Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with The Honorable Damon J. Keith

Keith, Damon J., 1922-2019

Alternative Names: The Honorable Damon J. Keith;

Life Dates: July 4, 1922-April 28, 2019

Work: Detroit, MI

Occupations: Federal District Court Judge

Biographical Note

Judge Damon J. Keith has had an illustrious career. Born on July 4, 1922, he has served as a United States Court of Appeals judge for the Sixth Circuit since 1977. Keith was the youngest of six children born to Annie and Perry Alexander Keith and the first to attend college. He graduated from West Virginia State College in 1943 and was then drafted into the military. His experiences in the segregated Army strengthened his conviction to the cause of civil rights. Keith
received a J.D. from Howard Law School in 1949, passed the Michigan bar exam in 1950, and earned an L.L.M. from Wayne State University School of Law in 1956.

In 1964, Keith established his own law practice, Keith, Conyers, Anderson, Brown, & Wahls, with four other African American attorneys. Keith was also very active in the Democratic Party and used his political connections to help his community. He served as the chair to the Detroit Housing Commission and the Michigan Civil Rights Commission. In 1967, President Lyndon Johnson appointed Keith to the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Michigan, where he served as Chief Judge from 1975 to 1977 before President Jimmy Carter appointed him to the Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit. Keith took senior status in 1995.

In 1993, the Damon J. Keith Law Collection, an archival resource devoted to the substantial historical accomplishments of African American lawyers and judges as well as the African American legal experience, was created at Wayne State University and named in his honor. Keith has received numerous awards and honors, including: thirty-eight honorary degrees from various colleges and universities; the NAACP's highest award, the Spingarn Medal; the 1997 American Bar Association's Thurgood Marshall Award; the Detroit Urban League's 1998 Distinguished Warrior Award; the Distinguished Public Service Award for the National Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith; the prestigious Edward J. Devitt Award for Distinguished Service to Justice; the Pinnacle Award at the 2000 Trumpet Awards in Atlanta; and the American Bar Association Spirit of Excellence Award in 2001.

Keith has also received the lifetime achievement award from the National Black College Alumni and was inducted into their Hall of Fame. Keith is married to Rachel Boone Keith, M.D., with whom he has three
daughters.

Keith passed away on April 28, 2019.

Related Entries

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

McMichael Intermediate School [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

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

high school diploma

West Virginia State University [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

B.A.

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

J.D.

Wayne State University School of Law [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

L.L.M.

Loomis, Jones, Piper & Cohen [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1950 to 1952]

Associate

Eastern District of Michigan [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1967 to 1977]

United States District Judge

United States District Court, Eastern District of Michigan [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1975 to 1977]

Chief Judge

United States Court of Appeals, Sixth Circuit
[employeeOf]
[from 1977 to ?]

Judge

Damon J. Keith Law Collection [memberOf]
[from ? to ?]

Founder

Detroit NAACP Fight For Freedom Fund [memberOf]
[from ? to ?]

Founder