



Hon. Carol Bagley Amon

Senior Judge, Eastern District of New York

by Kathryn C. Cole



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Until a feline dissection assignment during her undergraduate biology studies at the College of William and Mary, Judge Carol Bagley Amon planned to follow in the footsteps of her father into the practice of medicine. Realizing, however, that medicine was not for her, Judge Amon chose instead to enroll in law school at the University of Virginia just as her cousin—whom she idolized—had done a few years earlier. Although she was embarking into a male-dominated profession, Judge Amon never thought twice about it. Indeed, she recounts that her father—one of her biggest supporters—fully endorsed her decision to attend law school during a time when many fathers wanted nothing more than for their daughters to marry well. According to Judge Amon, her father believed in a strong education for each of his children, irrespective of gender, and believed an education was the cornerstone to independence and self-sufficiency.

Judge Amon was born in Richmond, Va., the second of four children. She received a Bachelor's of Science from the College of William and Mary in 1968 and then graduated from UVA Law in 1971. Immediately after graduating law school, Judge Amon worked as a staff attorney at the Communications Satellite Corporation in Washington, D.C. (1971-1973). Finding the regulatory component of the work less challenging than she had anticipated, she began to pursue other career options. As luck would have it, her roommate arranged an introduction to Myles Ambrose, who was head of a drug task force at the Department of Justice. After working for a short time with Ambrose in Washington, Judge Amon married and transferred to the New York City office of the drug task force, where she served as a trial attorney. Thereafter, she was hired by the U.S. attorney for the Eastern District of New York. During her tenure as an assistant U.S. attorney ("AUSA") from 1974 to 1986, she served as chief of frauds (1978-1980), chief of general crimes (1981-1982), and senior litigation counsel (1984-1986).

While Judge Amon believes much of her success in the profession is attributable to luck, it is clear that she ascended the ranks, in part, because of her dedication to excellence and professionalism and her



willingness to embrace challenges put before her. One such career challenge presented itself while she worked as an AUSA and involved the opportunity to be lead prosecutor on a large, high-profile trial involving the exportation of arms and explosives to Ireland for use by the Irish Republican Army. Judge Amon identifies this as the "breakpoint in the advancement of my career as a prosecutor." This particular challenge did not present itself at the ideal moment, however. At the time, then-AUSA Amon had two young sons and recognized that accepting the case would mean extended hours away from home preparing for the case. But, with the support of her husband—a corporate lawyer who himself had a demanding schedule—and the encouragement of her parents, she successfully embraced the opportunity.

After 12 years as an AUSA, Amon was appointed a U.S. magistrate judge for the Eastern District of New York in 1986. She held this position until 1990, when she received a phone call from President George H.W. Bush asking whether she would accept his nomination to be a U.S. district judge in the same district. She was confirmed by the U.S. Senate on Aug. 3, 1990, received her commission on Aug. 7, 1990, and received a personal congratulatory telephone call from then-President Bush shortly thereafter. Amon states

that the personal telephone call from President Bush and the ensuing discussion is an “awesome memory” that she holds dear.

When asked about her early years on the bench, Judge Amon recounts with fondness an individual whom she identifies as her “greatest supporter *on* the bench”—the late Judge John R. Bartels, who, upon his passing in 1997, was the oldest sitting federal judge at 99 years of age. Judge Bartels served the public for 38 years as a federal judge and, according to Judge Amon, always encouraged her to be her best. Specifically, during her early years as a magistrate, Amon recalls, with a smile, Judge Bartels telling her “stop hiding your light under a bushel—get out there!”

On April 3, 2011, when then Chief Judge Raymond J. Dearie assumed senior status, Judge Amon was appointed Chief Judge of the Eastern District of New York. Immediately following her accepting the position, the new chief judge participated in the hiring of a new clerk of the court and a new district executive, as well as welcomed various new judges to the District, including Hon. Margo Kitsy Williams and Hon. Pamela Ki Mai Chen.

Judge Amon’s enthusiasm for her position as judge and her passion for the judiciary is apparent. Indeed, her passion is reflected in her active involvement in a number of professional organizations, including the Judicial Conference of the United States, where she is a member of the Judicial Committee on Codes of Conduct, and the Federal Bar Council American Inn of Court, where she is a member and a past president.

The Judicial Conference, formerly known as the Conference of Senior Circuit Judges, was created by Congress in 1922 to serve as the principal policy-making body concerned with the administration of the United States’ courts. The chief justice of the United States is the presiding officer of the Judicial Conference and membership comprises the chief judge of each judicial circuit, the chief judge of the Court of International Trade, and a district judge from each regional judicial circuit. In addition to the Judicial Conference, there are committees that review issues within their established jurisdictions and make policy recommendations to the conference. Judge Amon serves as the chair of the Code of Conduct Committee to the Judicial Conference and in this capacity, her committee provides ethical advice to judges, law clerks, and other court personnel. Judge Amon believes that being a part of this Code of Conduct Committee allows her to perform an important service to her colleagues.

