



## Supreme Court of Florida

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### **Former Chief Justice Leander J. Shaw, Jr., 1930-2015**

TALLAHASSEE – Former Florida Chief Justice Leander J. Shaw, Jr., died early Monday morning after a lengthy illness. He was 85.

“Justice Shaw served Florida with dedication and distinction, first as a lawyer and then as a member of Florida’s highest court for two decades,” Chief Justice Jorge Labarga said. “As Florida’s first African-American chief justice, his service also marked an important step forward for diversity in our state.

“On behalf of Florida’s entire legal community, the judicial branch of government and my colleagues on the Supreme Court, I offer sincere condolences to his family.”

Born in Salem, Virginia, Justice Shaw served in the Korean conflict as an artillery officer before going to law school and earning his law degree from Howard University in 1957. He was appointed to the Florida Supreme Court in 1983 by Gov. Bob Graham, becoming the second African-American on the Supreme Court. He was Chief Justice from 1990 to 1992.

Shaw came to the Court at a time when it still was shadowed by the aftermath of scandals in the 1970s that had prompted impeachment investigations of Justices and led to a massive 1976 reform in the way Florida appeals judges were chosen. The scandals arose from allegations that some Justices had been improperly influenced by the same monied interests that had backed their election campaigns.

In the wake of the scandal, the voters of Florida eliminated contested judicial elections at all of the state’s appeals courts and created a new system whereby the Governor guided by a nominating commission vetted candidates and filled vacancies on the state’s high court.

Justice Shaw was the first African-American chosen under this new system.

“Leander Shaw was one of a handful of judges,” Labarga said, “who helped restore the public’s faith in the Supreme Court and who transformed it into one of the most respected courts in the nation. This was no small feat after the scandals of the 1970s.”

Before joining the Supreme Court, Justice Shaw served on the First District Court of Appeal for three years. He began his legal career in Tallahassee by teaching law at Florida A&M University, before entering private practice in Jacksonville. He also worked as a public defender and a prosecutor.

Shaw’s career began in the days of legal segregation in Florida. When he was admitted to The Florida Bar in 1960, he became one of only a handful of black attorneys practicing in the state. He often quipped that, when he traveled to handle a case in small towns, people would come just to see a black lawyer because it was such a novelty to them.

When Shaw took the Bar Exam, he was not permitted to stay the night at the hotel where it was administered – the old DuPont Plaza in Miami – because it was for whites only. This hotel was demolished in 2004-05.

Arrangements will include a memorial service at the Supreme Court. Details are pending.

More information on Justice Shaw can be found on his official website at:

<http://www.floridasupremecourt.org/justices/retired/shaw.shtml>

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