

Chief Justice Bernette Joshua Johnson - Bio

Chief Justice Bernette Joshua Johnson is the Louisiana Supreme Court's 25th Chief Justice, its second female Chief Justice, and its first African-American Chief Justice. Born in Donaldsonville, Louisiana, she attended Spelman College in Atlanta, Georgia where she earned a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Political Science in 1964. She was one of the first African-American women to attend and earn a Juris Doctorate degree from the Paul M. Hebert Law Center at Louisiana State University in 1969. She also received an Honorary Doctorate in Law from Spelman College in 2001. 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.

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. She 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.

On the bench, Chief Justice Johnson emphasizes principles of fairness and equality. She has served on the National Campaign on Best Practices in the area of Racial and Ethnic Fairness in the Courts. She has also championed many successful initiatives, including the training and certification of the Limited English Proficiency Interpreters in the courts and the implementation of an electronic filing system for the Louisiana Supreme Court. Chief Justice Johnson has always been an advocate for social justice and civil rights. Following law school, she 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.

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 award. In October of 2013, the Chief received the prestigious Joan Dempsey Klein Award by the National Association of Women Judges (NAWJ). She joins a distinguished list of Joan Dempsey Klein Award recipients that include U.S. Supreme Court Justices Sandra Day O'Connor, Ruth Bader Ginsburg, and Sonia Sotomayor. 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 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. The National Bar Association, 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, she 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.

Chief Justice Johnson has received many other notable awards, including the 2013 Martin Luther King Unsung Hero Award presented by LSU; the 2012 National and 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 State Bar Association Diversity Committee; 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; and the first-ever Ernest N. Morial Award presented by the New Orleans Legal Assistance Corporation.

On January 15, 2016, in recognition of Chief Justice Johnson's widespread impact, the Louisiana State Bar Association Board of Governors unanimously voted to combine the Trailblazer and Human Rights Awards into the aptly named, "Louisiana State Bar Association Chief Justice Bernette Joshua Johnson Trailblazer Award," bestowed by the LSBA each year at their annual meeting. Chief Justice Johnson was recently honored as a 2018 Good Apple Honoree by Louisiana Appleseed for increasing access to justice throughout her esteemed career and was presented the Whitney M. Young Award by the Southeast Louisiana Council of the Boy Scouts of America at its Diversity in Scouting Gala.

Chief Justice Johnson is a true civil servant who has spent her entire professional life serving her state, our profession, and our citizens. In addition to her professional achievements, and service to her community, Chief Justice Johnson is most proud of her commitment to her family, including her son David Johnson, an accountant, who lives in Atlanta with his family, and her daughter, Judge Rachael Johnson, who now serves at

Orleans Parish Civil District Court.