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King of Justice

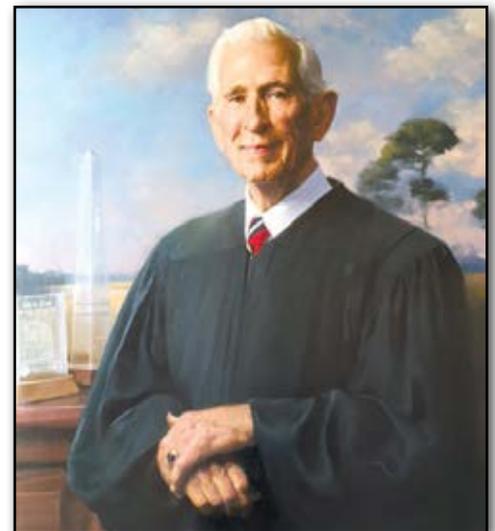
Judge King has served 47 years on the federal bench

By Lawrence D. Goodman and Mark J. Heise

Where to start on the storied and distinguished life and career of Judge James Lawrence King? He began his journey from humble beginnings, born on Dec. 20, 1927, just 29 blocks from the courthouse that bears his name. Like everyone from his generation, he will tell you he was born in “Miamah” and raised in a small home — without electricity or running water — down in “the Redlands” deep in South Dade County. His early life experiences clearly shaped his life and his future judicial philosophy — treating all whom he meets or who appear before him fairly and respectfully.

At age 11, just as the country was coming out of the Depression, Judge King’s father passed away, and he was raised by his mother. “She devoted her life to me,” Judge King declares. His mother, Viola King, instilled in him the core values of fairness, respect and diligence. It started with the weekly trip to the library, where he would check

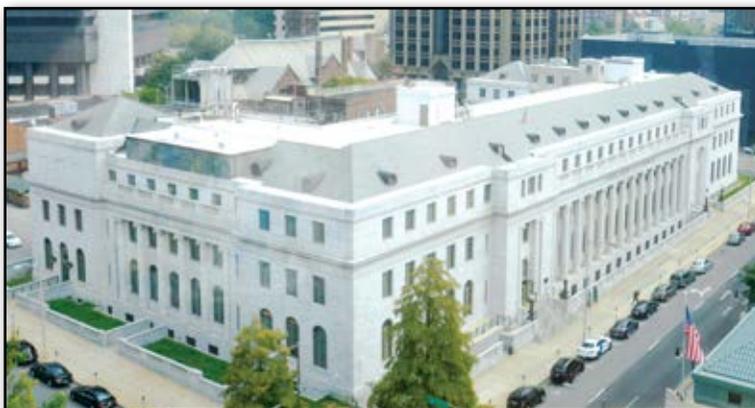
out seven books every Saturday. This mother’s love for education motivated Judge King to go to college, but before he could do so he had to earn enough money to pay the \$50-per-semester tuition. He would pack tomatoes, working side by side with



The portrait of Judge King, painted by Jie Ruan, hangs in the James Lawrence King Building in Miami. The presentation ceremony took place on April 26, 2017. (Photo provided by Mark J. Heise)

About the authors: Lawrence D. Goodman and Mark J. Heise clerked for Judge James Lawrence King in 1987-88 and 1988-89, respectively.

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Birmingham’s federal courthouses

The Judge Robert S. Vance Federal Building and U.S. Courthouse in Birmingham, Alabama, as seen from the Hugo Black Courthouse. A detailed look at the two buildings begins on Page 4. (Photo by Emily Ruzic)

