

ELAINE R. JONES ~ BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY

Elaine R. Jones is President and Director-Counsel, Emeritus of the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF), the nation's oldest law firm fighting for equal rights and justice for people of color, women, and the poor. When Ms. Jones took the helm of the Legal Defense Fund in 1993, she became the first woman to head the organization. She brought with her vast experience as a litigator and civil rights activist, as well as a passion for fairness and equality that dates back to her childhood.

Born in Norfolk, Virginia, Ms. Jones learned about the realities of racism and the importance of idealism from her mother, a college-educated school teacher, and her father, a Pullman porter and a member of the nation's first black trade union. From the age of eight, she knew she wanted to be a lawyer and to commit her life to the pursuit of equal justice.

After graduating with honors in political science from Howard University, Ms. Jones joined the Peace Corps and became one of the first African Americans to serve in Turkey. This began a long series of “firsts” in her career. Following her two-year Peace Corps stint, she became the first black woman to graduate from the University of Virginia School of Law, and subsequently the first African American to serve on the Board of Governors of the American Bar Association.

Ms. Jones was invited to join one of Wall Street’s most prestigious firms after her graduation. She turned it down to pursue the goal she had chosen in her youth and instead joined the Legal Defense Fund’s staff. With the exception of two years as Special Assistant to the United States Secretary of Transportation, she has remained with LDF ever since.

In her early years at LDF, Ms. Jones continued to blaze trails, becoming one of the first African American women to defend death row inmates. Only two years out of law school, she was counsel of record in *Furman v. Georgia*, a landmark U.S. Supreme Court case that abolished the death penalty in 37 states for 12 years. During this period, she also argued numerous employment discrimination cases, including class actions against some of the nation’s largest employers (e.g., *Patterson v. American Tobacco Co.*, *Stallworth v. Monsanto*, and *Swint v. Pullman Standard*).

Ms. Jones holds thirteen honorary degrees and the Jefferson Medal of Freedom, the highest honor awarded by the University of Virginia which does not award honorary degrees. She also has received the recognition of many organizations, including the Secretary’s Award of the Department of Transportation, first recipient of the Brennan Award of the DC Bar Association, the Hannah G. Solomon Award of The National Council of Jewish Women, Mickey Leland Public Service Award of the Congressional Black Caucus, Ida B. Wells-Barnett Justice Award of the Metropolitan Bar Association in New York City, Brennan Legacy Award of the Brennan Center, American Lawyer Lifetime Achievement Award, National Newspaper Publishers Association’s First Public Service Award, People for the American Way’s 2001 Democracy Award and The American Bar Association’s Commission on Women in the Profession (Margaret Brent Award). In December 2000, President William Jefferson Clinton presented her with the Eleanor Roosevelt Human Rights Award.

After a 32 year tenure with LDF, Ms. Jones stepped down on May 1, 2004.

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