



Acceptance Remarks for the Trailblazer Award by Justice Lubbie Harper, Jr.

Presented by the George W. Crawford
Black Bar Association at the Hartford Marriott
On May 14, 2015

On May 15, 2015, Connecticut Supreme Court Justice Lubbie Harper, Jr. accepted the Trailblazer Award from the George W. Crawford Black Bar Association by challenging all those who were present and the Connecticut legal community at large:

To use moral courage to step up, stand up, and speak out on issues that affect our profession, your association and more particular your members. Failure to do so signals complacency, indifference, and acceptance of the status quo; a condition that will render your association ineffective, if not irrelevant, during a time when our profession is confronted with so many significant issues. Let us not forget that, as members of the legal profession, we have the power to use the tool of our profession to affect real change not only in the lives of individual clients, but in the society as a whole. It would be a significant opportunity wasted if those of us here tonight, people who so openly profess to care deeply about the issues we face, were to simply sit back on the sidelines and not work toward a solution!

As leaders of the George W. Crawford Black Bar Association and the Connecticut Bar Association, respectively, we accepted Justice Harper's challenge and committed ourselves and our organizations to continue along the path so heroically blazed by Justice Harper and others. In the 2014-2015 programming year, Crawford has continued its efforts consistent with the theme of "Promise in the Pipeline" by partnering with high schools and law schools and by partner-

ing with the judiciary and other affinity bar associations to present career panels, including a panel on becoming a judge. In 2015-2016, Crawford is turning its attention to some of the social justice issues that Justice Harper highlighted in his speech to ensure that all citizens have the opportunity to realize the promise in our pipeline. For more information and to review an electronic version of Justice Harper's speech, please visit georgecrawfordblackbar.org.

In March 2015, the House of Delegate of the Connecticut Bar Association approved a Diversity and Inclusion Policy. The CBA's Diversity and Inclusion Committee adopted and is now implementing its Strategic Diversity and Inclusion Plan. Visit ctbar.org/diversity to learn more.

We invite all of you—affinity bars and county bars, CBA sections and committees, solo practitioners, law firms, corporations, law schools, and the judicial branch—to also accept Justice Harper's challenge and join us in working together to make our legal community richer and more effective because of diversity. If we do so, we can better serve our communities and have a greater impact on all of the people in this state. As Jackie Robinson, another trailblazer, once remarked: "A life is not important except in the impact it has on other lives."

Genea O. Bell – President, George W. Crawford Black Bar Association

Monte Frank – President-elect, Connecticut Bar Association

The remarks follow on the next page.

Thank you so much, Christine, for such a heartfelt introduction. I am truly humbled by your kind words and deeply appreciate the sincerity of your sentiments. As you know, we have developed a special bond, a bond that dates back to your law school days; a bond that has allowed me to serve as a mentor, confidante, and a source of inspiration to you. I have watched with pride your personal and professional growth. As I think about your development, I must note that your presence as a black woman in Connecticut's legal profession and your pursuit of perfection as a lawyer greatly pleases me. I told you years ago that you don't need validation for "who you are," but only affirmation for the good work you do. As a lawyer, I am convinced that your contributions to the legal profession will not only make a difference, but will ultimately be legendary. Again, Christine, I sincerely thank you for your kind words.

To all gathered here this evening, let me say it is, indeed, an honor for me to stand before you as the recipient of the George W. Crawford Trailblazer Award, and to acknowledge also the significance of the theme for this Annual Dinner: "Promise in the Pipeline." To be recognized as an individual who promotes personal growth, leadership development, and community service within the legal field is both humbling and exciting. So thank you "Crawford" for this prestigious award; there are not enough words to express my appreciation.

I would also like to acknowledge and congratulate the other award recipients. Dr. Jacobs' body of work speaks for itself. There is no question that he has made a significant contribution to the medical profession. He is certainly most deserving of the Visionary Award. I salute you, Doc, for all that you have done and for all that you will continue to do. Additionally, I am thrilled to see that the association has awarded the 2015 Priscilla Green Scholarship Award tonight to Thanisha Pariage. Thanisha, a rising 3L at UConn School of Law, has distinguished herself based on her academic record and her interesting

array of legal experiences. Thanisha represents our hope for the future and will undoubtedly be successful in her legal career. You make us all proud Thanisha. Congratulations and "keep on keeping on."

As I reflect on the significance of this award, I am reminded of the trails that were blazed by George W. Crawford. He was a consummate orator, the second black to graduate from Yale Law School, a highly skilled attorney, an outspoken freemason, and an active member of the NAACP. In 1966, it was Roy Wilkins, then-executive director of the NAACP, who best summarized the character of this pioneering black lawyer and civic leader. I quote:

It is difficult for a colored man to rise above difference, mistreatments, and inequalities to reach a place such as George Crawford has. He brought all the qualities that make up the American Dream. He served his community—not colored or white—but the whole community.

