

Acceptance Remarks Delivered to the Washington Bar Association 10/17/2013

Good Evening

-Thank you Mr. President for that kind and overly generous introduction. It is indeed a great experience to be introduced by my president and a true SUPER LAWYER.

-Let me acknowledge the members of the judiciary who are here that participated in bringing remarks tonight. Good evening lady and gentlemen!

--I also want to acknowledge the presence of the President of the National Bar Association, Ms. Pat Rosier. As most of you know, the WBA is a local affiliate of the NBA.

-And, to my good friend, former law firm partner and world renowned civil and human rights warrior, Charles Ogletree. That was quite a lecture you delivered. As usual, you did not disappoint anyone with that presentation.

-Let me take a few moments of to point out a few folks who are here:

\*My very attentive son: Ron, Jr., who lives and works here in DC;

\*My extremely devoted daughter, Taylor who came in from Georgia. She works at a college in Macon, Georgia, Mercer University;

\*One of my brothers and my personal hero: John Jessamy, Jr., a licensed architect here in DC working for the DC Housing Authority;

\*My former wife LaVerda who both came in from Georgia; a few of her relatives are present as well; Hello Martha and William.

\*Now my twin brother and his wife could not be here this evening. My twin brother Howard and his wife Patricia are on travel. He has to make a presentation in Miami in the morning.

I also want to acknowledge:

\*My brothers from the legal fraternity Sigma Delta Tau;

\*My former law partners from my old law firm, Jessamy Fort Ogletree and Botts:

\*Our managing partner and now a distinguish member of the D.C. Public Service Commission, Commissioner Joanne Doddy Fort;

\*Sam Botts, who I was in undergraduate school with me at Howard. Sam is also a proud graduate of this fine law school;

\*And of course, Charles Ogletree, from whom you heard earlier this evening;

\*A number of my fellow George Washington University Law School graduates;

\*Members of my church, Union Wesley AME Zion Church in NE Washington, DC. Thank you for being here.

\*Folks from the Council of Court Excellence, June Kress. That is an organization that both Chief Judge Roberts and I have some citizenship in.

\*I cannot overlook my good friend and chairperson of this evening's program, Robert Bell. Robert preceded me as president of the WBA. Robert is a great visionary. He has a keen sense of history. He is Chairperson Emeritus of Paine College in August, GA. I suspect when he finishes practicing law, he will become a "scholar-in-residence" at some institution of higher learning and pick up where my good friend J. Clay Smith left of, and continue to record the history of the Black Lawyer in this society.

-I do have a few remarks to make, but I pledge not to be long, for a number of reasons:

\*First, I am a firm believer of programs beginning and ending on the same day;

\*Second, I am the next to last person between you and the book signing and reception;

\*Next, because both my son and daughter told me not to be long; and

\*Finally, it is already past my bedtime.

Let me take this opportunity to say "thank you" to the officers and directors of the WBA for selecting me as the recipient for the Ollie May Cooper Award this year. Many of you have heard me say this previously. The Ollie May Cooper Award ceremony is one of my favorite affairs to attend. If you will allow me to boast a bit, I will tell you why. In 1979, I was assigned by then

WBA President J. Clay Smith to pick up and escort Ms. Cooper to the very first Ollie May Cooper program. I dutifully went to pick her up at her residence in the 1400 block of R Street, NW and brought her to the program. I refer to that incident as one of my little private widows on history. It brings to mind a story the late Dr. Dorothy I. Height was fond of mentioning. When she was a young lady, she received an assignment to escort First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt into a National Council of Negro Woman meeting in the early days of that organization. For those of you who are just now hearing about Ollie May Cooper, when you learn more about her and her role here at Howard School of Law, you will indeed learn that she could be deemed to have been the “First Lady” of Howard University Law School. So just like my good friend and former client, Dr. Height, I got to escort a “First Lady” to one of our meetings.

You will learn that not only did Ollie May Cooper spend over 40 years here at the law school handling all sorts of matters for the deans and faculty, but that she tended to the needs many of the students in innumerable ways. She did such things helping out with advancing her own personal funds in order for some students to be able to meet their tuition expenses when she could not otherwise help them make other arrangements; she is also remembered for getting students together in study groups. She was a founder of a legal sorority right here on this campus. In fact, some of the members of that sorority are assisting us with the program tonight. And get this—I found out that she was typically the first person to arrive at the law school facility on cold mornings in order to start the coal furnace to ensure that it would be warm when the students, faculty and administrators arrived later in the day. Besides her duties at the law school, she was very active in the Washington Bar Association and the National Bar Association.

It is in the spirit of Ollie May Cooper’s unselfish lifetime of giving of herself that I dedicate my receipt of this award this evening to my late foster parents, Katherine Morgan and Edward Morgan. Over a period of time, they cared for more than 30 foster children, even though they had children of their own. No, they were not lawyers. They probably never heard of Ollie May Cooper. They probably never heard of the Washington Bar Association. But like Ollie May Cooper, they were indeed unselfish. They gave of themselves in unimaginable ways. For instance, in keeping foster children, Mrs. Morgan was prohibited by the welfare department from working outside of the home. You know what, she did so anyway. She was not satisfied with the stipends that were provided to clothe us kids, or with the food allowance for us, and the like. So, at one point she

took a job at night as an orderly in a hospital to supplement the allowances for clothes & food for the children she and Mr. Morgan cared for. That's right, she changed bed pans. Mr. Morgan, had to be the original recycler. He would collect bundles of newspapers and pieces of discarded metal to sell to the junk yard in order to help supplement the welfare allowances for us. No, this was not in the 1970's or 80's. This was in the 1950's and early 60's, before recycling became popular. So, Mr. and Mrs. Morgan, if you happen to parting the curtains of heaven tonight and listing in on this ceremony, please know that like Ollie May Cooper, your unselfish acts are not forgotten. And Ms. Cooper, if you happen to be doing the same, please know that it is with great humility and pride that I accept this award that has been named in your honor. I trust that we will continue to be mentors to students much as you had been as well as 'disturbers of the peace' as the WBA continues to advocate on behalf of Black lawyers and judges, to borrow a term I have heard used by Vernon Jordan and others. Thank you.