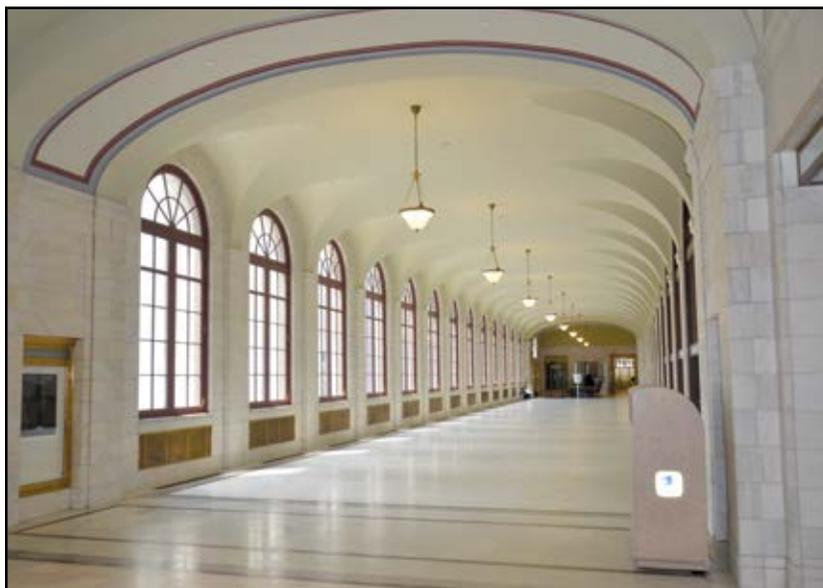
The federal courthouses of Birmingham

By Emily M. Ruzic

Sitting just a few blocks from the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church, Kelly Ingram Park and the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute, the Judge Robert S. Vance Federal Building and United States Courthouse in Birmingham, Alabama, was destined to hear many of the landmark civil rights cases. It is only fitting that its neighboring building, the Hugo L. Black Federal Courthouse, was named after U.S. Supreme Court Justice Hugo Black, a member of the court in the seminal (and unanimously decided) civil rights case, *Brown v. Board of Education*.

Following the 1954 decision in *Brown*, in 1955, sitting in the Vance Courthouse, Judge H.H. Grooms ruled that Autherine Lucy and Polly Ann Myers had been denied admission to the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa solely based on their race, contrary to the law. Grooms noted that, while the university did not have a written policy against admitting students of color, no African-American students had ever been admitted to the university, despite several applicants. Grooms issued an injunction barring anyone from interfering with the right to enroll in the University of Alabama of Lucy, Myers and others who were similarly situated, solely on account of race or color. Lucy and Myers were represented by leading civil rights attorneys, Thurgood Marshall and Robert Carter from the NAACP out of New York, and Arthur Shores of Birmingham.

The Civil Rights Movement again reached the Vance Courthouse in 1965, when James Alexander Hood, Vivian J. Malone and David McGlathery, three African-American students, were scheduled to enroll at the University of



First floor concourse as it appears after the 2009 renovation of the Judge Robert S. Vance Federal Building and United States Courthouse in Birmingham, Alabama.

Alabama. Judge Grooms heard a motion in which the Board of Trustees of the University of Alabama sought to intervene in the *Lucy* case, seeking to modify Judge Grooms' July 1, 1955, order. Ultimately, Judge Grooms did not modify his earlier order. The students, however, faced additional hurdles to enrollment.

George Wallace, then governor of Alabama, was just months removed from his infamous

"Segregation now! Segregation tomorrow! Segregation forever!" inauguration speech and had made a campaign promise that "I shall refuse to abide by any such illegal federal court order even to the point of standing in the schoolhouse door, if necessary." Upon learning of Grooms' decision not to modify the order, Wallace stated publicly that he would be present to bar the entrance of any African-American student who attempted to enroll at the University of Alabama. Thus, a motion for temporary injunction was made in *United States v. Wallace*, and such motion was heard by Judge Seybourn Lynne in what is now the Vance Courthouse. On June 3, 1963, Lynne entered the injunction, which in conjunction with an executive order issued by then-President John F. Kennedy, allowed Malone and Hood to enroll at the university.

Construction of the courthouse

Thanks to the work of Congressman and later Senator Oscar W. Underwood, inter alia, downtown Birmingham received appropriations for a new and large federal building. Between 1911 and 1913, work began to acquire half of city block, sitting along Fifth Avenue between

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The Vance Courthouse hosts three large remodeled bankruptcy courtrooms on the first floor.

Eighteenth and Nineteenth Streets North. At that time, seven homes sat on the property. By 1916, plans were complete for the U.S. Post Office/Courthouse to be built on that half city block (James A. Wetmore was then serving as acting supervising architect of the treasury). Construction began on the building, and the cornerstone was laid on May 15, 1918. However, because of World War I, construction was halted, and the building was not completed and occupied until 1921.

