Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with The Honorable Deborah A. Batts

Batts, Deborah A., 1947-2020

Alternative Names: The Honorable Deborah A. Batts; Honorable Deborah A. Batts;

Life Dates: April 13, 1947-February 3, 2020

Place of Birth: Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA

Work: New York, NY

Occupations: Federal District Court Judge

Biographical Note

U.S. District Court Judge Deborah A. Batts was born on April 13, 1947 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. She earned her B.A. degree in government from Radcliffe College in 1969 and attended Harvard Law School, where she earned her J.D. degree in 1972. Batts began her legal career clerking for Judge Lawrence W. Pierce, a U.S. District Court Judge for the Southern District of New York. The next year, Batts became an associate in New York City at the corporate law firm Cravath, Swaine & Moore.

In 1979, Batts became the Assistant U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of New York in the Criminal Division. She worked for the district until 1984 when she joined the faculty at the Fordham University School of Law. Batts was the first African American member of the faculty and later became a tenured Associate Professor of Law.

In 1990, Batts became a commissioner on the New York Law Review Commission. That same year, she served as Special Associate Counsel to the Department of Investigation of the City of New York. In 1994, Batts was nominated by President Clinton as a U.S. District Judge for the Southern District of New York. After her confirmation by the United States Senate, she was sworn into the office. As a federal judge, Batts has overseen a variety of high-profile cases and hearings. In 1999, she oversaw the indictment of Cheng Yong Wang and Xingqi Fu, charged with attempting to sell the organs of executed Chinese prisoners. Batts granted the defendants' motion to dismiss the indictment. In 2001, Batts wrote an Opinion resolving the issues of the sentencing hearing of al-Qaeda co-founder Mamdouh Mahmud Salim for the stabbing of a prison guard while Salim awaited trial in the case of the 1998 U.S. embassy bombings. Batts was also the judge in a widely publicized 2006 case against EPA Chief Christine Todd Whitman. Whitman was charged for her failure to adequately warn New

Yorkers of the health risks involved in returning to their homes after the September 11th terrorist attacks.

Batts is an active member of the Bar Association of the City of New York, the Metropolitan Black Bar Association and the Lesbian and Gay Law Association of Greater New York. In 1998, she received an honorary degree from the City University of New York School of Law.

Batts passed away on February 3, 2020.

Batts was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on August 15, 2007.

Related Entries

Philadelphia High School for Girls [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

St Rose Of Lima Elem School [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Radcliffe College [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Harvard Law School [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

St. Carthage School [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

U.S. Attorney's Office for the Southern District Court of New York [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from ? to ?]

   Attorney, prosectuor

Fordham University School of Law [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from ? to ?]

   Professor

U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from ? to ?]

   Federal Judge

Justice Lawrence W. Pierce [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from ? to ?]

   Legal Intern

National Institute for Trial Advocacy [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from ? to ?]

   Teacher

Cravath, Swaine & Moore LLP [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1972 to ?]

> **Associate**

Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual Alumni/ae Committee for Harvard Law School [MEMBEROF]
[from ? to ?]

> **Member**

LGBT Bar Association of Greater New York [MEMBEROF]
[from ? to ?]

> **Member**

Metropolitan Black Bar Association [MEMBEROF]
[from ? to ?]

> **Member**

Federal Bar Council American Inn of Court [MEMBEROF]
[from ? to ?]

> **Member, Master**

City University of New York School of Law [MEMBEROF]
[from ? to ?]

> **Board of Visitors**

Harvard University Board of Trustees [MEMBEROF]
[from ? to ?]

> **Member**

Harvard Law School Lambda [MEMBEROF]
[from ? to ?]

> **Member**