Serving as the chair of the Code of Conduct Committee is only one of the many ways Judge Amon provides a service to her colleagues. Judge Amon also teaches an annual course at Pepperdine University entitled “Ethics for Law Clerks” and never hesitates to support the Inns of Court, a committee within the Federal Bar Council, which is an organization of lawyers who practice in federal courts within the Second Circuit. The Inns of Court endeavors to foster collegial interaction between

the bench and bar through formal programs and informal discussions that promote the ideals of professionalism, mentoring, ethics, and legal skills. Among its many goals, the Inn endeavors to create a community of lawyers and jurists who will guide, mentor, and befriend each other.

Judge Amon believes it invaluable for young attorneys to have networking opportunities to interact with federal judges as well as more seasoned practitioners. And, Judge Amon not only supports the efforts of the Inns of Court but she also takes seriously her own mentoring obligations. Indeed, and notwithstanding her busy schedule, Judge Amon continues to be a role model for many attorneys, especially her current and former law clerks. According to former law clerk Dana Seshens—a partner at a prominent New York City law firm—it was empowering to work for a woman who managed to be successful in her career and raise three sons, noting that Judge Amon “rose up through the legal ranks to the federal judiciary at a time when few women did so and she was able to achieve her professional success while simultaneously raising a family.”

Another former clerk—also a partner at a prominent New York City law firm—Ted Polubinski, states that Judge Amon takes a keen interest in the lives and careers of all of her clerks and treats her clerks “like an extended family.” Indeed, both Seshens and Polubinski remarked that Judge Amon continues to advise and mentor each clerk long after the clerkship has ended and, even with her schedule today, is available for career guidance and as a sounding board.

Polubinski also recounts when Judge Amon opened her courtroom to his daughter’s Girl Scout Troop. Not only did Judge Amon take the time to instruct the girls in a “mock trial”—including direct and cross examinations, as well as jury deliberations—but then graciously, and unnecessarily, took the time to host the troop in chambers for juice boxes, home-baked brownies, and a Q&A session. According to Polubinski, “The girls were awestruck both with Judge Amon and with what they were able to accomplish so quickly under her tutelage. So was I.”

Both Seshens and Polubinski remarked that Judge Amon not only instilled in them the importance of embracing challenges throughout their respective careers, but that the judge always led by example—demonstrating excellence, care, and diligence in each matter before her and holding herself and the counsel who appeared before her to the highest standards of the profession. Clearly, the respect Judge Amon commands in the courtroom, in the community, from her family, her law clerks and deputies, and from her peers speaks volumes about the judge as a jurist and as a person. Judge Amon’s legacy is steeped in public service, commitment to the court and its constituents, and a demand for excellence. She is a leader by example!

Although Judge Amon assumed senior status on Nov. 30, 2016, she looks forward to continuing to improve

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me assure you that he was never “old” because he always carried himself as someone forty years younger than he was. Last January he and his wife, Barbara, accompanied us to the New York City Ballet on a cold blustery night, and we had trouble keeping up with him. Other than being shot in the leg during a battle the day before the Battle of the Bulge, he was never in the hospital, never took medication, and never wore glasses or exercised.

Judge Wexler was the ultimate Long Islander and a part of every inch of granite in the new courthouse. Without his dedication, the Long Island Courthouse might never have been built.

Upon his and Barbara’s return from two weeks in Egypt, he died suddenly at home. He was 93 years old. He and his wife were married for sixty-five years, and she showered him with her lovely paintings in his chambers. Their youngest son Bill Wexler, an attorney, lived six houses away from his parents and would have lunch at least once a week with his dad in the court’s cafeteria.

Judge Wexler cared deeply for the Court, his colleagues, and the lawyers and parties who appeared before him. He was direct, never intimidated, and never missed a day in court. He shall be truly missed. ☉

Amon Profile *continued from page 17*

upon the court as an institution, and to the inherent challenges in her responsibility as a judge of the Eastern District of New York—a judicial district that spans two courthouses, 26 Article III judges, 16 magistrate judges,

and encompasses more than 300 employees consisting of law clerks, support staff, deputies, and marshals—to name a few. ☉

Bianco Profile *continued from page 21*

Bianco’s anniversary of his appointment to the Bench.

Judge Bianco has had, and will continue to have, a profound impact on the lives of many people, in many contexts. His family, his students, his law clerks, his congregation, and the public at large who he serves dutifully in his judicial role are all beneficiaries of his good work. We are indeed fortunate to have him in the Eastern District of New York. ☉

Endnotes

¹Comments from *The Robing Room*, <http://www.therobingroom.com/District>.

²*Id.*

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