And I say to you this evening that it is still difficult for a colored man, not to exclude women of color, to rise above difference, mistreatments, and inequalities. George Crawford left us a legacy of courage, perseverance, and service. Yes, he left a legacy that members of the legal profession, in general, and lawyers of color, in particular, should be proud to emulate. Yes, I am deeply honored to receive an award that bears his name.

As I think about the theme for this dinner, "Promise in the Pipeline," I am compelled to note that it rings a bell of hope, a bell that gives us a reason to believe, a reason to believe that we as a society and as members of the legal community can successfully tackle many of the issues currently trapped in the "Pipeline." There is no question that hope is critically important because, without it, we will continue to face more troubling situations like "Ferguson" and "Baltimore"; situations wherein the manifestation of hopelessness, sparked by a fierce sense of frustration, erupted. It is, therefore, essential that we understand

that we cannot realize the "Promise" unless we first acknowledge and address the plethora of problems percolating in our society and the myriad of issues facing the legal profession. It would be disingenuous, if not the epitome of hypocrisy for me to stand here this evening and to accept an award without discussing these issues. I cannot do that!

Consequently, if we look at our national landscape, we find that it is replete with a multitude of problems that impact all of us. The distrust between communities of color and the police is at an all-time high. The disturbing recurrence and use of, arguably, unnecessary lethal force by police officers against unarmed men and children of color has created a public maelstrom in communities of color; a maelstrom of frustration that has manifested itself in the form of civil unrest, riots, and looting. In addition, frequent allegations of police brutality, misconduct, and shootings have spawned the development of the "Black Lives Matter" movement; a movement that was created, in part, to affirm the basic human rights and dignity of Black people.

It is troubling that, in our time, "official" acts of the law enforcement community are being called into doubt. Sworn police reports, arguably, should no longer serve as the official, complete, accurate, and trustworthy record of a criminal investigation. The recent admission by the FBI that forensic scientists, in the bureau's elite microscopic hair comparison unit, gave flawed testimony during criminal trials for more than two decades is an absolute miscarriage of justice and should concern all of us. Against this backdrop, it is understandable why there is a cry for the culture of policing in America to change. Disparity in the criminal justice system continues to plague us in our search for justice for all.

Apart from the problems facing our justice system, it is readily apparent that the tone of political discourse in this country has reached an all-time low. Personal attacks on the president of the United States

and divisive debates regarding health care, foreign policies, and immigration reforms have replaced constructive dialogue. The political misuse of filibustering by Republican Senators, which held up the confirmation of Loretta Lynch as the first African American woman Attorney General for 166 days—longer than the past seven Attorneys General combined—was a national embarrassment.

Part of the problem facing the political system as a whole is that arguably, oppressive voting rights legislation has served to deny many folks of color in some communities the right to vote. Concern for the common good has been replaced with self-interest. Fear mongering, race-baiting, insensitive remarks, and character assassination have replaced an honest discussion of the issues that affect all of us.

Several members of the news media, far from being neutral sources of information, in many instances have stoked division by spreading divisive propaganda, inciting violence, using hateful rhetoric, and disseminating misinformation. Hate crimes are running amok, extremism is a common occurrence. Instances of cyber-bullying, religious denigration, and insensitivity have replaced tolerance, acceptance, and understanding. Our country continues to grapple with the many tentacles of race relations in America and the need for an honest and frank discussion regarding race is long overdue. Now is the time to engage in such a discussion; a discussion among people of *all* color, *all* faiths, and *all* ethnicities. For if we are to have a diverse society that is celebrated and truly equal, then we must have consensus that such a goal is essential.

Many of us had hoped that the struggles of the 1960s and onward would have resolved the matters that confront us today. In hindsight, however, we now know that the past heroism of men and women of color was a critical, but not a conclusive point, in the struggle. We cannot simply sit back and stand on their shoulders, for there is more work to be done. In so doing, we must recognize that the tactics of those who prefer a monochrome world have become subtler and harder to expose. It's oftentimes easier to confront in-your-face racism than institutional racism, white

privilege or implicit bias. There the rivers run deep, and it is difficult to extricate hatred from a person's heart. Therefore I do not believe that we will ever sway those who hate based on race. There will always be bigots, some of them violent and all of them ignorant. We should not use our considerable persuasive skills on trying to enlighten them. I would rather rely on the rule of law and our courts to put an end to their invidious tactics and to redress their wrongs.

In our local communities, we all know that we are experiencing a crisis of untold proportion. A plethora of problems readily come to my mind; these problems include the challenges of urban education and youth related issues, inadequate health care, dysfunctional families, unemployment, and the need for more effective communication between law enforcement officials and communities of color.

