

## **Judge Santiago E. Campos**

By

Hon. James A. Parker

In 1978, President Jimmy Carter appointed Santiago E. “Jimmy” Campos as the first person of Hispanic heritage to serve on the bench of the United States District Court for the District of New Mexico. Judge Campos was born in Santa Rosa, New Mexico in 1926. He served in the United States Navy from 1944 to 1946. In 1953 he was awarded a Juris Doctorate from the University of New Mexico School of Law, graduating first in his law school class. He then was a member of the Office of the Attorney General for the State of New Mexico from 1954 to 1957 after which he practiced law with a firm in Santa Fe, New Mexico. In 1971 Judge Campos was elected district judge of the First Judicial District of New Mexico in Santa Fe and held that position until he was appointed to the federal bench in 1978. He was Chief Judge of the District of New Mexico from 1987 to 1989, when he assumed senior status.

Because he was a former trial lawyer, Judge Campos relished good advocacy. He knew that litigants were best served when attorneys were prepared and conducted themselves in a professional manner. As a judge he demanded the best from attorneys, and because his expectations were great, so too were the results.

Judge Campos was the premier golfer among the judges in the history of the District of New Mexico, and probably among the judges in the national judiciary. His passion for golf developed at an early age. When he was a young altar boy in Santa Rosa, he often borrowed Father Cassidy’s irons to practice. Always possessed of great confidence, one day young Jimmy Campos knew he could hit an iron over the top of the church. Unfortunately the shot was a mite low and shattered a stained glass window. Father Cassidy temporarily interrupted young Campos’ golfing career; but he resumed it with a vengeance later in life as a lawyer and a judge.

Judge Campos was a superb linguist and a teacher of both Spanish and English. He stated his thoughts, in writing or orally, with precision. When contemplating a profound pronouncement he would pause in mid-sentence—you could almost hear his mind whirring—and then utter the perfect word. He has a repertoire of DICHOS that he was fond of expressing. Those who would say to him “Buenos Dias” were immediately admonished for dereliction and disrespect. Judge Campos pointed out that the proper greeting was “Buenos dias le de` Dios.” If you said only “Buenos Dias” his response invariably was “Buenos dias dijo el Diablo para no mentar a Dios.” At his investiture ceremony, which was held on the grounds outside the United States Courthouse in Santa Fe, Judge Campos delivered part of his speech in Spanish, making it undoubtedly a prideful occasion for many New Mexico Hispanics. He endearingly addressed his colleague, Judge James A. Parker, as “Tocayo” (“namesake” in English) because they shared a common name. Sometimes he simply addressed Judge Parker as “Flaco” (“skinny” in English) because Judge Parker is rather slim. When then-Chief Judge John E. Conway told then-Senior Judge Campos that he would have to vacate his chambers much sooner than he wanted to in order to accommodate a new judge, Judge Campos bestowed upon Chief Judge Conway the sobriquet “Iron Pants.”

Judge Campos had a delightful, self-deprecating sense of humor. On the back of the door to his chambers bathroom he hung a cartoon depicting a robed judge looking into a mirror and talking to himself, saying “Now, your honor, go out there and display your rare sense of justice: that sensitive balance between complete fairness to both sides and a desperate compassion for the physically, morally, and culturally deprived—all overlaid with your delightful sense of humor.”

Judge Campos handled a number of significant cases, in some of which he wrote important opinions that were interspersed with interesting words that reinforced his reputation as a master wordsmith. In an action that arose out of occupation of the United States Embassy in Tehran by Iranian students, Judge Campos granted an injunction against New Mexico State University prohibiting it from enforcing a resolution that was designed to rid the campus of Iranian students during the Iranian hostage crisis. The Regents of the University had voted to deny enrollment to students “whose home government holds or permits the holding of U.S. citizens hostage . . . until the hostages are released unharmed.” Judge Campos ruled that the resolution violated the Iranian students’ equal protection rights under the United States Constitution and impermissibly interfered with federal immigration policy. Judge Campos wrote: “This crisis tests our country’s patience. It also tests our country’s commitment to its fundamental principles of liberty expressed in the Constitution.” Describing him as “one of American’s great radicals,” Judge Campos quoted Benjamin Franklin who had written: “God grant that not only the love of liberty, but a thorough knowledge of the rights of man may pervade all the nations of the earth so that a philosopher may set his foot anywhere on its surface and say, ‘this is my country.’” Judge Campos then stated, “I suggest that the ideal is as civilized and as civilizing today as when Mr. Franklin articulated it about two hundred years ago.”

