The Honorable Phyllis A. Kravitch
Judge, U.S. Court of Appeals, Eleventh Circuit
Savannah, Georgia

Judge Phyllis A. Kravitch is the first woman to be appointed a federal judge in the Southeast and the third woman appointed as a U.S. Circuit Court Judge in the country. Her 1979 appointment capped a long career dedicated to the struggle to achieve equal rights for women and minorities in the deep South.

Judge Kravitch's own struggle began at the University of Pennsylvania Law School in 1943 when despite being a law review editor, she was rejected for several federal and U.S. Supreme Court clerkships and law firm positions because of her sex. She pursued a wide ranging trialpractice in Savannah at a time when Georgia had no female judges, no women on juries and few female lawyers. Her practice included defending indigents in criminal cases and many civil rights suits, among them an attack on Georgia's white Democratic primary. Practicing in a conservative legal community, she soon won a name as a champion in the courts not only for the basic legal rights of minorities and women, but also for according proper respect to minority and female parties and witnesses. On the Chatham County Board of Education from 1949-1955, she was instrumental in eliminating sex- and race-based salary discrepancies and the use of sub-standard buildings for minority schools.

In 1975 Judge Kravitch was elected the first woman president of the Savannah Bar Association, one of the first women in the South to head a bar association. In 1976 she was elected the first woman Superior Court Judge in Georgia, paving the way for the subsequent appointment of other women to judicial positions in the state. Prior to her appointment to the federal bench, Judge Kravitch was active in establishing the Savannah Area Family Emergency (SAFE) shelter for battered women and the Savannah Rape Crisis Center, and assisted the Georgia legislature in revising family, juvenile and child abuse laws and statutes that were not gender neutral. On the United States Court of Appeals, Judge Kravitch continues as an intellectual force dedicated unswervingly to equal justice.