The Court Archive:
Judge Wendell E. Green

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Judge Wendell E. Green was one of the first Black judges who had a lengthy judicial career lasting nearly twenty years, and he presided in a high-profile case involving a police officer killing a Hispanic youth in Cook County.

Wendell Elbert Green was born January 1, 1887, in Topeka, Kansas. His father was a native of Bermuda. Green graduated from the University of Kansas in 1908 with a degree in chemistry. In 1910, he was working as a druggist in a St. Joseph, Missouri drug store. He married Lorraine Richardson in 1912 in Harrisonville, Missouri, just south of Kansas City. The Greens moved to Chicago in the mid-1910s in order for Wendell to study law at the University of Chicago. There he met Earl B. Dickerson, and the two received their LLB degrees at the same time and received their law licenses on the same day on December 10, 1920. The two also briefly shared a law office after becoming lawyers.

Green became a well-known defense attorney in the 1920s. He was also active in the Cook County Bar Association. In 1925, he helped to form the National Bar Association and became its first secretary. In 1930, Green became an assistant public defender for Cook County and also served six years on the Chicago Civil Service Commission. In the 1940s, Green served as president of the board of trustees for Provident Hospital, the African American hospital founded a half-century earlier by Dr. Daniel Hale Williams, who was the first doctor to perform successful open-heart surgery. Future Illinois attorney and First Lady Michelle Obama was born at Provident.

In 1942, Green was elected judge of the Cook County Municipal Court. In 1950, Illinois Governor Adlai Stevenson appointed him to become a circuit court judge. Judge Green was elected to a full term in 1951 and reelected in 1957. Judge Green worked primarily in family court and argued for the creation of a training school staffed with psychologists and case workers to help delinquent youths.

One of Judge Green's cases received national attention. In 1951, Michael Moretti, a Chicago police officer, was charged with murder after shooting and killing Arthur Gamino, a 15-year-old Hispanic youth. Moretti claimed self-defense because he saw Gamino, Edward Salvi, and

Leonard Monaco holding a gun before Moretti shot and killed Gamino and Salvi and wounding Monaco. Judge Abraham Lincoln Marovitz presided in the trial, but a hung jury resulted in a new trial, which was then assigned to Judge Green. One of the star witnesses was the wounded Monaco. As judge, Green navigated racial issues as well as "side issues of scandal, narcotics, political pressure, and bribery." The jury found Moretti guilty, and Judge Green sentenced him to life imprisonment. After the verdict, detectives checked the ignition and starting systems of Judge Green's car out of concern for a planted bomb. The case went to the Illinois Supreme Court twice: *People v. Moretti*, 415 Ill. 398 (1953) and *People v. Moretti*, 6 Ill. 2d 494 (1955). Both cases affirmed the judgment. In the latter case, Justice Joseph Daily wrote, "we conclude that defendant has had a fair trial, free from prejudicial error, and that the verdict of the jury is supported by sufficient credible evidence. We are not, therefore, warranted in interfering with the judgment of the trial court."

Judge Green's wife, Lorraine, was elected to the Chicago School Board in 1958 and served until 1969 when she passed away. In the summer of 1959, Judge Green became ill and died on August 24, 1959. He is buried in Burr Oak Cemetery in Alsip. In 1973, the Cook County School Board named the new elementary school at Racine and 96th Street after the first African American judge in Illinois, Wendell E. Green.