

Introducing the Newest Supreme Court Justices: Justice Piper D. Griffin Sworn In on Jan. 1

By Judge Tiffany G. Chase and Judge Karelia R. Stewart



Louisiana Supreme Court Justice Piper D. Griffin. Photo provided by the Louisiana Supreme Court.

On the morning of Nov. 3, 2020, when most candidates were casting their votes and preparing for a last-ditch effort of campaigning, Louisiana Supreme Court Justice Piper D. Griffin was baking her famous pound cake and brownies — in some instances, even delivering them to her dedicated campaign volunteers. You need only meet Justice Griffin once to immediately recognize her selflessness, dedication, generosity and compassion for the community she serves. Couple these personal characteristics with her effective leadership skills, love for the law, scholarship and analytical prowess and you have Piper D. Griffin, a jurist who has prepared and is ready to serve as the third African-American justice on the Louisiana Supreme Court.

A lifelong resident of New Orleans, Justice Griffin graduated from Xavier Preparatory High School in 1980 and the University of Notre Dame with a BA degree in 1984. Upon graduation from Notre Dame, she received the Leonard A. Collins Honorary Award in recognition of her contributions to student life, including her many volunteer and leadership roles at the university. In 1997, she was recognized as one of the 50 most distinguished African-American graduates in the history of the University of Notre Dame.

Justice Griffin returned to Louisiana and graduated from Louisiana State University Paul M. Hebert Law Center in 1987. She credits her return to her friend, Irma Dixon, who encouraged her, observing that Louisiana's best and brightest were not returning, thus creating a "brain drain" in the state. For 15 years, Justice Griffin practiced in the area of civil litigation, handling a plethora of complex casualty litigation cases in both state and federal courts. She was the first African-American female Louisiana Bar examiner, writing the Constitutional Law Bar Exam for 10 years.

In 2001, she was elected to the Orleans Parish Civil District Court and served with honor and distinction for nearly 20 years. During her tenure, she was unanimously elected by her peers to serve



Louisiana Supreme Court Justice Piper D. Griffin, fifth from left, was sworn in on Jan. 1 by Judge Tiffany G. Chase, far right. Attending the installation were, from left, Kaci Griffin, Keenan Fortenberry, Lisa Griffin, Betty Griffin, Justice Griffin, Cleo Brumfield, Jr. and Judge Chase.

as chief judge. Her extensive experience as a trial judge has afforded her keen insight into effectively interpreting legal policies and understanding how people are impacted by verdicts rendered. When asked "why" she wanted to be a justice on the Supreme Court, Justice Griffin's response, consistent with her core values, was, "I want to continue to serve the community that nurtured and afforded me the opportunity to uphold justice."

Justice Griffin has served in various leadership positions throughout her tenure in the judiciary. She served as president of the Louisiana Judicial Council of the National Bar Association, as well as president of the 4th and 5th Circuit Judges Association and second vice president of the Louisiana District Judges' Association. She has been actively involved with the Louisiana Judicial Council Foundation; served on the Greater New Orleans Louis A. Martinet Legal Society, Inc. Scholarship

Committee and the Louisiana Bar Foundation Board.

Additionally, and more germane to her role on the Supreme Court, Justice Griffin served on the board of the Louisiana State Law Institute and supplied her valuable insight on several Supreme Court committees, including the Committee on Bar Admissions Testing, Budgetary Control Board and the Committee on Judicial Ethics.

Never one to seek personal recognition for her deeds, nonetheless, Justice Griffin has received several honors from numerous organizations in recognition of her achievements. Specifically, she has received the Louis A. Martinet Lifetime Achievement Award, the National Bar Association Judicial Council's Sarah T. Harper Humanitarian Award, the Ernest N. Morial Judicial Pacesetter Award and, in 2020, the Thomas Jefferson Justice by the People Award from the American Board of Trial Advocates.

It is not the judicial accolades that define our newest Supreme Court justice. It is her humble beginnings, commitment to her community and dedication to uplifting others.

Justice Griffin's biggest influencer is her mother, Betty Griffin, who raised her and her sister, Lisa Griffin, as a single parent. When asked about her proudest accomplishment, Justice Griffin replied: "Personally, I am very proud of having served as a foster parent, the work I did with five other graduates to help my high school, Xavier Prep, stay open, as well as the mentoring I have done with high school, college and law school students. When I see the children that I have mentored achieve success, I am humbled and grateful for my role in giving them the opportunity to obtain an education. I thank God that I was able to help."

The common and quintessential theme that is embedded in her answer: uplifting others and giving a voice to those who are underrepresented. As a jurist, she offers a

depth of warmth and kindness grounded in analytical rigor. She cares about the judiciary and wants lawyers and judges to work towards justice and fairness. Justice Griffin will provide the diligence to master complex and competing issues, and a moral compass to make sure the system works for all. This is exactly what the judiciary needs.

The Brennan Center for Justice released an updated report in February 2020 which detailed vast racial, ethnic and gender disparities on state high courts across the country. Similar to other states, the diversity on Louisiana's highest court is disproportionate to Louisiana's racial demographics. Diversity is not just about gender or race but instead focuses on bringing different perspectives and ideas.

Justice Griffin became a member of Louisiana's highest Court on Jan. 1, 2021, in the midst of a worldwide pandemic, unprecedented political polarization and embattled debates of social injustice. This biographical information reveals that

Justice Griffin will undoubtedly be an asset to our judiciary. She brings her vast experiences, passion for justice, strong work ethic, scholarship and compassion.

In giving advice, Justice Griffin often says, "You have to be at the table" to effectuate change. Our judiciary, our state, is better knowing that she is at the table.

Judge Tiffany Gautier Chase has served on the Louisiana 4th Circuit Court of Appeal bench since 2017. Previously, she served on the Orleans Parish Civil District Court bench from 2007-17. (410 Royal St., New Orleans, LA 70130)



Judge Karelia Rachelle Stewart has served on the 1st Judicial District Court bench for Caddo Parish since 2014. (Ste. 300-D, 501 Texas St., Shreveport, LA 71101)



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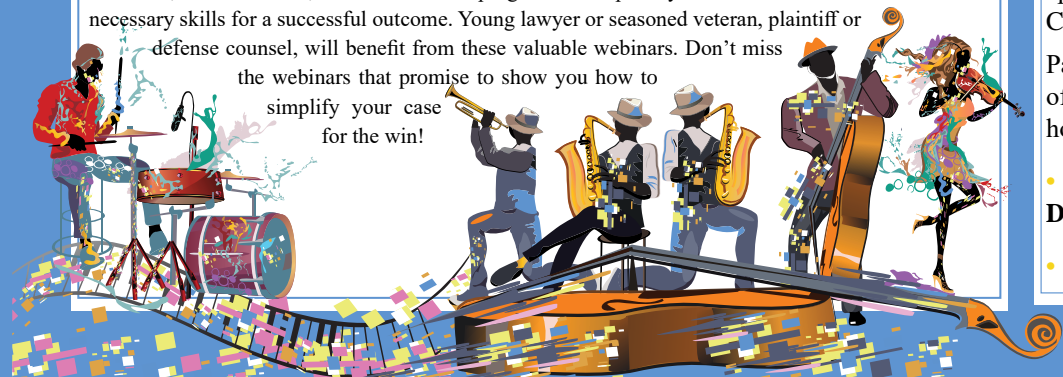
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