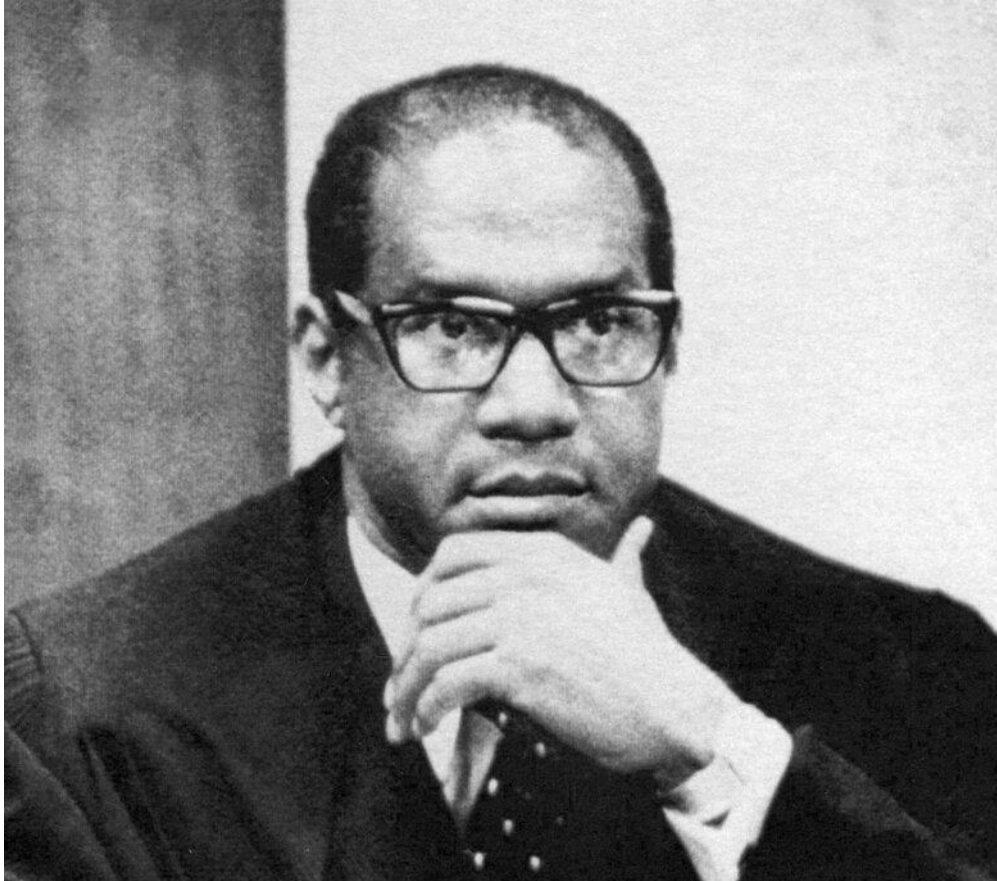


Seattle Judge Jerome Farris, 90, first Black judge to serve on 9th Circuit Court of Appeals, has died

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Judge Jerome Farris in 1979. Farris died July 23 at the age of 90. (AP PHOTO)



By [Mike Carter](#)

Seattle Times staff reporter

Former Seattle jurist Jerome Farris, the first Black judge on the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals, died on July 23, according to the court's San Francisco headquarters and acquaintances in Seattle. He was 90.

Farris was appointed to the federal appellate court by President Jimmy Carter and confirmed by the U.S. Senate in 1979. He maintained chambers in Seattle and became a senior judge, with a reduced caseload, in 1995.

Chief Circuit Judge Sidney Thomas of Montana called Farris an “extraordinary judge and human being. He truly was a force of nature, and he was unfailingly generous to his colleagues and many friends.”

Chief U.S. District Judge Ricardo Martinez in Seattle considered Farris a friend and mentor. It was Farris, Martinez said, who suggested that perhaps Martinez should consider going to law school when they met nearly 40 years ago at a dinner party at Farris’ home.

“Judge Farris was an incredible individual who had tremendous impact on our country, our city and our community,” Martinez said in an interview on Monday. “He was a true pioneer and an extraordinary inspiration to young lawyers of color everywhere.

“He set an example for every one of us who continue to aspire to resolve disputes in a civil and noncontentious fashion,” Martinez said. “He will be dearly missed.”

Before his appointment to the federal bench, Farris had served as a judge of the Washington state Court of Appeals since 1969. He was unanimously elected as the first presiding chief judge of the court in the 1977-1978 term and served as chief judge of Division I from 1977 to 1978.

He worked for the law firm of Weyer, Roderick, Schroeter, and Sterne before he opened his own firm. His successor on the federal appellate bench, Circuit Judge M. Margaret McKeown called Farris “an icon in the Pacific Northwest legal community.”

“This is indeed a sad day for the court. As the first African-American judge to serve on this court, he left a legacy in which we can all take pride,” said Circuit Judge Johnnie B. Rawlinson.

Farris was born in Birmingham, Alabama, and earned a Bachelor of Science degree with department honors in mathematics at Morehouse College in 1951. After graduation, he served in the Army Signal Corps and went on to earn a Master of Social Work degree at Clark Atlanta University in 1955. He received his Juris Doctor degree in 1958 from the University of Washington School of Law, where he was a member of the Law Review, a member of the Order of the Coif, and was elected president of the student body.

Farris worked as a juvenile probation officer while earning his law degree.

Former Gov. Mike Lowry appointed Farris to serve as a Regent of the University of Washington in 1985. He also served as a trustee of the Seattle-King County Bar

Association and former chairman of the Washington Council of the National Council on Crime and Delinquency.

In 2002, Farris became embroiled in controversy when he had 120 maple and cherry trees in Colman Park cut down to improve his view of Lake Washington. While then-King County Prosecutor Norm Maleng declined to file criminal charges, Farris was fined and eventually [paid more than \\$600,000 in compensation](#) to the city. He claimed it was a miscommunication with his gardener.

Farris is survived by two daughters, Juli and Janelle, and a sister, Marian Farris Hatch. He was preceded in death by his wife, Jean Shy Farris.

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