

2006 Margaret Brent Awards

Peggy A. Quince



Justice Peggy Quince was taught by her father that education was a priority. She grew up in rural Virginia where the school bus came very early in the morning. If she missed it, her father was already at work and could not take her to school. She went to bed at 8:30 pm every evening because there was no missing the school bus in her family.

Justice Quince still carries those early work hours to court each day. However, well before she became a state supreme court justice, she was a zoology major at Howard University, from which she graduated in 1970. She planned to attend medical school or to pursue a Doctorate in Science, but the social realities she experienced as a college student led to another pursuit. One day a conversation about legal matters among her law student friends spurred her to research a career in the law—one that would allow her to help bring about social change. In 1975, she received her J.D. from the Catholic University of America.

Upon graduation, Justice Quince worked with a Virginia law firm and later moved to Washington, D.C., where she accepted an appointment as a hearing officer with the Rental Accommodations Office administering that city's new rent control. After that, she briefly entered private practice in Norfolk, Virginia with an emphasis in real estate and domestic relations. In 1978, she moved to Bradenton, Florida, where she practiced general civil law. Two years later, Justice Quince joined the state's Attorney General's Office, Criminal Division as assistant attorney general. There she handled numerous appeals in the Second District Court of Appeal, the Florida Supreme Court, the Eleventh Circuit Court of Appeals, and the United States Supreme Court. She headed the busy Tampa bureau for five of her nearly 14-year tenure, handling death penalty cases exclusively for another three.

In 1993, Justice Quince became the first African-American woman to be appointed to the Second District

Court of Appeal. In 1998, she was appointed by Governor Chiles and Governor-elect Jeb Bush to the Florida Supreme Court, the first African-American woman to achieve that position. As a state supreme court justice, Justice Quince reviews final orders imposing the death sentence for prisoners in Florida and the constitutionality of laws passed by the Florida legislature in addition to many other matters that help make the legal system fair to all.

Justice Quince is on the executive council of the Appellate Section of the Florida Bar and is the Supreme Court liaison to the Workers' Compensation Committee, the Judicial Ethics Advisory Committee, and the Supreme Court's Family Court Steering Committee. Other Florida Bar Association activities include membership on the Gender Equality Committee, the Criminal Law Certification Committee, and the Executive Councils of the Government Lawyers and Criminal Law Sections.

She is the recipient of many honors and awards. Some of them are: Proclamation from the Broward Board of County Commissioners designating February 28, 1999 as "The Honorable Peggy A. Quince Appreciation Day"; 2001 William H. Hastie Award from the National Bar Association Judicial Council; 2001 Girl Scouts, Woman of Distinction Award; National Bar Association Women Lawyers Division Jurist Award for Outstanding Leadership Achievements and Dedicated Service to the Community At Large; and the 2002 Florida Bar Equal Opportunities in the Profession Award.

Despite her many achievements, Justice Quince maintains a down-to-earth sensibility and perspective. For her investiture as a supreme court justice, she reserved seats for busloads of children from her home church in Tampa. She wanted them to see that it was possible for one of their very own to rise to great heights. It had a tremendous impact on the children just as her example has had on women throughout the legal profession.