

Comprehensive Bio

Nkechi Taifa, Esq.

Nkechi Taifa serves as senior policy analyst for the Open Society Foundations and Open Society Policy Center, focusing on issues of criminal and civil justice reform. She also convenes the Justice Roundtable, a broad network of advocacy groups advancing federal criminal justice policy in Washington. She is admitted to practice before the United States Supreme Court, U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit, and the District of Columbia Court of Appeals. She received her Juris Doctorate from George Washington University Law School and graduated magna cum laude from Howard University.

In a career spanning over thirty years, Nkechi has a rich history specializing in the advancement of issues and projects which enrich the legal, educational, cultural and financial health of the community. She has served as founding director of the award-winning Equal Justice Program at Howard University School of Law, where she also coordinated the law School's Externship Program and taught seminars on "Racial Disparity in the Criminal Justice System," Public Interest Law," and the "Law of Corrections and Prisoners' Rights;" adjunct professor at American University Washington College of Law; legislative counsel for the American Civil Liberties Union where she served as the principal spokesperson on criminal justice and civil rights issues; policy counsel for the Women's Legal Defense Fund; staff attorney for the National Prison Project; Office Manager and Network Organizer for the Washington Office on Africa; elementary school teacher at NationHouse Watoto School, and founder and director of a Saturday School for youth. She also maintained a general criminal and civil law practice in the District of Columbia, representing indigent adult and juvenile clients, and specialized in employment discrimination law.

Nkechi Taifa has had five law review articles published, "Integrative Solutions to Interrelated Issues: A Multidisciplinary Look Behind the Cycle of Incarceration," "Cracked Justice: A Critical Examination of Cocaine Sentencing;" "Three Strikes and You're Out – Mandatory Life Imprisonment for Third Time Felons;" "Civil Forfeiture vs. Civil Liberties;" and "Codification or Castration – the Applicability of the International Race Convention to the U.S. Criminal Justice System." She was the Project Chair for the publication, *Tulia: Tip of the Drug War Iceberg*, and author of the chapter, "Social Policy Implications of Racial Disparities in the Criminal Justice System," published in *The Color of Social Policy*. She is also the author of the article, "Roadblocked Reentry: the Prison After Imprisonment," and served as the principal author of the Advancement Project's report, "Re-Enfranchisement! A Guide for Individual Restoration of Voting Rights in States that Permanently Disenfranchise Former Felons." She was a contributing author to *Black Reparations: American Slavery and its Vestiges; Reparations Yes: The Legal and Political Reasons Why Blacks Should be Paid for the Enslavement of Our Ancestors;* and *Decolonization U.S.A.* Taifa has served as consultant to various organizations and projects, and been interviewed and quoted extensively in the national and local electronic and print media.

As convener of the Justice Roundtable, Taifa was in the leadership of the coalition responsible for the passage of both the Second Chance Act reentry legislation (2008) and the Fair Sentencing Act crack disparity legislation (2010). Nkechi Taifa served as co-chair for the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights (LCCR) Steering Committee on D.C. Statehood (1993-95) which resulted in a historic first vote in Congress; and on LCCR's Task Force on Voting Rights (1991-93) which resulted in passage of the National Voter Registration Act (Motor Voter bill). She helped to mobilize the successful campaign against implementation of the death penalty in the District of Columbia in the early 90's, and served as coordinator and trainer for the 1995 Million Man March Legal Observer Committee. She served as a prosecutor delivering the Opening Statement for both the 2007 International Tribunal on Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, and the 1997 International Tribunal for Justice for Mumia Abu-Jamal.

Nkechi Taifa has testified before the U.S. Congress, the United States Sentencing Commission, the Council of the District of Columbia, and the American Bar Association Justice Kennedy Commission. She serves as an appointed Commissioner and Chair of the District of Columbia Commission on Human Rights. She has served on the board of numerous organizations, and has received awards and honors, including the "President's Award," from the Washington Council of Lawyers," "Certificate of Achievement for Outstanding Advocacy" from Congresswoman Maxine Waters, the Rosmarian Award for Excellence in Teaching and Service," "Professor of the Year," "Outstanding Social Engineer Award," and "Distinguished Faculty Author Award" – all from Howard University School of Law; Certificado De Participacion, Universidad de la Habana, Sociedad y Derecho en Cuba," and the "Pro Bono Resource Center of Maryland Appreciation Award."

In her personal capacity, Nkechi Taifa is the founder and CEO of SCHOLARgifts, an exciting new crowdfunding platform for educational needs. She is President of Legacy Empowerment Enterprises (LEE), her family's home-based business. LEE is an umbrella entity, consisting of a web-based travel service - Legacy Travel Site; a Network Marketing Company – Legacy Biz; a consulting firm - Legacy Consulting; and an educational series - Legacy Empowerment. She served as the host of the year-long Legacy Justice Radio Show, which helped to shape the national discourse on targeted justice issues that disproportionately impact people of color and the poor, and is currently host of "Spotlight on Justice" on WPFW-FM radio. A multi-talented individual, Nkechi Taifa received an Individual Artist Fellowship Award for Excellence in Literature from the D.C. Commission on the Arts and Humanities, and is the published author of two books for children, *Shining Legacy* (1983) which highlights twelve heroes and heroines through moving stories accentuated with rhyme; and *The Adventures of Kojo and Ama* (1992) which contains seven wisdom-filled stories combining excitement, fun and suspense with lessons in pride and heritage. She has performed spoken word with the group "BlackNotes" as part of its debut CD project, leading her original creation, "While Malcolm Preached, Trane Played." She is the proud mother of a daughter, Mariama Taifa-Seitu, and the wife of Dakarai James Kearney.

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