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"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." – Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson

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MADISON - Ketanji Brown Jackson became the first Black woman justice on the U.S. Supreme Court after she was sworn in Thursday by Chief Justice John Roberts and her mentor, Associate Justice Stephen Breyer — whose retirement was official moments earlier.

The swearing-in ceremony at the Supreme Court making Jackson's place in history official took barely three minutes and capped a months-long process that began when Breyer announced in January he intended to step down at the end of the court term.

Jackson's husband, Patrick, held two Bibles upon which Jackson swore her oath. One was a family edition and one had been donated to the court in 1906 by Justice John Marshall Harlan, the only justice to dissent in the infamous Plessy v. Ferguson case that upheld racial segregation.

Roberts administered the constitutional oath, while Breyer, for whom Jackson clerked two decades ago, administered the judicial oath. Roberts and Breyer were dressed in black robes while Jackson wore a navy dress.

“On behalf of all of the members of the court, I am pleased to welcome Justice Jackson to the court and to our common calling,” Roberts said to close the ceremony, using Jackson’s new title for the first time.

Other than reciting her pledges, Jackson did not speak during the ceremony.

Roberts said that Jackson’s daughters, Leila and Talia, were present in the audience.

At a White House event in April celebrating her Senate confirmation the previous day , Jackson did address the historic nature of her confirmation.

“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,” she said. “But we’ve made it. We’ve made it, all of us.”

Rocky confirmation

President Joe Biden vowed on the campaign trail in 2020 that he would nominate a Black woman to serve on the nation’s highest court and did so by selecting Jackson two months after Breyer announced his retirement.

Jackson’s addition will not change the ideological balance of the court, whose 6-3 conservative majority has riled Democrats with consequential rulings on major cases in recent weeks.

But a faction of Republican senators — led by Missouri’s Josh Hawley and Texas’ Ted Cruz — still pursued an aggressive campaign against her confirmation, showing how partisan high court selections have become.

Over two days of questioning, Republicans on the Senate Judiciary Committee grilled Jackson

over her sentencing record in child pornography cases, defense of terrorism suspects and views of culture war
issues like critical race theory
and the definition of a woman.

Democrats and other supporters, including police associations, said the attacks were unfair and praised Jackson as highly qualified.

Following a grueling week of confirmation hearings, the U.S. Senate confirmed Jackson in a 53-47 vote in April. Three Republicans — Maine's Susan Collins, Alaska's Lisa Murkowski and Utah's Mitt Romney — joined all Democrats in voting for her.

Florida background

In addition to being the first Black woman on the court, Jackson on Thursday became the court's first former public defender and its first person from Florida. Born in Washington, D.C., Jackson grew up in Miami.

Jackson, 51, graduated from Harvard University in 1992 and Harvard Law School cum laude in 1996. She later clerked for a federal trial court in Massachusetts, a federal appeals court covering northeastern states and for Breyer.

She worked in private practice before joining the U.S. Sentencing Commission in 2003 and becoming a federal public defender in 2005.

She began her judicial career as a U.S. District judge in Washington, D.C., in 2007. Biden nominated her to the D.C. Circuit Court of Appeals last year. The Senate confirmed her for that position in a 53-44 vote.

by Jacob Fischler, Wisconsin Examiner
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