

Hon. Judith W. Rogers

Last year, Judge Judith W. Rogers celebrated 30 years on the bench, first on the District of Columbia Court of Appeals and then on the United States Court of Appeals for the District of

Columbia Circuit, where she presently serves.

Judge Rogers has been a trailblazer throughout her career, graduating as one of 15 women in a Harvard Law School class of over 500 students. After law school, she clerked and then joined the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Columbia as an assistant U.S. attorney, only the third woman in the Criminal Division. Subsequently, she was involved in two legislative undertakings that transformed the District of Columbia.

First, she was part of a five-member team in the Office of the Deputy Attorney General at the U.S. Department of Justice to draft and shepherd through Congress legislation to establish a state-type court system for the District of Columbia. Congress enacted the D.C. Court Reform and Criminal Procedure Act in 1970. Over a three-year period, jurisdiction of local D.C. matters was transferred from the federal courts to a new D.C. trial court of general jurisdiction and a new appellate court as the highest court in the District of Columbia.

Second, she was involved in the development of home rule for the District of Columbia. Appointed the general counsel to the Congressional Commission on the Organization of the District of Columbia ("the Little Hoover Commission"), she thereafter served as the mayor's special assistant for legislation, concentrating on home rule proposals, and was the first woman appointed to the Cabinet. Congress enacted the D.C. Self-Government and Governmental Reorganization Act in 1973. Local functions were transferred from federal agencies to a newly-established mayor/council elected form of government, upon adoption of a charter by District of Columbia voters.

In 1979, she became the corporation counsel of the District of Columbia, the first woman appointed chief legal officer for the District of Columbia. Her responsibilities were comparable to those of a state attorney general, supervising over 100 attorneys in civil, criminal, legal

counsel, and housing and financing divisions. She inaugurated an antitrust program, personally oversaw the hiring of new attorneys to bring on board outstanding lawyers, including expanding the number of women and minority attorneys and supervisors in the office, and paved the way for D.C.'s membership in the National Association of State Attorneys General.

In 1983, President Reagan nominated her, and she was confirmed by the U.S. Senate, to be a judge on the District of Columbia Court of Appeals. Four years later, the D.C. Judicial Nomination Commission selected her to be the chief judge. She had obtained a Masters Degree in Judicial Administration from the University of Virginia Law School. As chief judge and chair of the Joint Committee on Judicial Administration, she convened two task forces—the Task Force on Gender Bias and the Task Force on Racial and Ethnic Bias—to examine the D.C. court system and oversaw implementation of their recommendations.

In November 1993, President Clinton nominated her to be a judge on the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit. Upon confirmation by the U.S. Senate in March 1994, she became only the fourth woman and the first African American woman to serve on this court. On the United States Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit, over half of the docket involves the federal government. For example, she heard the Microsoft antitrust appeal, American Indian trust fund class action claims against the Interior Department, numerous challenges to agency rulemakings, including by the EPA under the Clean Air and Clean Water Acts, petitions for review of agency decisions, and appeals by Guantanamo detainees.

The recipient of numerous awards, Judge Rogers has opened doors for women in the profession by demonstrating to generations of women lawyers that professional opportunities are limitless. At a time when many judicial chambers consisted of only male law clerks, she maintained a chambers that reflected diversity of gender, race, ethnic background, and sexual orientation. By recasting the established image and profile of one of the most prestigious clerkships in the country, Judge Rogers created a ripple effect from the ranks of law students aspiring to clerkships, to the staff in the courthouse and beyond as her former clerks move into their professional lives in government, private practice, and legal academia. For these reasons, she is a sterling example of a Margaret Brent Award honoree.