

# GEORGETOWN LAW

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## Student Stories



# Spotlight: Michael D. Jones (L'85)

Having a successful national litigation practice doesn't leave much time for TV reruns and old movies, but when Michael D. Jones (L'85) does tune in, he likes to watch Westerns. Why Westerns, for a Washington-based lawyer? They're predictable, he says, and the good guy almost always wins.

"'Gunsmoke,' 'The Rifleman,' you name it ... any Western TV series or movie that's any good I've seen dozens of times," says Jones. "I can recite chapter and verse from them."

Fitting words from the son of a Baptist deacon who would become one of the top litigators in Washington, D.C., and the country. In his 26-year career, Jones, a partner at Kirkland & Ellis, has been recognized for his legal prowess by *The American Lawyer*, *The National Law Journal*, *Washingtonian* magazine and *Black Enterprise* — just to name a few. *The American Lawyer* highlighted Jones' successful defense of NL Industries (a critical lead paint case) in a 2008 article called, appropriately enough, "Kirkland & Ellis: Top Guns."

When *Georgetown Law* caught up with Jones, he was preparing for a six-week bench trial before Judge Catherine Blake in federal district court in Baltimore — where he would argue that the state of Maryland had not met its obligations to fully dismantle vestiges of segregation in its historically black colleges and universities. He serves as pro bono co-counsel to the Coalition for Equity and Excellence in Maryland Higher Education, which sued the Maryland Higher Education Commission in 2006 over policies and practices affecting the schools. So, what gets Jones fired up about being in the courtroom?

"Being a litigator and a trial lawyer, it's a sporting event: cross-examining a witness or doing a direct examination ... arguing to a jury or a judge, it's very exciting," he says. "I enjoy the trial aspect of it and I've been fortunate to be able to try cases in very different parts of the country, with and against lawyers from all over the country — you get to see varying styles and try to figure out what works and what doesn't work. Those are the kinds of things that I really get excited about, just the art of trial advocacy and the art of litigating."

From public speaking as a boy at church programs in Shreveport, La., Jones turned to speech, debate and drama in high school and met his fate in part when a former English teacher introduced him to Carl Stewart, now a judge on the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals. Jones was in the process of choosing a college, and Stewart, who was then working in the U.S. Attorney's Office in Louisiana, encouraged him to attend Dillard University, his alma mater.

Jones would major in English, but became interested in Georgetown Law's joint J.D./master of science in foreign service program after spending his junior year in England and, later, taking an arms control and disarmament course at Dillard taught by a visiting State Department official. He ultimately decided to pursue litigation instead. "The lawyers I was familiar with were



kind of the colorful lawyers from Texas, the criminal defense lawyer Richard 'Racehorse' Haynes and of course I'd heard about F. Lee Bailey ... so I thought litigation was probably the best fit," he says.

His law school days were memorable, due to a position as notes and comments editor on the *Georgetown Law Journal* and a course in criminal law taught by the late legendary Professor William W. Greenhalgh. "He was straight out of 'The Paper Chase' ... he made it very, very challenging and it made law school live up to what many of us were thinking it was going to be like from watching the [TV] series," Jones says.

After clerking for Judge Elbert Tuttle, then on the 11th Circuit Court of Appeals, Jones joined Kirkland & Ellis, figuring he'd stay in Washington a few years before moving on. A quarter of a century later, he's still here — giving him the opportunity to lend his time and support to the Law Center. Jones serves on the Board of Visitors, attends the Black Law Students Association (BLSA) brunch during reunion weekends, co-chairs Georgetown Law's African-American Endowed Scholarship Fund, and co-teaches a trial practice course, among other things. He was awarded a Paul R. Dean Award in 2010 for his service to the school.

"Education is something that I really have become devoted to," Jones says, noting that he and his wife, Shaun, have endowed a scholarship at Dillard University as well as a scholarship fund in Louisiana for the NAACP. (The Jones family also includes Maria, Lori and Michael Jr.) "I look at my own career; when I was growing up we didn't have two cents to rub together," he notes. "It was really through educational opportunities at Dillard and subsequently at Georgetown that I was able to carve out a space."

— By Ann W. Parks