Griffin Boyette Bell Biography

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Biography

Griffin Boyette Bell served as U.S. attorney general from 1977 to 1979. Bell, who was appointed by President Jimmy Carter, had previously served as a federal appellate judge for fifteen years. A distinguished corporate lawyer before becoming a judge, Bell resumed his private law practice in 1979.

Bell was born on October 31, 1918, in Americus, Georgia. After serving in World War II, Bell attended Mercer University Law School, graduating in 1948. Admitted to the Georgia bar, Bell practiced law in Savannah, Georgia, and Rome, Georgia, between 1947 and 1953. He then moved to Atlanta and became a member of a distinguished law firm.

Bell got his first taste of government service in 1959 when he became chief of staff to Georgia Governor S. Ernest Vandiver. Though Vandiver opposed school desegregation, Bell worked quietly with African-American leaders to broker a compromise. His willingness to defend desegregation led to his appointment in 1961 to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit. As a federal appeals judge, Bell ranged from moderate to conservative in his viewpoints. Though he supported civil rights in employment and voting rights cases, he opposed busing to achieve school desegregation. In addition, he worked on court reforms that improved the efficiency of the system.

In 1976, Bell resigned from the court and resumed his private law practice in Atlanta. However, he also found time to advise Georgia governor Jimmy Carter in his presidential campaign. Again Bell was rewarded for his efforts. Carter named Bell attorney general in 1977.

As attorney general, Bell worked on court reform and directed the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) to pursue white-collar crime, narcotics trafficking and antitrust violations. However, he grew disenchanted with government service and returned to his Atlanta law firm in 1979. Since then, Bell has remained in the public eye by defending large U.S. corporations. For example, he conducted an independent investigation of Exxon Corporation's actions following a 1989 oil spill in Prince William Sound, off the coast of Alaska.

Bell has served on numerous law-related committees and has chaired groups that investigated violent crime and legal ethics. In addition, he served as president of the American College of Trial Lawyers. In 1982, Bell published *Taking Care of the Law*, which described his term as attorney general and recommended reforms in the judicial system.