

Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with The Honorable Leah Ward Sears

PERSON

Sears, Leah Ward, 1955-

Alternative Names: The Honorable Leah Ward Sears; Chief Justice Leah Ward Sears;

Life Dates: June 13, 1955-

Place of Birth: Heidelberg, Germany

Residence: Atlanta, GA

Work: Atlanta, GA

Occupations: State Supreme Court Judge

Biographical Note

The Honorable Leah Ward Sears became the first woman and the youngest person ever to become a Georgia State Supreme Court Justice. Sears was born on June 13, 1955 in Heidelberg, Germany. She grew up traveling the globe with her family and father, Colonel Thomas Sears, who served as Master Army Aviator in the U.S. Army. The family eventually settled in Savannah, Georgia, where she attended elementary and high schools. In 1976, Sears earned her B.S. degree at Cornell University and moved to Atlanta, where she attended Emory University to earn her J.D. degree.

After earning her law degree, Sears decided to stay in Atlanta. There, she made a name for herself working as a trial lawyer for the law firm, Alston and Bird. In 1985, after five years of working, Mayor Andrew Young appointed her as a judge in Atlanta's City Traffic Court. After serving three years in this position, Sears was appointed as a Superior Court judge for the state of Georgia. She became the first African American woman to hold such a position in the state of Georgia. In February of 1992, Governor Zell Miller appointed Sears to Georgia's Supreme Court, where she became the first woman and the youngest person ever to serve. Sears retained her seat on the state's Supreme Court by winning a statewide election in the fall of 1992. This made her the first woman to win a contested statewide election in Georgia. In 1993, Sears received an honorary Doctor of Law degree from Morehouse College. She then continued her education and earned a LL.M degree from the University of Virginia School of Law. Sears is currently the number two justice in Georgia's Supreme Court. She is considered next in line to become the state's chief justice.

Sears has several civic and professional affiliations. She served as chairman of both the American Bar Association's Board of Elections and the Judicial Section of the Atlanta Bar's Minority Clerkship Program. Sears founded and served as the first president of the Georgia Association of Black Women Attorneys. Currently, she serves as an adjunct professor of pretrial litigation at the Emory Law School Council and is a member of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. In 1998, Sears was named the "Georgia Woman of the Year" by the Georgia State Commission on Women. In 2001, she was the recipient of the Emory Medal from Emory University for being an "Outstanding Young Alumna".

Sears is married to Haskell Sears Ward, and they have two children, a son, Addison, and a daughter, Brennan.

Sears was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on October 15, 2004.

Related Entries

Beaver Heights Elementary [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Bartlett Middle School [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Wilder Junior High School [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Savannah High School [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Alfred E. Beach High School [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Duke University School of Law [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Emory University School of Law [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

National Judicial College [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

University of Virginia School of Law [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Lanham Elementary School [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Cornell University [STUDENTOF]

[from ? to ?]

Emory University Law School [EMPLOYEEOf]
[from ? to ?]

Adjunct Professor of Pretrial Litigation

City of Atlanta [EMPLOYEEOf]
[from ? to ?]

Judge

Alston and Bird [EMPLOYEEOf]
[from 2000 to ?]

Trial Attorney

Atlanta's City Traffic Court [EMPLOYEEOf]
[from 1992 to 1992]

Judge

State of Georgia [EMPLOYEEOf]
[from 198809 to 199202]

Superior Court Judge

Georgia Supreme Court [EMPLOYEEOf]
[from 1992 to ?]

Justice

Georgia Commission on Interpreters [MEMBEROf]
[from ? to ?]

Chair

American Bar Association [MEMBEROf]
[from ? to ?]

Chair, Board of Elections

Georgia Association of Black Woman Attorneys [MEMBEROf]
[from ? to ?]

Founder

Alpha Kappa Alpha [MEMBEROf]
[from ? to ?]

Member

Battered Women's Project of Columbus, GA [MEMBEROf]
[from ? to ?]

Founder