Judge Campos presided over a fourteen-week jury trial involving a breach of contract case between Robert McKinney, former owner of *The New Mexican*, and Gannett Company, a newspaper, radio and television conglomerate that had purchased *The New Mexican* from McKinney. In a post-trial order, Campos stated that instead of honoring its contractual commitments, Gannett had escalated its breaches of the contract to “the highest level of dishonor” and described Gannett’s executive, in particular CEO Alan Neuharth, as “hard chargers” who exhibited “perfidy” towards McKinney’s contractual rights, and as having attitudes that were “jaded” and “insensitive.” Judge Campos’ orders were affirmed by the Tenth Circuit and the case was featured in a part of the 1996 publication entitled *Chain Gang: One Newspaper versus the Gannett Empire*.

In the first DNA admissibility case in the District of New Mexico, and one of the earliest throughout the nation, Judge Campos made a pre-*Daubert* ruling, after thirteen days of hearing scientific evidence, that DNA evidence would be admissible at the trial of a rape case.

For his chambers staff and other court personnel, he prominently displayed his "Golden Rules" which were:

SANTIAGO E. CAMPOS  
JUDGE

P.O. BOX 2244

**GOLDEN RULES**

1. If you open it, close it.
2. If you turn it on, turn it off.
3. If you unlock it, lock it up.
4. If you break it, admit it.
5. If you can't fix it, call in someone who can.
6. If you borrow it, return it.
7. If you value it, take care of it.
8. If you make a mess, clean it up.
9. If you move it, put it back.
10. If it belongs to someone else and you want to use it, get permission.
11. If you don't know how to operate it, leave it alone.
12. If it's none of your business, don't ask questions.

S.E.C.

In an extraterrestrial ruling, Judge Campos held that the State of New Mexico could not impose its gross receipts tax on the manufacturer of radio telescope antennae comprising the Very Large Array (VLA) project because the antennae were passive receivers of radio waves from deep in outer space and therefore not within the definition of radio towers under New Mexico law.

Toward the end of his judicial career Judge Campos took up painting, became a respectable artist, and began showing up at his chambers wearing a black beret. One day Judge Campos brought to his chambers his painting of a landscape featuring two pine trees standing together in a hilly field. Judge Campos told his staff the story of a famous "artistic shootout" that had occurred earlier that year. Judge Campos had been introduced to a Montana art dealer which in turn had introduced Judge Campos to a young Mexican artist from Oaxaca. Striking up a conversation with the young artist, Judge Campos asked him if he was familiar with the judge's favorite "ranchera" entitled "Los Dos Arbolitos." The young man immediately broke out in song, the judge joined in, and together they sang this very sad song about a man who sees two trees grow up on his ranch. The trees hate each other, but the man is sad because he has no compañera. This gave Judge Campos an idea. He issued a challenge to the young Mexican artist and to the Montana art dealer, who also was a painter. "Let's each of us go home and paint a

depiction of this song, 'Los Dos Arbilos,' and the next time we get together we will compare our artistic impressions of this ranchera on canvas." The painting that Judge Campos brought to the office was his rendition. Judge Campos told his staff that the artistic shootout was a great success. All three artists gathered at the Campos home over "sunshine" drinks (OJ, tequila and lime) and a special omelet cooked by the judge. All assembled persons, most of whom were family and friends of the judge, agreed that Judge Campos' painting was the best, although no formal vote was taken.

Judge Campos died in January 2001 at the age of 74.

On September 15, 2007, the District of New Mexico held a ceremony naming the historical federal courthouse in Santa Fe, New Mexico, the "Santiago E. Campos United States Courthouse."