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Virgin Islands Supreme Court Gains First New Justice in 18 Years: Harold Willocks

Justice Harold Willocks's appointment to the Supreme Court marks a historic addition after nearly two decades. Leaders commended his deep understanding of Virgin Islands' culture and his distinguished career in public service

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Justice Harold Willocks. By. WTJX

For the first time in 18 years, the Supreme Court of the Virgin Islands has welcomed a new justice.

On Friday, an investiture ceremony was held for Harold Willocks, the fourth Justice of the territory's Supreme Court. Chief Justice Rhys Hodge remarked on the long journey towards the

establishment of the territorial apex court, and noted the need for those administering the law in a community to have knowledge of that jurisdiction's culture and way of life. "The people of the Virgin Islands expect judges of the courts of the Virgin Islands to appreciate how life in the Virgin Islands is both similar and different from life on the mainland," Chief Justice Hodge said.

"This is especially true for those who serve as Justices of the Supreme Court," he argued. "It is for this reason that we celebrate the appointment of Justice Willocks to our Supreme Court."

Noting that Mr. Willocks "is a son of the soil and a product of the public schools in St. Croix", Mr. Hodge detailed Justice Willocks's long history of service to the people of the Virgin Islands, first as a teacher, then as a prosecutor-turned-public defender, followed by his ascension to the bench of the Superior Court.

The Chief Justice also cited Justice Willocks's scholarly writings as evidence of his deep connection to and understanding of the Virgin Islands, highlighting his authorship of *The Umbilical Cord: The History of the United States Virgin Islands From Pre-Colombian Era to the Present* from among his 20 publications as perhaps no better evidence of that understanding.

With his work alongside community organizations, "Justice Willocks not only possesses superior knowledge of the Virgin Islands law, but understands how that law impacts the community we all serve," Chief Judge Hodge declared.

Associate Justice of the Supreme Court Maria Cabret said the reasons why Justice Willocks is the best person for the job as the court's newest associate are "far too numerous for any person to say this morning." However, she highlighted his "thoroughly thoughtful" approach to the law, and his personal qualities of kindness and compassion. Justice Cabret made mention of the deep respect and admiration felt towards Justice Willocks by the entire legal community and the wider Virgin Islands at large. "Unquestionably, Justice Willocks is one of the brightest shining stars of the Virgin islands," she declared, saying that she was "overwhelmed with joy" at his appointment.

Justice Arlington Swan cautioned his new colleague that "appellate work is significantly different from trial work," as Justice Willocks would immediately discover. However, Justice Swan expressed confidence that the new Justice's "towering intellect" would find the transition easy.

The speakers that followed, from the Superior Court, the Virgin Islands Bar Association, and the legislative branch of government, continued to praise Mr. Willocks for his erudition, his willingness to serve, and his dedication to doing so on behalf of the people of the Virgin Islands.

Governor Albert Bryan Jr. reflected on Justice Willocks's humility despite his great achievements, a titan in a community of people who "just know him as Harold...you could meet him and you will never know that he's a justice. And that is a blessing in itself," the governor said.