

## FOUNDATION BREAKFAST SERIES CONTINUES WITH DISTINGUISHED AUTHOR MARTHA BURK

By Marilyn C. Kunstler

The New York Women's Bar Association Foundation, Inc. hosted the most recent in its series of breakfasts with distinguished authors on April 26, 2005, at the Harvard Club. The breakfast featured Martha Burk, chair of the National Council of Women's Organizations and author of the newly released *Cult of Power: Sex Discrimination in Corporate America and What Can Be Done About It*.

Dr. Burk was thrust into the national media spotlight in 2002 when she and the NCWO challenged the men-only membership policy of the Augusta National Golf Club. Augusta National is the home of the Masters Tournament, one of the premier events in the world of golf, which was won again this year by Tiger Woods.

The story of Dr. Burk's challenge to Augusta National and the over-the-top response by its members, who refused even to speak with Dr. Burk, was the impetus behind the book. As a result of Dr. Burk's efforts, corporate sponsors for the tournament withdrew their support. But despite the fact the club still has no women members, the corporate sponsors ultimately returned.

As Dr. Burk eloquently put it, the strength of the response to her challenge demonstrates that the issue of women members of Augusta National is not about the game of golf -- it is about something far more fundamental and important. It is "about power, about keeping women out of places where important business is done, and most of all, about how sex discrimination is viewed in business circles and by extension in society at large." Thus it exposes what Dr. Burk called "acceptable" discrimination: although a club that practiced racial discrimination would be unlikely to attract corporate sponsors to a premier sporting event like the Masters Tournament, those same corporate sponsors apparently consider sex discrimination to be tolerable.

Dr. Burk emphasized that such discrimination starts at the top -- and the membership of Augusta National represents if nothing else a club of those in the top circles of business and even government. To illustrate the point, Dr. Burk and her staff at NCWO compiled a list of members of Augusta National with their corporate affiliations. In an appendix to *Cult of Power*, this list is presented not by individual name, but by the business organizations they lead. The list is 30 pages long.

As Dr. Burk explained, the pressure must be kept on those members to admit women to "the Club." So long as sex discrimination still occurs at the top, the organizations they lead should not be allowed to hide behind listings as women-friendly workplaces. Indeed, such lists pose a danger of diluting the ultimate issue -- exclusionary policies that keep women out of the highest circles.

After her remarks, Dr. Burk answered questions from the audience and stayed to sign copies of her book. Dr. Burk's

publisher, Scribner, donated the books sold by the Foundation at the breakfast. The Foundation was also pleased that, through the generosity of its supporters, nine students from the Law and Public Service Program at Washington Irving High School were able to attend this important event.

The Foundation's breakfasts are fundraising events, with the proceeds of ticket and book sales going to support the Foundation's law school internship programs. Previous breakfasts have featured well-known authors Linda Fairstein, Kati Marton, Gail Collins and Beth Harpaz. Look for the announcement of the next breakfast in the fall.



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