



# Breaking Barriers

A View from the Bench

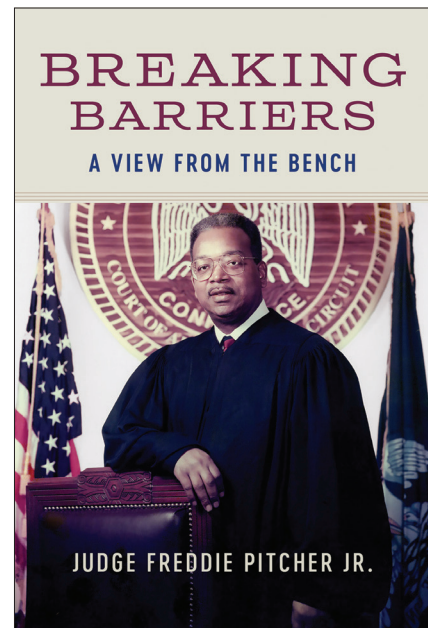
**JUDGE FREDDIE PITCHER JR.**

In *Breaking Barriers*, Judge Freddie Pitcher Jr. describes how he made history in Baton Rouge by becoming the first African American to be elected to judgeships at three different levels of the court system. Pitcher recounts his early years in Valley Park—a segregated and semi-rural neighborhood—where one of his cousins, a civil rights attorney, served as his role model and inspired him to become both a lawyer and an agent of change. Pitcher depicts what it was like to grow up in the segregated South and how racial discrimination fueled his drive to challenge the norms of the Baton Rouge judiciary later in life.

Pitcher discusses how he forged together Black political organizations, the Black church community, and a group of white attorneys into a campaign coalition that ultimately helped him overcome the racial barriers that prevented Black people from ascending to the judiciary in Baton Rouge. He details the strategy used to win seats on both the Baton Rouge City Court and the 19th Judicial District Court at a time when many said a Black candidate could not win a city- or parish-wide election. He describes many of the challenges he faced as the first and only Black judge in Baton Rouge while highlighting some of the notable cases he tried and sharing his beliefs about judging and the judicial process.

Pitcher's story of rising from “the bench to the bar to the bench”—from the bench outside the local grocery store that he and his friends frequented as young boys, to the Louisiana bar, to the judicial bench—is informative and inspiring, shedding light on the perseverance and determination required of early African American candidates to overcome the many roadblocks to full participation in the political process related to the judiciary.

With his election to City Court, **FREDDIE PITCHER JR.** was the first African American elected to a judgeship in Baton Rouge. He was also the first Black person elected to both the 19th Judicial District Court and the Louisiana First Circuit Court of Appeal. Upon his retirement from the bench in 1997, and after a six-year stint as a partner in a major law firm, he served as Chancellor of the Southern University Law Center from 2003 until 2015. Pitcher is the recipient of numerous honors and awards, including the G. Leon Netterville Award for Outstanding Achievement in Law from Southern University and the Lifetime Achievement Award from the Greater New Orleans Louis A. Martinet Legal Society.



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## PRAISE FOR *BREAKING BARRIERS*

“Judge Pitcher has crafted a riveting account of a life filled with significant triumphs against all odds. His story is a portrait of Baton Rouge and the American South, showing that a great man can make a difference despite institutional obstacles.”

—Jim Engster, president of Louisiana Radio Network and host of Talk Louisiana

“*Breaking Barriers: A View from the Bench* is a marvelous and valuable account written by a talented and consequential leader. The book gives insight into the history of African American life in Baton Rouge—and in a larger sense throughout Louisiana and the South—during the Jim Crow era. It also reveals Freddie Pitcher Jr., the first elected Black judge in East Baton Rouge Parish, as savvy and strategic. Among other tactics, he shows how to win elected office by using different approaches and techniques for Black and white voters. His success as a crossover candidate was significant in Louisiana politics. We owe him a debt of gratitude for this memoir.”

—Charles Vincent, professor of history, Southern University and A&M College

“It’s not every day that you get to meet and know a history maker. Not only have I known a history maker for more than thirty years, but reliving his life in this wonderful book was truly a pleasure. Judge Pitcher draws a vivid picture of his pioneering role in civil rights work in his childhood home of Baton Rouge. This book should be a must-read for any young person in Louisiana.”

—James M. Douglas, Distinguished Professor of Law at Thurgood Marshall School of Law and former president of Texas Southern University

“Recounting the history of his trailblazing career, Judge Freddie Pitcher Jr. reveals the inside stories of getting around some significant odds. His memoir is inspiring and confidence-building, offering a hopeful lesson that success is often possible if you try and never give up. You will be glad, as I am, that he shares his journey as a man of many career firsts in *Breaking Barriers: A View from the Bench*.”

—Hon. Bernette Joshua Johnson, Chief Justice, Louisiana Supreme Court (Ret.)

“This book is a very interesting and readable chronicle of an African American person growing up in the '60s in the segregated South. Having grown up in Mississippi and having spent some time pursuing the legal profession in Baton Rouge, at Southern, I can relate to many of the experiences chronicled by Judge Pitcher. I applaud Judge Pitcher for recording, for those who may follow in his footsteps, his stellar experience as a lawyer, a judge, and a law school administrator. It is a good read for aspiring lawyers and enlightening for those interested in the law and the history of the era, and the geographic area, that he describes.”

—Hon. Reuben V. Anderson, former Mississippi Supreme Court justice

“Judge Freddie Pitcher Jr., chancellor emeritus of the Southern University Law Center, continues to break barriers beyond the classroom and the bench. In his memoir, Pitcher gives the reader a closer glimpse into the challenging journey from Valley Park that has made him the thought leader and inspiration he is today. I, along with the Southern University Law Center community, salute him for his leadership, wisdom, and philanthropic contributions toward molding and empowering the next generation of legal professionals. He has been a trailblazer all his life, and his memoir chronicles a transformative life and career.”

—John A. Pierre, chancellor and professor of law, Southern University Law Center

“An overwhelmingly inspiring read that still holds relevance in today’s political climate. ‘*Breaking Barriers*’ is the perfect example of perseverance, faith, and being the change.”

—Cleo Fields, Louisiana State Senator