

January 1997

Introduction of Elaine R. Jones

The Hon. Thelton Henderson

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.law.ggu.edu/ggulrev>

 Part of the [Other Law Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

The Hon. Thelton Henderson, *Introduction of Elaine R. Jones*, 27 Golden Gate U. L. Rev. (1997).
<http://digitalcommons.law.ggu.edu/ggulrev/vol27/iss3/3>

This Comment is brought to you for free and open access by the Academic Journals at GGU Law Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Golden Gate University Law Review by an authorized administrator of GGU Law Digital Commons. For more information, please contact jfischer@ggu.edu.

INTRODUCTION OF ELAINE R. JONES*

REMARKS OF HON. THELTON HENDERSON**

Throughout this introduction you're going to hear the word "first" a number of times. And you'll realize that Elaine Jones is a woman of many important firsts. I've counted Elaine Jones as a much valued and inspiring friend since about 1979 when she offered me her wise counsel and moral support as I, innocent in the ways of federal judicial appointments, expressed concern to her about attempts by some to sidetrack my nomination by Senator Alan Cranston to the position that I am now so fortunate to hold.

Elaine was then the NAACP Legal Defense Fund's Legislative advocate in Washington D.C. Though barely in her 30s Elaine was already a powerful force to be reckoned with — known in Washington D.C. corridors of power for her zealous and extraordinarily effective advocacy on behalf of the disenfranchised, and also known for her twinkling eyes and the Virginia tidewater twang that you'll soon hear. Elaine helped me negotiate the treacherous shoals of the judicial confirmation process. I continue to be grateful to you for that, Elaine, as do countless other African-American federal judges who were similarly shepherded through the confirmation process.

Born in Norfolk, Virginia, Elaine's youthful social sensibili-

* DELIVERED ON MARCH 14, 1996 AT GOLDEN GATE UNIVERSITY.

** CHIEF JUDGE, UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT, NORTHERN DISTRICT CALIFORNIA; BA, 1956, JD, 1962, UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY.

ties were shaped and sustained by the powerful and sometimes painful influences of the Jim Crow South, which taught that people like her were something less than their white counterparts. Her mother was a college-educated school teacher. Her father was a pullman porter and a member of the nation's first black trade union. From them Elaine learned both about the realities of racism and the importance of idealism. It's said that at the age of 8 she knew she wanted to be a civil rights lawyer.

Following a two-year stint in the Peace Corp in Turkey, where she was the first African-American to serve in that country, she became the first black woman to enroll in the University of Virginia School of Law; in 1970 she became that school's first female African-American graduate. Turning down a job with a Wall Street law firm, Elaine instead chose to follow her dream of being a civil rights lawyer and joined the Legal Defense Fund's staff where she has remained to this day, with one brief hiatus.

In her early years at the Legal Defense Fund, Elaine litigated employment discrimination cases as well as death penalty cases. One of the first African-American women to defend death row inmates, Elaine argued capital cases throughout the South, braving harassment from the Ku Klux Klan and profound disrespect from the southern legal system of that day. She was counsel of record in *Furman v. Georgia*, the landmark Supreme Court case that invalidated death penalty laws in 37 states; I'm sure you lawyers and professors and law students have studied that case in criminal law classes.

Briefly leaving the Legal Defense Fund in 1975 to serve as special assistant to the U.S. Secretary of Transportation, Elaine returned to LDF in 1977 to become the first legislative advocate in Washington, and as I've said, it was then that I first met Elaine. Her work included efforts to re-shape the federal judiciary to include more people of color and more judges committed to equal rights. And I hope, Elaine, that I and the other judges that you've helped have not disappointed you in that commitment.

Earning a reputation as a passionate and effective advo-

cate for equal justice, Elaine played a key role in securing passage of legislative milestones such as the Voting Rights Act Amendment of 1982, the Fair Housing Act of 1988, the Civil Rights Restoration Act of 1988 and the Civil Rights Act of 1991.

In 1993 Elaine was appointed Director/Counsel of the Legal Defense Fund, replacing the great Julius Chambers. The nation's oldest and most respected public interest civil rights law organization, the Legal Defense Fund was founded in 1940 under the leadership of the late Thurgood Marshall. Elaine (another first) is the first woman to head that venerable and great organization. A leading voice in our nation's public debate over questions of race and equality, and an architect of the civil rights community strategy to meet the current attack on affirmative action, I honestly can think of no one more intimately and effectively involved in defining and correcting America's greatest social cancer, which is racism, and thus I can think of no one more qualified to talk to you here today on the current issues in civil rights law. We're privileged to have Elaine Jones with us today to share her thoughts on these important subjects. Please join me in giving a warm San Francisco Golden Gate welcome to Elaine R. Jones.