We are living in a time in which so many young people are crying out for help. We are living in a time in which we are confronted with a disturbing amount of youth violence and gun related crimes that have resulted in a disturbing number of untimely deaths. We are witnessing in too many communities where too many young folks are prone to use deadly force to resolve disputes, where strong and positive parental guidance is missing. Our inner city neighborhoods are beset with a myriad of social and economic problems.

Yes, we are witnessing difficult times in our urban communities. Young brothers and sisters are destroying their lives at an early age, so many of our young folks don't take school seriously, and respect for authority, legal, parental or otherwise, is eroding.

Too many of our young folks are walking around as if they were in a coma of sorts, for they are numbed by their circumstances, unfazed by the consequences of their bad decisions, and do not appreciate the value of life. Too many of our ministers are spending too much time on funeral services for our young people who have died as a result of acts of violence, rather than on sermons for those young people who are lost and in need spiritual guidance.

Yes, my brothers and sisters, friends and

colleagues, we must bear witness that in our urban communities there is a crisis, genocide is occurring daily and we can no longer afford to simply view this erosion as spectators. We have everything to gain, all of us, young folks and adults alike, if we become our brothers' and sisters' keepers, and much to lose if we don't.

A look at the legal community reveals that it's in the midst of a dramatic transformation. Economic pressure on the practice of law has caused for demanding clients to require more efficiency and responsiveness from their lawyers at less cost. Technology is allowing solo practitioners and small firms to compete with larger firms. To remain relevant, arguably, the legal profession must consider restructuring the manner in which it delivers legal services. Innovation and innovative leadership is required; leadership that recognizes the value of an innovative business model that embraces change and identifies a new competitive advantage. These issues coupled with issues regarding diversity, recruitment, and retention of lawyers of color by major law firms are just some of the issues with which the legal profession must come to grips with if it's to function as a sensitive, relevant, responsive, efficient, and just professional body.

Bar associations and affinity bars must become active. They can longer simply serve as social organizations for fraternization. Affinity bars such as yours are integral players in the legal profession. You have an obligation to take responsibility for training and expanding the knowledge base and skill set of your members. Use your resources for addressing the professional challenges you may face, and continue to reach out to other affinity bars so that your collective voices will create a strong and united message; a message consistent with your goal of promoting diversity in the legal field. I view this effort as among your most important task because the legal system must represent the population it serves. For if it does not then a growing number of people of color will lose faith in the very institution that plays such a key role in sustaining a democracy.

Lastly, I strongly encourage you to use moral courage to step up, stand up, and speak out on issues that affect our pro-

fession, your association, and more particular your members. Failure to do so signals complacency, indifference, and acceptance of the status quo; a condition that will render your association ineffective, if not irrelevant, during a time when our profession is confronted with so many significant issues. Let us not forget that, as members of the legal profession, we have the power to use the tool of our profession to affect real change not only in the lives of individual clients, but in the society as a whole. It would be a significant opportunity wasted if those of us here tonight, people who so openly profess to care deeply about the issues we face, were to simply sit back on the sidelines and not work toward a solution!

Our courts must continue to recognize and grapple with economic, cultural, social and racial issues that impact its primary mission of guaranteeing access to justice for all. In fact our criminal justice system is out of sync and needs to be reformed. Mass incarceration and the war on drugs need to be reexamined. Justice should be inseparable from fairness, and therefore policies and procedures should insure equal treatment for the strong and the weak, powerful and powerless, privileged and disadvantaged, majority and minority. Political realities and fiscal constraints have increasingly resulted in the criminalization of social problems. There are inadequate services for mentally ill criminal defendants who commit minor offenses. The courts and their ability to punish and incarcerate should not serve as a substitute for needed social services. Reformation of the jury system is necessary to assure that jurors are representative of our diverse community. These issues, not to slight issues involving accountability, transparency, diversity, cultural competency, self-represented parties, and implicit bias, have all created significant challenges for our courts. I am proud to say, however, that Connecticut's judicial branch under the leadership of our Chief Justice, Chase Rogers, not only understands the importance of these issues, but has launched a series of initiatives to make a difference, initiatives that include restructuring the civil and family court dockets, increasing diversity in the Branch's workforce and on the bench.

These initiatives are designed to increase cultural competency, transparency, and access to justice.

Yes, the *pipeline* is laden with many issues. So the challenge for us is to step up, to use our individual talents and a collective effort to help bring about change and offer solutions to these issues; issues that affect our nation, our communities, and our profession. It's a challenge that requires us to look outward for the greater good and not inward for self-gratification, for the gratification is in fulfilling the "*Promise in the Pipeline*." A promise that is more than words; a promise that has resonated with us for centuries; a promise best expressed by Frederick Douglass in 1863, as noted in his speech, "Men of Color, to Arms!": I quote:

The day dawns; the morning star is bright upon the horizon! The iron gate of our prisons stands half open. One gallant rush from the North will fling it wide open, while four million of our brothers and sisters shall march out into liberty. The chance is now given you to end in a day the bondage of centuries and rise in one bound from social degradation to the place of common equality...

