

Nkechi Taifa, Esq.
Comprehensive Bio/CV (as of January 1, 2026)
Preferred pronunciation
(Neh-KEE-Chee Tah-EE-fah)

Nkechi Taifa is a civil and human rights attorney, scholar-activist, talk show host, and best-selling author. She is President and CEO of The Taifa Group LLC, a social enterprise firm whose mission is to advance justice, and is Executive Director of the Reparation Education Project, Inc., bringing long-standing expertise to this burgeoning movement. She is a Power, Innovation, and Leadership graduate of the Harvard Kennedy School, and serves on the governing board of the Corrections Information Council. A visionary thought leader and nationally recognized expert and commentator on race and justice issues, Taifa is Convener Emeritus of the Justice Roundtable Coalition, served as Commissioner and Chair of the D.C. Commission on Human Rights, and as Senior Fellow for the Center for Justice at Columbia University. She is a founding and lifetime member of the National Coalition of Blacks for Reparations in America (N'COBRA), and an inaugural commissioner of the National African American Reparations Commission (NAARC).

Nkechi served as the Advocacy Director for Criminal Justice for the Open Society Foundations and Open Society Policy Center from 2002-2018, focusing on issues of sentencing reform, law enforcement reform, reentry, prison reform, executive clemency, and racial justice. She also founded the Justice Roundtable coalition while at the Open Society. As the Roundtable convener for 19 years, 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). She helped to fuel the mobilization of the Obama administration's clemency initiative, which resulted in the early release from unjust imprisonment of over 1,700 people and successfully advocated for the inclusion of sentencing provisions within the 2018 First Step Act.

Nkechi was the founding director of the award-winning Equal Justice Program at Howard University School of Law from 1996-2002, where she also directed 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." She taught as an adjunct professor at American University Washington College of Law as well as Howard Law until 2006, and taught high school students criminal law as part of the National Bar Association's Crump Law Camp from 2001-2019.

Taifa served as legislative counsel for the American Civil Liberties Union from 1991-1996 where she was its principal spokesperson on criminal justice and civil rights issues; policy counsel for the Women's Legal Defense Fund from 1989-1991; staff attorney for the National Prison Project from 1984-1987; Office Manager and Network Organizer for the Washington Office on Africa from 1980-1983; elementary school teacher at NationHouse Watoto School from 1977-1980, and as founder and director of a Saturday School for

youth during the 1970s. She also maintained a general criminal and civil law practice in the District of Columbia between 1987-1991, representing indigent adult and juvenile clients, and specializing in employment discrimination law.

Nkechi Taifa served as co-chair of 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 the Leadership Conference'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 the 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. Taifa served as chief prosecutor for the 2021 International Tribunal on Human Rights Abuses in the U.S.; and as the 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, the American Bar Association Justice Kennedy Commission, the United Nations Permanent Forum on People of African Descent, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, the U.S. Helsinki Commission, the Maryland Legislature, and the California State Task Force on Reparations. She served as an appointed Commissioner and Chair of the District of Columbia Commission on Human Rights from 2007-2014. On April 4, 2022, she delivered a poignantly moving TEDx talk, "Reparations: An Issue Whose Time Has Come."

Nkechi is the author of the best-selling memoir, *Black Power, Black Lawyer: My Audacious Quest for Justice*, which tells the story of the rebellious journey of a girl coming of age during the Black Power era and the social justice lawyer she becomes. She is the author of the best-selling book, *Reparations on Fire: How and Why it's Spreading Across America*, which has been described as "part historical analysis, part revolutionary manifesto, and part political red alert." A multi-talented individual, Nkechi is also the published author of three books for children, *Shining Legacy* (1983) which highlights twelve Black heroes and heroines through moving stories accentuated with rhyme; *Three Tales of Wisdom* (1983) which combines history and Afrofuturism into original Black folktales; 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. After being banned by a school district in 2020, Taifa re-published these classics in 2021 for a new generation. She performed spoken word with the group "BlackNotes" as part of its 1998 debut CD project, leading her original creation, "While Malcolm Preached, Trane Played." She is part of the 2024-released hip hop reparations single, 'AEO,' featuring the lyrical refrain, 'How We Gonna Make Reparations Rise? Agitate, Educate, Organize!'

Attorney Taifa has had six law review articles published, "Let's Talk About Reparations" (Columbia Journal of Race and Law (Spring 2019); "Integrative Solutions to Interrelated

Issues: A Multidisciplinary Look Behind the Cycle of Incarceration” (Harvard Law and Policy Review, Summer 2009 – co-authored with Catherine Beane); “Codification or Castration – the Applicability of the International Race Convention to the U.S. Criminal Justice System” (Howard Law Journal 1997); “Cracked Justice: A Critical Examination of Cocaine Sentencing” (Univ. of West Los Angeles Law Review, 1996); “Three Strikes and You’re Out – Mandatory Life Imprisonment for Third Time Felons” (University of Dayton Law Review, 1995); and “Civil Forfeiture vs. Civil Liberties” (New York Law School Law Review, 1994).

She is a contributing author to the anthology, *Excessive Punishment: How the Justice System Creates Mass Incarceration*, published by Columbia University Press (2024). 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 ground-breaking White Papers and Issue Briefs, such as “Race, Mass Incarceration, and the Disastrous War on Drugs” (Brennan Center for Justice May 2021); “Clemency: An Inside Story from a Progressive Advocate” (Federal Sentencing Reporter June 2017); “Racism in the Criminal Justice System: Institutionalized Genocide” (American Constitution Society 2016); “A Bittersweet Moment in History: Passage of the Fair Sentencing Act (NACDL Champion Magazine 2010); “Roadblocked Reentry: the Prison After Imprisonment” (National Bar Association Magazine 2006); and “Reflections from the Frontlines: An Insider’s Perspective on the Crack Cocaine Controversy” (Federal Sentencing Reporter 1998).