By 1921, the new post office and courthouse stood two stories tall over a basement. The U.S. Post Office occupied the first floor, and courtrooms were located on the second floor. It was always intended that the building would be added on to, and in the 1930s, two additional floors were added to the building. The building has housed appellate judges, district judges, magistrate judges and bankruptcy judges, including former Eleventh Circuit Judge Robert Vance.

Naming it the Vance Courthouse

On Dec. 16, 1989, Judge Robert Vance was killed in his Mountain Brook, Alabama, home as he opened a package containing a bomb. At that time, Vance was working in Birmingham as an active judge on the Eleventh Circuit Court of Appeals.

Two days after Judge Vance's murder, Robert Robertson, an Atlanta attorney and prominent civil rights advocate, was also killed by a package bomb. Later, two more bombs were discovered, one addressed to the federal courthouse in Atlanta and another to the Jacksonville office of the NAACP. At first, it appeared that the targets of the bombs were chosen based on their work in civil rights. However, authorities eventually determined that Walter Leroy Moody had sent the bombs and targeted Judge Vance based on his contact with Vance in a court case in the 1980s. It is believed that Moody sent the other

bombs to divert authorities. On June 28, 1991, Moody was convicted of more than 70 charges and sentenced to life in prison.

In 1990, the building was renamed in memory of Vance, who had had his office in the same building.

Construction of Hugo Black Courthouse

The Hugo Black Courthouse was completed in 1987 and sits nine stories tall. The courthouse was designed by the KPS Group, located in Birmingham. The building has a post-modern style with a limestone base on the bottom two floors and a glass curtain wall above. Birmingham-based Brasfield and Gorrie served as general contractor on the project.

The building is located catty-corner to the Vance Courthouse, at Fifth Avenue and Eighteenth Street North in Birmingham. The building was named after U.S.



Eleventh Circuit Court of Appeals Judge Robert Vance was assassinated in December 1989. The following year, the courthouse was named in his memory.

Supreme Court Justice Hugo Black, who served on the high court from 1937 to 1971. Upon its completion in 1987, the U.S. District Court and U.S. Court of Appeals moved from the Vance building to their new home in the Black Courthouse.

The lobby of the building contains a bust of Hugo Black. There are several plaques on the walls along the first floor, including some that quote from opinions of Black. From 1991 to 2012, a granite sculpture titled "Red Mountains" adorned the front steps of the building. It was designed by Dimitri Hadzi. The large sculpture was eventually removed due to security concerns.

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The Federal Court Houses of Birmingham, continued

The Vance Courthouse today

In 2009, the Vance Courthouse underwent a \$40 million renovation funded by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. Work included repairing and replacing windows, repairing exterior walls, restoring the original marble and wood paneling, installing new historically accurate light fixtures and adding in skylights. One of the goals of the project was also to achieve Green Building Council LEED Silver certification.

Today, the Vance Courthouse hosts three large bankruptcy courtrooms on the first floor. The probation office occupies the second floor. The third floor contains Judge Lynne's former courtroom and offices for Alabama's two senators, currently Richard Shelby and Luther Strange. The U.S. Marshal's office is located on the fourth floor. The building also contains a basement.



U.S. District Judge Seybourn H. Lynne's former courtroom is found on the third floor of the Vance Courthouse. At the time of Judge Lynne's death in 2000, at the age of 93, he was the longest serving federal judge in the United States.



Completed in 1987, the Hugo L. Black Federal Courthouse is located catty-corner to the Vance Courthouse, at Fifth Avenue and Eighteenth Street North.

The Hugo Black Courthouse today

Today, the Hugo Black Courthouse hosts an Eleventh Circuit judge and many U.S. district and magistrate judges for the Northern District of Alabama. Judge Karon O. Bowdre is currently the chief judge of the Northern District of Alabama, and she occupies the ceremonial courtroom in the building. This courtroom was built just a few years ago and allows the court to have large audiences for proceedings.

Judges William H. Pryor, Jr. and Kevin C. Newsom of the Eleventh Circuit also maintain their offices in the Black building, though the Eleventh Circuit does not currently hold argument in Birmingham. Further, Sharon Harris serves as the clerk for the Northern District of Alabama with her office in the Black Courthouse.



Architectural plans for what is now the Vance Courthouse were approved by Acting Supervising Architect of the Treasury James A. Wetmore and were dated July 18, 1917.

All photos taken by Emily Ruzic

