



GALLERY OF DISTINGUISHED CITIZENS INDUCTEE 2006

OSCAR WILLIAM ADAMS, JR. became the first African-American Supreme Court Justice in Alabama on October 10, 1980. He was appointed to this position by Governor Fob James. When he was elected to a full term position in 1982, he became the first African-American elected to a statewide constitutional office in the state and he was re-elected in 1988.

Justice Adams graduated in 1944 from Talladega College with a degree in philosophy. Although segregation laws prevented him from attending law school in his native state, he graduated from Howard University in Washington, D.C. in 1947. He was admitted to the Alabama State Bar in that same year and launched a distinguished legal career in private practice becoming a leader in civil rights litigation.

He was the first African-American lawyer admitted to the Birmingham Bar Association. He was a sole practitioner until 1967, when he established the state's first integrated law firm, Adams and Burg. In 1969, he and James K. Baker opened the state's first African-American law firm, Adams and Baker, which later expanded to include U. W. Clemon. The law firm of Adams, Baker & Clemon became one of the nation's leading law firms handling complex civil rights litigation.

Justice Adams' clients included Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and the NAACP. The firm handled numerous school desegregation cases, employment, housing and public accommodations discrimination cases and voting rights cases. The firm eventually dissolved when each of the partners was called into government service. James K. Baker became the first African-American to serve as city attorney for the City of Birmingham; U. W. Clemon became the first African-American judge of the United States District Court of Northern Alabama and Oscar W. Adams, Jr. became the first African-American Justice of the Supreme Court of Alabama.

Justice Adams retired in 1993. He passed away in 1997.