Nkechi Taifa 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” (2002). She was a contributing author to the 1987 published book, *Black Reparations: American Slavery and its Vestiges*; and *Reparations Yes: The Legal and Political Reasons Why Blacks Should be Paid for the Enslavement of Our Ancestors*; and *Decolonization U.S.A.*

Nkechi served on the Legal Advisory Team of the Legacy of the GU272 Alliance (descendants of the 1838 Jesuit sale of 272 enslaved persons which ensured the survival of Georgetown University); and is a past president of the DC Chapter of the National Conference of Black Lawyers; and former co-chair of the Legislative Commission of the National Coalition of Blacks for Reparations in America. She submitted a clemency petition on behalf of reggae star Buju Banton, seeking relief from the overzealous prosecution that led to his imprisonment on drug charges.

Reported civil and criminal legal cases with Taifa as counsel include *Shepherd v. American Broadcasting Companies*, 864 F. Supp. 486 (D.C. Cir. 1994); 62 F.3d 1469 (D.C. Cir. 1995); *U.S. v. Whitehorn*, 710 F. Supp. 803 (1989); *U.S. v. Marilyn Buck and Mutulu Shakur*, 690 F. Supp. 1291 (SDNY) 1988; and *Knop v. Johnson*, 655 F. Supp. 871 (WD Mich 1987).

Nkechi has served on the boards of a myriad of organizations, and has received numerous awards and honors, including the prestigious **“William J. Brennan, Jr. Award”** from the District of Columbia Bar Association (2025), **“Legacy Award”** from First Repair (2024); **“Walking in the Footsteps of the Ancestors Award;”** from ADACI (2024); **Community Healer Award** from the Community Healing Network (2023); **“Malcolm X Black Unity Award”** from the National Association of Kawaida Organizations; **“Champion of Justice Award”** from the National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers (2021); **“Lifetime Achievement Award”** from the 17th Annual A Love Supreme Trane Tribute (2021); **“Distinguished 400 Award”** from the 400 Years of African American History Commission (2024 & 2021); **“Black Resistance Matters Award,”** from the Malcolm X Commemoration Committee (2017); **“Equal Justice Award”** from the UDC David A. Clarke School of Law (2017); **Dad’s Award** from Hope House (2016); **“Wiley Branton Award”** from the National Bar Association (2016); **“Legacy Award”** from the Institute of the Black World 21st Century (2016); the **“Marcus Garvey Award”** from the Universal Negro Improvement Association (2015); the **“Cornelius Neil Alexander Humanitarian Award”** from the D.C. Commission on Human Rights (2015); the **“Wiley Branton Award”** from the Washington Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights and Urban Affairs (2014); the **“Umoja Award,”** from the National Black United Front (2014); **“Certificate of Achievement for Outstanding Advocacy”** from Congresswoman Maxine Waters (2011); the **“President’s Award”** from the Washington Council of Lawyers (2005);” the **“Rosmarian Award for Excellence in Teaching and Service** (2000); ” **“Professor of the Year (1999),”** **“Outstanding Social Engineer Award (1996),”** and **“Distinguished Faculty Author Award”** -- – all from Howard University School of Law; **Certificado De Participacion**, Universidad de la Habana, Sociedad y Derecho en Cuba;” the **“Pro Bono Publico Award”** from the American Bar Association for outstanding leadership of Howard Law’s Equal Justice Program (1996); and the **“Appreciation Award”** from the Pro Bono Resource Center of Maryland (1996).

Taifa was honored as one of Essence Magazine’s 100 Woke Black Women Advocating for Change (2019); celebrated as one of Essence Magazine’s Unsung Black Women Making Strides in the Law (2018); and was showcased in a feature article in People’s Magazine (2020). She has served as consultant to various organizations and projects and is interviewed and quoted extensively in the national and local electronic and print media.

Nkechi has worked her whole career seeking justice for political prisoners, victims of the FBI’s campaign to disrupt and destroy Black and other movements. Some of those that she successfully worked with others to get released from prison include Imari Abubakari Obadele, Geronimo Jijaga Pratt, Sekou Odinga, Sundiata Acoli, Veronza Bowers, Leonard Peltier and more. At the end of the Biden Administration, Taifa was ecstatic that work she had been engaged in for over ten years with Dr. Julius Garvey as part of the Justice 4 Garvey campaign to help secure a posthumous pardon for his father, the Honorable Marcus Mosiah Garvey was granted! Garvey’s 1920 conviction was the first for a young J. Edgar Hoover under the predecessor to the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the dirty tricks employed would continue to be used against activists throughout the decades. The January 2025 posthumous pardon was a major achievement, in that only four others

had been granted after-death pardons in U.S. history up to that time. Taifa's chapter, "The Garvey Movement: Personal, Powerful, Political," was featured in Dr. Garvey's pivotal book, *Justice For Marcus Garvey: Look for Me in the Whirlwind*.

Nkechi is admitted to practice before the United States Supreme Court, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit, and the District of Columbia Court of Appeals. A native Washingtonian, she received her Juris Doctorate from George Washington University Law School (1984) and graduated magna cum laude from Howard University (1977). Taifa's birth name is Anita Josephine Caldwell. She is the proud mother of an adult daughter, Mariama Taifa-Seitu.

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