

**Citation of Professor Constance Backhouse as an Honorary Fellow  
of the American Society for Legal History  
November 15, 2025**

The Society is pleased to welcome as Honorary Fellow Constance Backhouse, Distinguished University Professor at the University of Ottawa.

Professor Backhouse received her undergraduate degree from the University of Manitoba before earning her first law degree at Osgoode Hall and her LL.M. at Harvard. She taught at the University of Western Ontario before moving to the Faculty of Law at the University of Ottawa in 2000, where she is now Distinguished University Professor and University Research Chair. She was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada in 2004, a member of the Order of Canada in 2008, and a member of the Order of Ontario in 2010. Her many other honors include the Killam Prize in Social Sciences, the David W. Mundell Medal, the Gold Medal from the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada, the Molson Prize in Social Sciences, multiple book prizes, and honorary doctorates from four universities, as well as from the Law Society of Upper Canada. She has written ten books, co-edited six more, and published upwards of seventy-five articles.

Professor Backhouse's scholarly interests are broad, but it is her contributions to feminist legal history and the legal history of gender and race discrimination that stand out. Her impact on these fields began with her first book, *Petticoats and Prejudice: Women and Law in Nineteenth-Century Canada*, which launched the "new" feminist legal histories in Canada. Her use of narrative and her attention to diversity among the women challenging patriarchal structures became hallmarks of her subsequent work. The book remains "canonical reading in Canadian legal and women's history courses."

With her second book, *Colour-Coded: A Legal History of Racism in Canada, 1900-1950*, Professor Backhouse turned her gaze toward race and racial discrimination. It, too, became a classic and remains an anchor for scholarship in the field.

With each additional major work, Professor Backhouse has continued to break new ground. Although time precludes mentioning all of them, they are all, at their core, books that address access to justice and the struggle for social justice, through which she has informed and transformed both academic and professional understandings of the importance of law. These qualities are fully evident in her most recent book, *Reckoning with Racism: Police, Judges, and the RDS Case*.

Throughout her career, Professor Backhouse has built communities. She has worked tirelessly to build the field of legal history—and specifically feminist legal history—in Canada, the United States, and elsewhere, notably Australia and New Zealand. She has done this not only through her scholarship, but also through her teaching, mentoring, conference organizing, and generally prodding members of the legal history community to work in more creative ways. She co-founded the Feminist History Society and is a founding member and long-time President of the Women's Education and Research Foundation of Ontario, Inc. Her work as a scholar has always been intimately intertwined with work outside the academy. For example, she served for many years as a mediator and adjudicator of human rights complaints, including compensation claims arising from the physical, sexual, and psychological abuse of former students at Indian residential schools and of other groups whose members experienced sexual violence. She brings this lived experience to her scholarship.

The scholars we elect as Honorary Fellows are distinguished not simply by scholarship that has shaped the broad discipline of legal history and influenced the work of others, but also by their commitment to building their fields and helping other, younger, scholars stand on their shoulders and carry the work forward. This has been Professor Backhouse's life. She has made the field of legal history in Canada stronger and been an exemplary mentor to generations of legal historians. We celebrate her election as an Honorary Fellow of the Society.