



Associate Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson Warmly Welcomed in the Virgin Islands

*By Aesha Duval, Virgin Islands Branch Librarian
Photographs are courtesy of the District Court of the Virgin Islands*

Hosted by the District Court of the Virgin Islands, the Honorable Ketanji Brown Jackson, Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States, visited the Virgin Islands last month, sharing life lessons and inspiring the Territory's youth and adults alike.

Justice Jackson told audiences at the series of events across the Territory that she was delighted to be in the Virgin Islands, not just for the warm weather, but to share her story, meet the people and experience the culture.



The Honorable Ketanji Brown Jackson, Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States and the Honorable Wilma A. Lewis, District Judge, discuss Jackson's path to the Supreme Court on February 6, 2025 before a packed audience at the Sidney Lee Event Center on St. Croix.

Justice Jackson—the first woman of African-American heritage to serve on the United States Supreme Court—assumed the position of Associate Justice on June 30, 2022, after being nominated by President Joseph R. Biden, Jr. Prior to her appointment to the Supreme Court, Justice Jackson served as a judge on the United States District Court for the District of Columbia from 2013 to 2021 and the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit from 2021 to 2022.



Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson with the Guardians of Culture Moko Jumbies and the Lew Muckle Elementary School Steel Orchestra performs in the background. Deeply rooted in Caribbean culture for more than 200 years, a Moko Jumbie is a traditional stilt walker or spirit dancer. The origins of Moko Jumbies date back to West Africa, where "Moko" was believed to be a spiritual protector, watching over villages from above.

During her historic visit and speaking tour, Justice Jackson engaged with Judges and Court staff in both District University of the Virgin Islands and the community at public events on both the St. Croix and St. Thomas-St. John districts.



From left, Hon. Emile A. Henderson III, Magistrate Judge (DVI), Justice Jackson, Judge Lewis, and Hon. Tamika Montgomery-Reeves, Third Circuit Court of Appeals, pose for photos during Justice Jackson's visit to the Courthouse on St. Croix.

Inspiring the Youth

Born in Washington D.C. and raised in Miami, Florida from the age of 3, Justice Jackson recounted her childhood and family life to an auditorium filled with hundreds of St. Croix public, private, and parochial high school students on February 6. Answering dozens of questions from students, Justice Jackson spoke of the love and support from her parents, who were both public school teachers, and her determination that drove her to academic success from elementary school through Harvard Law School and her legal career culminating in her appointment as a Supreme Court Justice. One student asked Justice Jackson how to best overcome the geographical challenges and lack of exposure that comes with being from a small island territory. Justice Jackson responded that being from somewhere else makes you different and memorable. "Take what you can and use it to your advantage," she told the students.



Good Hope Country Day School students listen to Justice Jackson's responses to their questions.

Sharing stories from her childhood and imparting life lessons are what Justice Jackson said she looks forward to the most. She described one formative experience from her childhood to the students. Growing up in Miami, Justice Jackson was always around water and her mother made sure she had swimming lessons. Floating on her back was one of her favorite things to do and at a pool party hosted by a colleague of her parents, she was doing just that. She was about 7 or 8 years old. "When I next opened my eyes, I had floated out to the deep end," she said. Panicking, she sank to the bottom and had to be rescued. "My overwhelming feeling was of being disappointed in myself," Justice Jackson said. "When it came to using my skills when it mattered the most, I sank." Justice Jackson said she did not know why she panicked in that moment but promised herself to never again allow fear to shut her down in the face of challenges. Later that evening, Justice Jackson shared this same advice with the St. Croix community at an event hosted by the District Court of the Virgin Islands at the Sidney Lee Event Center. "If faced with the deep end, no matter what it is, I would swim," said Justice Jackson. "That is how I approach everything."



Officials with the Virgin Islands Department of Education present Justice Jackson with tokens of appreciation on February 6, 2025.

A Journey Inspired by the Law

Justice Jackson recalled her earliest memories of her father going to law school and pouring over his law books at the kitchen table. Justice Jackson said she would be sitting right across from him with her coloring books. She said that early exposure to the law was the spark that ignited her interest in becoming a lawyer.

“I always thought law was just what people did,” she said. “I never really thought of doing anything else.”

Judge Lewis joined Justice Jackson on the Sidney Lee stage for a fireside chat interview. Judge Lewis asked if she had ever faced discrimination or unfair treatment during her career. Justice Jackson said what she experienced was more subtle and nothing like what her parents and grandparents went through, but she did recall a time when she was mistaken for someone’s secretary at a law firm.

Justice Jackson spoke about Hon. Constance Baker Motley, the first Black woman to argue a case before the Supreme Court, and in 1966, the first Black woman to serve as a federal judge. She recalled her amazement upon learning she shared a birthday—September 14—with the late Judge Motley. She told the audience that Judge Motley was more than qualified to serve on the Supreme Court, but she just happened to be born in a different time.



Justice Jackson dances quadrille with the We Deh Yah Cultural Dancers during a welcome reception at the Divi Carina Bay Beach Resort on February 5, 2025.

Making History

Justice Jackson revealed that long before she was nominated by President Biden, her then 13-year-old daughter insisted that she belonged on the Supreme Court.

When Justice Antonin Scalia died in 2016, her daughter encouraged her to apply for the vacant position. Justice Jackson explained that Supreme Court justices are appointed by the President. Her daughter then wrote a letter to then-President Barack Obama, urging him to choose her mother.

The letter did not land Justice Jackson on the bench right then, but her successful legal career over the years that followed eventually led to history being made.

Justice Jackson drew laughs and applause when she recalled the moment President Biden called her to say he was nominating her to replace Associate Justice Stephen Breyer on the Supreme Court.

“I was on the floor under my desk, on the phone with the President,” Justice Jackson said describing her shock. After enduring a grueling vetting process and not hearing anything from the White House, she was convinced she was not the nominee. She was wrapping up her workday and getting ready for dinner with her girlfriends who wanted to cheer her up when the call came. The evening turned into a celebration, and she began drafting her speech that she would deliver the next day, accepting the nomination.



Judge Henderson, Honorable Ruth Miller, Recalled Magistrate Judge (DVI), Justice Jackson, Honorable Robert A. Molloy, Chief Judge and Honorable G. Alan Teague, Magistrate Judge (DVI), pose for photos during a February 7, 2025 visit to the St. Thomas Courthouse.



Justice Jackson with Charlotte Amalie High School students at the St. Thomas High School Event on February 7, 2025.



From left, University of the Virgin Islands President Safiya George, PhD, Justice Jackson, and UVI Board of Trustees Chairman Henry C. Smock, Esq. during a student convocation ceremony on February 7, 2025 at the UVI Sports and Fitness Center on St. Thomas.

On St. Thomas, Justice Jackson also addressed high school students; was the honored guest for a student convocation at the University of the Virgin Islands where she was bestowed an honorary doctorate degree; and was the featured guest at a public event where she engaged in a fireside chat interview with Judge Lewis.

Chief Judge Molloy said it was an honor for the District Court of the Virgin Islands to host the events featuring a trailblazing jurist who has already left an indelible mark in the nation and a privilege to welcome her to the Virgin Islands, a place rich in history.