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Shattering glass ceilings	2
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SHATTERING GLASS CEILINGS

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Setting a historic milestone, Ketanji Brown Jackson became the first Black woman to be confirmed to the U.S. Supreme Court by the Senate. She is also the first former public defender to be nominated to the country's top court and will replace Justice Stephen Breyer for whom she once worked as a law clerk. In her speech after her nomination to the Supreme Court was confirmed, Judge Jackson thanked Justice Breyer for the opportunity to work with him early on in her career. "My clerkship with Justice Breyer, in particular, was an extraordinary gift and one for which I've only become more grateful with each passing year."

Judge Jackson was confirmed to the Supreme Court by 53 votes in favour of her, which included three Republican votes. Vice President Kamala Harris, the first Black woman to hold the post, presided over the vote as the leader of the Senate. A total of nine justices make up the U.S. Supreme Court panel. With Judge Jackson's appointment, the number of women justices on the panel will rise to four.

"It has taken 232 years and 115 prior appointments for a Black woman to be selected to serve on the Supreme Court of the United States. But we've made it. We've made it, all of us. All of us," Judge Jackson said, invoking a round of applause from the attendees at the South Lawn in White House after her nomination was confirmed.

During his campaign before the 2020 presidential election, Joe Biden had pledged that he will nominate a Black woman to the Supreme Court if a vacancy arises during his tenure.

Growing up

She was born in Washington D.C. and grew up in Miami, Florida. Both her parents had attended segregated primary schools as children and went on to study at historically Black colleges and universities. Judge Jackson traces her love for law back to when her father was attending law school while she was in preschool. In 2017, at the University of Georgia School of Law's 35th Edith House Lecture, Judge Jackson talked about how she used to sit next to her father, colouring her books, while he read cases and prepared for his classes.

Both her parents started their careers as public-school teachers and went on to hold important administrative and leadership positions in the Miami-Dade public school system. Despite being a high achiever throughout her academic life, Ms. Jackson often faced incidents of racism, including when her high school guidance counsellor told her not to "set her sights so high" when she expressed a desire to attend Harvard University. The guidance counsellor's harsh words did not hold Ms. Jackson back, and she graduated from Harvard. She then attended Harvard Law School and served as an editor of the *Harvard Law Review*.

Legal career

Judge Jackson began her legal career as a clerk for three judges and then moved on to work for the U.S. Sentencing Commission after a short period of private practice. She was nominated to serve as an attorney for the Sentencing Commission by former President Barack Obama in 2009. "I am grateful for Ms. Jackson's willingness to serve and confident that she will be an unwavering voice for justice and fairness on the Sentencing Commission," Mr. Obama had said after declaring his nomination.

Judge Jackson then moved on to serve as a judge at the District Court for the District of Columbia, and her nomination was surprisingly supported by Republican vice-presidential nominee Paul Ryan, to whom she is related by marriage. “Our politics may differ, but my praise for Ketanji's intellect, for her character, for her integrity, it is unequivocal,” Mr. Ryan had said.

During her tenure, Judge Jackson took up multiple cases related to the Trump administration. “Presidents are not kings,” she once famously said.

Describing her methodology for approaching cases, Judge Jackson said during the Senate hearing that she is impartial and ensures that she is “adhering to the limits of (her) judicial authority”. She explained that she follows a three-step process to approach a case — proceeding from a position of neutrality, taking all appropriate inputs, and interpreting the law to the facts of the case. Judge Jackson is 51 years old, which means that she is staring at the possibility of serving on the Supreme Court Bench of justices for decades.

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