That, ladies and gentlemen, is the *promise* in the *pipeline*: our journey to a place of common equality. It has not been an easy path to travel, but we must march on amid new challenges, teaching our children, empowering our sisters and brothers, and pressing on for justice and equality.

As I reflect on my career, I have always been mindful of the struggle for justice and equality as well as the social, economic, cultural, political, racial, and legal challenges in the *pipeline*. As I reflect on my career, I have always been cognizant that the *promise* of hope in the *pipeline* must be inextricably linked to a call for action. I have always strived to make a difference, to help someone, to touch someone. I have always attempted to identify and ameliorate many of the challenges that have beset our profession and our community, particularly challenges and problems confronted by today's urban youth.

Your recognition this evening of my service to our profession and community is something I will always cherish. I am

humbled and profoundly honored to accept the George W. Crawford *Trailblazer Award*. In accepting this award, I am privileged to join the ranks of many outstanding individuals who have received this honor.

As a committed public servant, I dare say, we have a responsibility, if not an obligation, to constantly reexamine our role as legal professionals in a constantly changing society. Lawyers and law firms should no longer simply focus on the bottom line. We are part of a noble profession and as such, we must realize that our mission must also include an effort to make a difference by addressing those issues trapped in the pipeline.

I am committed to such an effort and, therefore, I accept this award this evening, as an acknowledgement of my continued efforts to make a difference and view it as a challenge to all of us in the legal profession to "give back" to our community, to spread seeds of hope, encouragement and determination. I accept this award as an acknowledgment of my commitment to reducing disparity, advancing diversity and reforming Connecticut's criminal justice system. I accept this award as an acknowledgment of my efforts to promote an understanding of the importance of implicit bias and to encourage the development of cultural competency. I accept this award as an acknowledgment of my belief in and history of mentoring members of our profession. Yes, I am convinced that mentoring strengthens our profession by enhancing our sense of community and elevating our standards of competence, ethics, and professionalism. It further enhances our profession by helping our protégés to develop practical skills while developing a sense of confidence, identity, and effectiveness in their professional role. I accept this award as a challenge for all of us to build a solid foundation for the life of our young people, especially those youngsters who have lost their sense of purpose, hope, and identity. Hopefully, our collective efforts will serve as a source of inspiration for so many inner city youngsters who "feel trapped" by the circumstances of their life and who doubt their ability, potential and self-worth. Margaret

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will range from fundraising to donation of time and resources. We have an obligation to not only give back to our communities, but to become active members of our communities and community organizations. The YLS Cup mandate to participate in public service projects is one way to give back to our respective communities while learning to work with others from a variety of backgrounds.

The goal of this year, and of the YLS Cup, is to give our members opportunities to work with one another outside of their law-specific fields, while providing training and chances to network that they

would not have otherwise had if they were not members of our organization. If we want to increase our membership ranks, and ensure that our younger members continue to take part in CBA activities during the time in their careers where work becomes intense and family activities increase, we have to give them the ability to take part in our organization outside of the standard continuing legal education programs we have been accustomed to organizing. There is no question that continuing legal training should be a focus of the Connecticut Bar Association, and will become even more so if CLEs eventually

become mandatory in Connecticut, the fact remains that relationships cannot be built on lectures or cultivated in question and answer sessions. Our members need to have shared experiences, and we need to get creative and find different ways to keep membership throughout the state engaged at all stages of their legal careers. It is my hope that the YLS Cup will energize our executive committee and motivate them to think outside of the box, which I believe will translate to sustained growth of our section and the bar at large.

CL

Lubie Harper

(Continued from page 23)

Mead once said, and I quote:

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed, citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.

I, therefore, challenge you to never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, commit-

ted members of the legal profession can change our society.

As we attempt to respond to the noted challenges in the "pipeline" and as we attempt to remain relevant as a profession, may we always keep in mind our obligation to make a difference, to help somebody, to touch somebody. May we always keep in mind the importance of public service. For if we do, our lives will not be in vain, for if we do, our lives will be enriched, for if we do, we are destined to make a difference, for if we do, the "Prom-

ise in the Pipeline" will become a reality; a reality that will hopefully cause us all to continue to "Blaze Trails" in an effort to make a difference. For as "trailblazers" may we always keep in mind our obligation to do justice because it's a moral imperative. Love kindness because it's the essence of humanity. And may we always keep in mind that to "give back" to others is a righteous thing to do because we are all servants of God.

Thank you. CL



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