



Chief Justice Bernette Joshua Johnson was born in Donaldsonville, Louisiana in Ascension Parish. After attending New Orleans public schools, she enrolled at Spelman College in Atlanta, Georgia on academic scholarship. She received a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Political Science in 1964. Chief Justice Johnson was one of the first African-American women to attend the Paul M. Hebert Law Center at Louisiana State University, where she received her Juris Doctorate degree in 1969. She also received an Honorary Doctorate in Law from Spelman College at commencement services in 2001.

Chief Justice Johnson's judicial career began in 1984 when she was the first woman elected to serve on the Civil District Court of New Orleans. In 1994, her colleagues elected her Chief Judge. Chief Justice Johnson was then elected to serve on the Louisiana Supreme Court in 1994, and was re-elected without opposition in 2000 and 2010. As the senior justice on the Court, she was sworn in as Chief Justice on February 1, 2013. She is the Court's 25th Chief Justice, its second female Chief Justice, and its first African-American Chief Justice.

On the bench, Chief Justice Johnson emphasizes principles of fairness and equality. As Chief Justice, she chairs the Louisiana Judicial Council and the Human Resources Committee, and is a member of the Judicial Budgetary Control Board. Chief Justice Johnson has also served as a member of the Court's Legal Services Task Force and the National Campaign on Best Practices in the area of Racial and Ethnic Fairness in the Courts. She has worked closely with the Court's Mandatory Continuing Legal Education Committee as well as the Committee on Bar Admissions, in an effort to advance the legal profession in the State of Louisiana. She has also championed many successful initiatives, including the training and certification of Limited English Proficiency Interpreters in the Courts and implementation of an electronic filing system for the Supreme Court.

Chief Justice Johnson has always been an advocate for social justice and civil rights. She worked as a community organizer with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) Legal Defense & Educational Fund, and at the U.S. Department of Justice's Civil Rights Division. Following law school, Chief Justice Johnson became the Managing Attorney of the New Orleans Legal Assistance Corporation (NOLAC), where she provided legal services to clients in socio-economically deprived neighborhoods. She practiced in federal, state and juvenile courts, advancing the rights of children, the poor, the elderly and the disenfranchised. In 1981, Chief Justice Johnson joined the City Attorney's staff, and later became a Deputy City Attorney for the City of New Orleans.

Having dedicated herself to a life of service, Chief Justice Johnson is widely recognized as a trailblazer in the judiciary and is the recipient of numerous highly coveted awards. In October of 2013, Chief Justice Johnson received the prestigious Joan Dempsey Klein Award by the National Association of Women Judges (NAWJ) during the organization's 35th Annual Conference, which she co-chaired with Judge Mary Hotard Becnel. As the 2013 recipient, Chief Justice Johnson joins a distinguished list of Joan Dempsey Klein Award recipients that include U.S. Supreme Court Justices Sandra Day O'Connor (1982), Ruth Bader Ginsburg (2003) and Sonia Sotomayor (2009). The award recognizes Chief Justice Johnson's assistance to women judges in becoming more proficient in their profession and in solving the legal, social and ethical problems associated with the judiciary. According to NAWJ President Joan Churchill, "Chief Justice Johnson overcame many obstacles in her judicial career while making impressive contributions to women in the legal profession."

The American Bar Association (ABA) has long recognized the value of Chief Justice Johnson's service, awarding her the 2010 Spirit of Excellence Award from the ABA's Commission on Racial and Ethnic Diversity in the Profession, as well as the 1998 Margaret Brent Women Lawyers of Achievement Award. Chief Justice Johnson was appointed twice by ABA Presidents to the Commission on Interest on Lawyer Trust Accounts (IOLTA).

The National Bar Association (NBA), the nation's oldest and largest association of African American lawyers and judges, has also recognized Chief Justice Johnson's work as a long-time member of the organization. In 2010, Chief Justice Johnson was inducted into the NBA Hall of Fame at the annual meeting and was awarded the Distinguished Civil Rights Advocate Award by Attorney Barbara Arnwine on behalf of the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under the Law. In 1998, Chief Justice Johnson was the Chairperson of the NBA-Judicial Council and chaired the annual luncheon in Memphis, Tennessee where United States Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas was the keynote speaker.

Chief Justice Johnson has also received many other notable awards, including the 2013 Martin Luther King Unsung Hero Award presented by LSU; the 2012 National Urban League President's Award, the 2012 National Association for the Advancement of Colored People Award; the 2012 Exceptional Leadership Award presented by the Louisiana Bar Association Committee on Diversity; the 2009 Distinguished Jurist Award presented by the Louisiana Bar Foundation; the 2000 Medal of Honor presented by the Mayor of the City of New Orleans; the 2000 Women of Wonder Award by the National Council of Negro Women; the first ever Ernest N. Morial Award presented by the New Orleans Legal Assistance Corporation and the NAACP Louisiana State Conference A.P. Tureaud Citizenship Award. Chief Justice Johnson was inducted into the LSU Law Center's Hall of Fame in 1996 and was recently named as an Honorary Inductee into the LSU Order of the Coif.

In addition to serving on the bench, Chief Justice Johnson is actively involved in the legal community. She is an active member of the A.P. Tureaud Chapter of the American Inns of Court, the National Association of Women Judges (NAWJ) and the Women in Prison Project. Chief Justice Johnson is also an active member of the American Bar Association, the National Bar Association, the Louisiana State Bar Association, the New Orleans Bar Association and the Louisiana Judicial Council. She is a member of the Greater St. Stephen Full Gospel Baptist Church, where she served on the Trustee Board. She is also an active member of the Omicron Nu Zeta Chapter, Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc., and the New Orleans Chapter of Links, Inc., organizations founded upon the importance of community service and fellowship.

Chief Justice Johnson is frequently asked to address legal, academic, and community groups both nationally and internationally. On April 9, 2013, Chief Justice Johnson delivered the State of the Judiciary Address before the Louisiana Legislature. In May of 2013, she delivered the Commencement Address at Southern University as well as her alma mater, LSU Law School. In 2008, she was the guest lecturer at the Urban League of Portland, Oregon and in 2006, she lectured law students at Wuhan University Law School, in Wuhan, China. She was also the Women's History Month Speaker at several U.S. Military bases in Germany in March of 2001. Chief Justice Johnson is the proud parent of two industrious and conscientious adult children: a son David, an accountant, who lives in Atlanta with his family, and a daughter Rachael, an attorney licensed to practice law in Florida and Louisiana.