

## Napoleon Jones becomes federal judge | County Juvenile Court veteran is 2nd black on U.S. bench here

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Superior Court Judge Napoleon Jones, who worked for years in the county's Juvenile Court system, was sworn into office yesterday as a U.S. District Court judge.

The ceremony came 11 months after Sen. Dianne Feinstein recommended Jones' appointment to President Clinton.

The length of the process had drawn criticism from some local African-Americans eager to see a second black on San Diego's federal bench. Earl B. Gilliam, San Diego's first black federal judge, has been recovering from heart surgery in recent months.

Jones, 54, has been a judge in San Diego since 1977. He said yesterday that he never doubted that his appointment to the federal bench would come through.

"Like everything, it takes time," he said.

Jones is known for his years in Juvenile Court and his special knowledge of issues involving youthful offenders. He takes the federal bench at a time when the government is being urged to expand its prosecution of juveniles.

The crime bill signed recently by Clinton essentially ensured that more juveniles will be prosecuted in federal court by lowering the age at which a teen-ager can be tried as an adult from 15 to 13.

"Judge Jones will be the most knowledgeable person in federal court on issues involving juveniles," said Knut Johnson, the chief trial attorney for Federal Defenders Inc., which represents most indigent federal defendants. "It'll be nice to have someone with his experience, but he won't get all the juvenile cases. It'll be luck of the draw."

San Diego lawyer Michael Crowley, who has specialized in civil rights issues, praised Jones for his behind-the-scenes work in trying to expand the representation of African-Americans on the county's grand juries.

Crowley said that in hearings held a few years ago to determine whether the county grand juries were representative of the community "it turned out that there were a lot of African-Americans on the grand jury because Judge Jones had taken it upon himself to go out into the community and find people who could serve."

Jones said yesterday that he is cognizant of issues involving blacks, notably a controversy over mandatory sentencing laws. African-American leaders have contended that the federal sentencing structure is too harsh and that its stiffer punishment for offenses involving rock rather than powdered cocaine affects young blacks more than whites.

Most federal judges dislike the sentencing structure, and a few have openly refused to follow the guidelines set by Congress for sentencing in federal court.

Jones, however, said he would not be one of them.

"I have an obligation to follow the existing law whether I agree or disagree," he said. "I will follow precedent. Justice is too important to be subject to the whims of the individual jurist."

Credit: Staff Writer

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**Abstract** (Document Summary)

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