

LawCrossing's  
*Spotlight on*  
Minority  
Attorneys

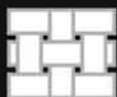


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# LawCrossing's Spotlight on Minority Attorneys

by LawCrossing

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ISBN: 0-9788619-6-5

Printed and bound in the United States of America.

## Introduction

If you are looking for interesting, inspirational reading, you have come to the right place. *LawCrossing's Spotlight on Minority Attorneys* presents profiles of 19 exceptional minority attorneys who, through innate ability, hard work, and perseverance, have carved successful niches in a predominantly white industry to reach extraordinary heights of success.

In the year 2000, Lawyers for One America reported that 10% of all attorneys in America were minorities. According to the National Association for Law Placement, minority lawyers made up 3% of all partners and 15% of all associates at large law firms across the country.

*LawCrossing's Spotlight on Minority Attorneys* is a compilation of attorney profiles written about successful lawyers who have distinguished themselves in every area of the law. It features profiles of trial attorneys, activists, and even a few legal experts who have opted to pursue alternative endeavors. These profiles offer fascinating glimpses inside their worlds.



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# Dennis Archer

By Jesse London



Trial lawyer, professor, law firm chairman, supreme court judge, big city mayor, first African-American president of the American Bar Association. This week we profile Dennis Archer, a man who's done most everything the legal profession has to offer.

Some *Law Stars* do it all. If there is one super-sized, all-around, world-class *Law Star*, it would have to be Dennis Archer: Trial lawyer, professor, law firm chairman, supreme court judge, big city mayor. Did we leave anything out?

Oh, yes, just to top it all off, in August 2003 the former two-term mayor of Detroit and chairman of Dickinson Wright became the first African American president of the American Bar Association, a mere 60 years after the nation's top professional association for lawyers reluctantly began to admit blacks at all. Indeed, some *Law Stars* make history.

Naturally, few arbiters of law fame and acclaim have overlooked Dennis Archer. His name has been a fixture on a seemingly endless parade of "best of" compilations, including lists of the "most influential blacks," "most powerful businessmen," "most powerful attorneys," "most dynamic mayors," "most respected judges," "public official of the year," and more, in countless publications including *Newsweek*, *Governing* magazine, *Ebony* and the *National Law Journal*. We did not mind standing in line patiently to award him a *Law Star*.

A quick look at the trajectory to date. Born in Detroit in 1942 and raised in Cassopolis, Michigan, Archer worked his way through Western Michigan University and then Detroit College of Law.

Over the years Archer practiced as a trial attorney in Detroit, taught learning disabled children in his city's public schools, and served as associate professor of the Detroit College of Law as well as adjunct professor at Wayne State University Law School.

In 1985 Governor James Blanchard appointed Archer Associate Justice of Michigan State Supreme Court in 1986, where he served until 1990. Thereafter, the citizens of Detroit elected him mayor, twice, during which time he also served one year as president of the National League of Cities.

Upon leaving the mayor's office, Archer became chairman of Dickinson Wright, a renowned Detroit-based law firm with offices throughout Michigan, as well as in Washington, D.C.

And before taking the helm at the ABA, Archer served as president of other notable law associations including the National Bar Association and the State Bar of Michigan.

Archer's wife, Trudy DunCombe Archer, serves as a judge of Michigan's 36th District Court and they are the proud parents of two.

Naturally, I was out of breath when Dennis Archer took a moment to chat with me about law, life, the ABA and more. (But he was raring to go.)

**Q: Mr. Archer, congratulations on your election to the ABA's top position, a step forward not just for the profession but for the nation. And I'm delighted to talk with you as a newly-named LawCrossing *Law Star* who has been breaking barriers and leading the charge of African American political, social and professional achievement for years. Of all the positions you've held, starting with caddying at a golf course at the age of eight, and including lawyer, professor, judge, mayor and law firm partner, all the way to your current role at the ABA, can you tell us: which job or position has been the most rewarding?**

**A:** Each job has been outstanding and has provided me with different experiences and helped me grow as a person. I loved teaching the learning disabled. I worked hard to prepare a lesson plan; I learned to be flexible, but to always stay focused on the end result, which was to help students learn. This paved the way for the jobs that I later enjoyed and continue to enjoy which is that of being a leader. Being mayor of the city of Detroit made me mindful of always balancing the budget and making sure we stayed within budget, at the same time trying to improve the quality of life for our citizens. And that applies to members of the American Bar Association, too, and to our sections, our divisions, leaders of state, local and international bars, and our affiliate organizations.

**Q: Compared to being mayor of a big city, which we can safely assume was a job filled with great challenges and rewards, how are you enjoying serving as head of the nations' lawyers? Any surprises so far?**

**A:** This is one of the most satisfying positions I've held. I enjoy traveling around the country and internationally meeting with outstanding bar leaders and lawyers who are committed and share the goals of the ABA. The one surprise was just how much travel is involved and that there is so much to be accomplished in so little time. It is truly a wonderful full time job.

**Q: Still youthful at 62, if you could get any job you have not yet tried, assuming there is any job you have not tried -- or achieve anything that has yet eluded you, what would it be?**

**A:** I have been blessed as every goal I have set, I have been able to meet. I now await the mission He has set for me as I am now content to return to the full-time practice of law and to successfully contribute to the corporate boards on which I am privileged to serve.



