

Arnette R. Hubbard



During Judge Arnette Hubbard's tenure as president of the National Bar Association, the organization sent a delegation to Washington, DC to meet with the secretary of state and other officials at the White

House. Members of the delegation (all male except for her) suggested that a man lead the delegation, as all their meetings would be with men. Judge Hubbard asked whether they also should hire a white man to lead the team since all the government officials would be white. It is no surprise to anyone who knows Judge Hubbard that she led that delegation.

When Judge Hubbard began her career, women were barely allowed in the room, let alone given access to the ladder. But as is true of all Margaret Brent Award honorees, when life presented her with closed doors, she made a way to open them.

Although a math and chemistry major in college at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, she always had been interested in how law served as an element of change. She already had experienced *Brown v. Board of Education*, the Montgomery bus boycott, sit-ins, freedom rides, and more. She recognized that, in every instance, there were courageous volunteers and lawyers, and these incidents made clear that the law had given discrimination its power—and could take it away.

Judge Hubbard began her career in 1969 as an attorney for the Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights Under Law and soon focused her practice on criminal defense and later on civil litigation for private and public clients. Her career as a private practitioner spanned two decades in Illinois and federal courts.

Voter education/participation has been a lifelong passion for Judge Hubbard. Following service as a commissioner on Chicago's first cable commission, she was appointed to the first of three consecutive three-year terms on the Chicago Board of Elections, where she served as the only female member for eight years. During this time, she was central to citywide programs to educate and register high school and college students to vote. She developed "Desert Fax," a program to deliver absentee ballots to overseas military personnel

by fax. She reformatted and annotated the National Voter Registration Act of 1993 and served on the statewide task force created to help implement it.

Internationally, Judge Hubbard was an official U.S. observer to the 1994 historic elections in South Africa in which Nelson Mandela won the presidency. The following year, President Clinton appointed her to the U.S. Presidential Observer Delegation for the Parliamentary and Local Elections in Haiti.

In 1997, she left the election board to accept appointment to fill a judicial vacancy in the Circuit Court of Cook County. She was elected judge by 85% of voters in a countywide contested election in 1998 and was retained in 2004.

Judge Hubbard helped create and served as vice-chair of the Illinois Commission on the 50th Anniversary of *Brown v. Board of Education*. The commission's first event re-enacting and commemorating that Supreme Court decision was broadcast live in 2004 to all Illinois public schools via PBS stations and the internet.

In 1981, Judge Hubbard was the first woman lawyer elected to the presidency of the National Bar Association, the nation's largest African American lawyer organization. Her historic rise to the presidency paved the way and opened the door for nine women lawyers to follow in her footsteps. Her presidency inspired and demonstrated to thousands of women lawyers that they, too, could become leaders of national organizations. During her leadership, she actively recruited more women to the bar to help change the culture. Judge Hubbard also was the first woman elected president of the Cook County Bar Association, the nation's oldest African American bar association.

Throughout her career, she has mentored women law students, women lawyers from all backgrounds throughout the country, and young students in high school and college (she still hosts law interns in her courtroom for lunch). Judge Hubbard often credits her success to the multiple "mothers" she had to nurture and support her, an exceptional network of women who provided her with spiritual, psychological, and emotional support. She frequently speaks to women audiences and shares how "mothering got her over"—and always reminds her audience that they must never lose sight of the bigger goals: to be an advocate and role model for all women.