military leaders as Brig. Gen. Wilma L. Vaught, who described it as an "exalting" tale that "goes into Dovey Roundtree's mind, memory and soul."

To follow Roundtree's journey from the poverty of Jim Crow North Carolina to the courtrooms of Washington, DC is to watch the entire history of the civil rights movement roll past. As a protégé of the great black educator and activist Mary McLeod Bethune, Roundtree became one of the first women to break the gender and color barriers in the World War II military, recruiting hundreds of other black women in the Deep South for the newly formed Women's Army Corps, often at risk of her personal safety. She entered Howard University Law School on the cusp of the historic assault on school segregation that would culminate in the landmark Supreme Court decision of *Brown v. Board of Education*. Inspired by such giants as Thurgood Marshall and James Madison Nabrit, Jr., she went on to carve out her own place in history.

In November, 1955, one month before Rosa Parks ignited the protest movement led by the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., Roundtree wrested from the notoriously segregationist Interstate Commerce Commission a bus desegregation case that demolished the doctrine of 'separate but equal' in the field of interstate travel, just as the *Brown* case had done in the area of public education. That case, *Sarah Keys v. Carolina Coach Company*, invoked by Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy at the height of mob violence in the South during the Freedom Riders' campaign of 1961, helped bring an end to Jim Crow in travel across state lines.

At a time when black attorneys had to leave the courthouses to use the bathrooms, Dovey Roundtree took on Washington's white legal establishment in behalf of black clients, and she prevailed. Washington legal lore is filled with stories of her victories in unwinnable cases for clients no one cared about. The reporters, judges and law students who packed the US District Court in the summer of 1965 to watch her defend a black laborer accused of the murder of a Kennedy mistress remember, still, the way she took on the government in the case of the *United States v. Ray Crump*. She earned legendary status as the beautiful woman lawyer who tried one of Washington's most sensational murder cases dressed in a pink-and-white suit, who stood alone against the US Attorney's office, skewered the state's eyewitnesses, made a mockery of the circumstantial case erected against her client, and quoted Shakespeare on the sacredness of a man's good name. In so doing, she won for herself an honored place among the white majority, simply by outperforming them.

Even as she opened doors for black attorneys, both male and female, at the DC bar, Roundtree broke new ground in 1961 as one of the first women to be ordained to the ministry of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. From the pulpit of Allen Chapel AME Church, located in one of Washington's most violent neighborhoods, she launched the final battle of her life, the one she continues to fight today, the battle to save the next generation from what she calls "the demon of violence." *Justice Older than the Law* is more than an autobiography of a civil rights heroine, more than a simple historical account of race in America. It is an eloquent expression of a vision of justice older by far than the law, and it speaks movingly and urgently to our racially troubled times.

DOVEY JOHNSON ROUNDTREE is a retired lawyer, an Army veteran, and an A.M.E. minister. She lives in Charlotte, North Carolina. **KATIE MCCABE** is a freelance writer whose work has appeared in the Washingtonian Magazine, Baltimore Magazine, and Reader's Digest, among others. Her National Magazine Award-winning article on black medical legend Vivien Thomas was the basis for the HBO film *Something the Lord Made*, winner of three Emmys and a 2005 Peabody Award.

–30–

For more information contact Clint Kimberling, Publicist, ckimberling@mississippi.edu
For news, reviews, ordering information visit www.justiceolderthanthelaw.com

*For the latest on what's happening at University Press of Mississippi, visit us at www.upress.state.ms.us
and read our blog at <http://upmississippi.blogspot.com>*

