

# Ann Claire Williams



Judge Ann Claire Williams began her career as a music and third grade teacher in the inner city schools of Detroit, Michigan, after graduating with a bachelor's degree in elementary education from Wayne State University and a master's degree

in guidance and counseling from the University of Michigan while working full-time. She received her law degree from the University of Notre Dame.

After graduation, Judge Williams clerked for Judge Robert A. Sprecher of the United States Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit. She was an assistant United States Attorney in Chicago from 1976 to 1985 and ultimately became chief of the Organized Drug Enforcement Task Force, responsible for organizing federal investigation and prosecution activities for a five-state region. She was the first African-American woman supervisor of a criminal division.

In 1985, President Ronald Reagan appointed Judge Williams as a United States District Judge in the Northern District of Illinois. She became one of the youngest people ever appointed to a federal judgeship and was the first African-American woman appointed to a district court in the three-state Seventh Circuit. In 1999, President Bill Clinton appointed Judge Williams to the United States Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit, making her the first African-American appointed to that court and the third African-American woman to serve on any federal appeals court.

Judge Williams has a long history of service to the judiciary. From 1993 to 1997, she chaired the Court Administration and Case Management Committee of the Judicial Conference of the United States. She was the first African-American woman appointed to chair a judicial conference committee.

In 1999, Judge Williams became the first African-American to serve as president of the Federal Judges Association, which represents more than 900 federal judges and works to preserve the independence of the federal judiciary. In 2008, Chief Justice John Roberts re-appointed Judge Williams to a second three-year term on the Supreme Court Fellows Program Commission.

She has committed herself to public service

and expanding the pipeline for minorities and women. In 1977, she co-founded Minority Legal Education Resources, which still operates today and has helped over 4,000 lawyers pass the Illinois bar at a rate that equals or exceeds the annual passage rate. In 1987, she helped found the Black Women Lawyers Association of Chicago, an association that supports African-American women in the legal profession. In 1991, Judge Williams created a public interest post-graduate legal fellowship program for Equal Justice Works. In 1993, she co-founded the Just The Beginning Foundation, an organization that was initially created to celebrate the integration of the federal judiciary and has evolved into a pipeline organization to encourage students of color and other under-represented groups to pursue legal careers.

Judge Williams also has a long-standing commitment to legal education and training. She has taught with the National Institute for Trial Advocacy for over 20 years. In addition, she judges moot court competitions at law schools across the country and has served as an adjunct professor and instructor in many programs for federal judges, practicing attorneys, and law students.

Judge Williams has led or participated in numerous judicial delegations to foreign countries. In 2002 and 2003, she led delegations to Ghana to train the Ghanaian judiciary. She has taught trial and appellate advocacy at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda and the Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia. In 2006, Judge Williams became the first non-Kenyan judge to attend and address the Kenyan Judicial Colloquium. She has returned to the Colloquium each summer and has spearheaded the Kenyan Women's Trial Advocacy Program, which focuses on domestic violence. In 2007, Judge Williams led a delegation in Liberia for Lawyers Without Borders to teach trial advocacy skills to Liberian magistrate judges, prosecutors, and defense attorneys.

Among many awards, Judge Williams in 2000 became the first African-American woman to receive *Chicago Lawyer's* Person of the Year award, and both *Crain's* magazine and the *Chicago Sun-Times* named her in 2004 as one of Chicago's 100 Most Influential and Powerful Women. In 2008, she received the National Bar Association's Gertrude E. Rush Award and the ABA's Council on Legal Education Opportunity Legacy Diversity Award.