

Black Alumni Network Holds Weekend Celebration of First Decade

ALUMNI

news & notes

Ten years ago, Black graduates of Boston College Law School formed an organization to facilitate their interactions with each other and with current students. This March, the Black Alumni Network celebrated its first decade with a weekend-long program of education, socializing, and remembrance.

Attorney Walter Prince and Law School Associate Professor Ruth-Arlene W. Howe, both members of the Class of 1974, led workshops on the respective topics of criminal

Emeritus Richard G. Huber, who was Dean of the Law School from 1970 to 1985.

Judge Jones received the Honorable Harold A. Stevens Award, named for the first Black graduate of Boston College Law School and given for significant contributions to the legal profession. Before ascending to the federal bench, Judge Jones had served as a District Court judge for the Parish of New Orleans. Earlier, he was City Attorney for New Orleans. In 1993, Jones was named the William J. Kenealy,

affirmative action — and much to be justly concerned about. ... We must take stock of where we are today. ... Only you can make yourself a dedicated and committed person. Use your lips for truth, your voice to enlighten, and your hands to help.”

By honoring Huber with the Paul Robeson Award for service to Boston College Law School and the larger community, the Black Alumni Network came full circle. Huber also had been recognized at the organization’s first event, at the time of his retirement as Dean of the Law School. Huber had overseen the Law School during a period when Black students began to increase their presence on campus.

According to Howe, the first time Boston College Law School’s Black graduates numbered more than one per year was 1969, when there were two. In 1984, when the idea of creating the Network was developed, Howe notes that 13 Black students were among the graduates.

Like many who were at the Law School during this era, Charles E. Walker, Jr. ’78 speaks highly of Huber, his commitment to encouraging Black students to enter the legal profession, and his close relationships with these students. Walker, who became the first President of the Black Alumni Network, says, “He didn’t sacrifice quality — he gave us chances. He put a lot of faith in us. When we did a tribute brunch for him ten years ago, the place was packed. Alumni came from all over the country. We felt so good after the event, as a group and as a significant part of the Law School. We had a desire to



Black Alumni Network leaders (pictured left to right): first President Charles E. Walker, Jr. ’78; Boston College Law School Associate Professor Ruth-Arlene W. Howe ’74; and immediate past President Wilbur E. Edwards, Jr. ’84

justice and adoption law. Alumni also met with Boston College Law School Dean Aviam Soifer and members of the Black Law Students Association and heard about the Network’s recently launched initiative to raise money for student scholarships.

A highlight of the weekend was a Saturday night awards banquet recognizing the achievements of the Honorable Okla Jones II ’71, a United States District Court judge for the Eastern District of Louisiana, and of Professor

S.J. Alumnus of the Year by the Boston College Law School Alumni Association. He now joins the Honorable Harold A. Stevens ’36, the Honorable David S. Nelson ’60, Ruby R. Wharton ’69, and Ruth-Arlene W. Howe as a recipient of the Stevens Award.

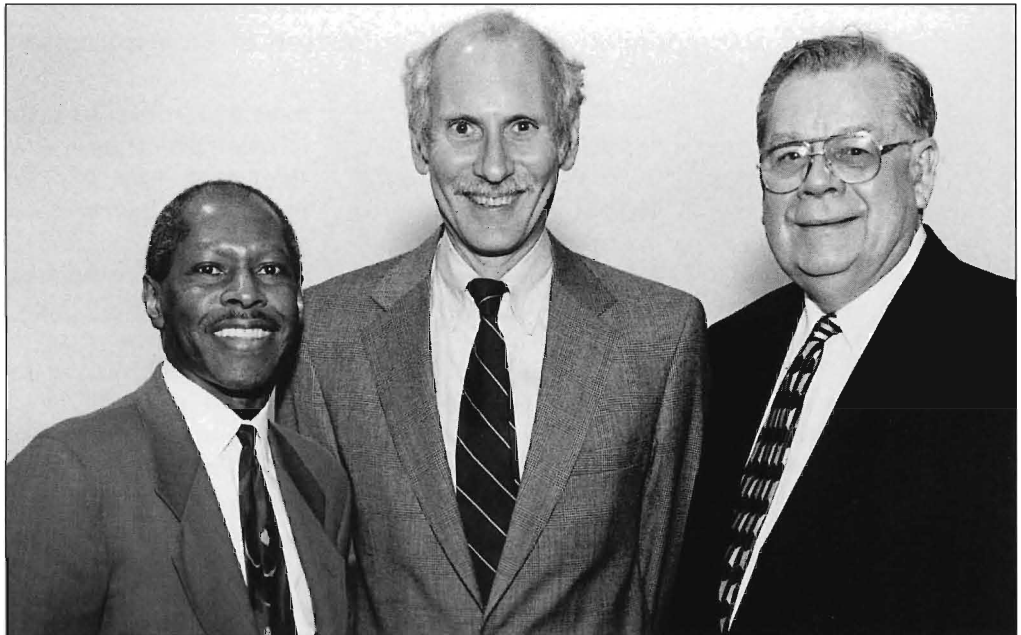
In accepting his award, Judge Jones said, “This is a time to reflect, to review our past ... to think about what is important and what really counts. ... There is a crisis in our current situation — welfare, school lunches, higher education, health care,

reflect about where we came from and those who preceded us. It was the experience of being a Black law student and finding people of like mind and soul that brought the Network together.”

Today the Black Alumni Network counts nearly 300 graduates among its members. They are employed throughout the country, working in government agencies, law firms large and small, legal education, public service, and in other areas both within and outside law. Many are active in their communities as well. (See the alumni profiles on the pages that follow.)

Through the Network, these Black alumni also become involved directly with Boston College Law School students, serving as role models.

“Students realize that they



Boston College Law School Dean Aviam Soifer (center) joins the honorees at the Black Alumni Network's awards dinner: the Honorable Okla Jones II '71, a federal district court judge in Louisiana; and former Boston College Law School Dean and Professor Emeritus Richard G. Huber

can become lawyers because they see people who look like them do it,” notes Wilbur P. Edwards, Jr. '84, who has

stepped down as President of the Network after four years. He has been succeeded in this capacity by the Honorable

Susan Maze-Rothstein '85.

Offering support and mentoring to Black students at the Law School has been a primary goal of the Black Alumni Network since its inception. The organization also has sought to build lasting bonds between alumni, as indicated by the title chosen for the tenth anniversary event: “Celebrating Our Family: The Ties That Bind.” In addition, Network members work with the Law School Alumni Association as well as independently to improve and aid their *alma mater*.

“The Network ensures that we have a vehicle for our voices to be heard,” says Howe. “It is not a splinter group — we encourage members to be active in the general Alumni Association as well as the Network. The Network's existence is a measure of the fact that there are differences between Black students' prior experiences and those of majority students. For some, it has been very comforting to know that they can pick up the phone and call someone with a shared experience.” ■



Andrea Ford-Roberts '78 presents the Black Alumni Network's Paul Robeson Award to former Boston College Law School Dean and Professor Emeritus Richard G. Huber

Jose Allen '76: A Member of the First Generation of Environmental Lawyers

Jose R. Allen '76 practiced environmental law before the term "Superfund" ever entered the federal government's lexicon. Over the years, the field of environmental law has changed significantly, and Allen's career has done so as well.

Allen first discovered environmental law as a Boston College Law School student employed at the United States Environmental Protection Agency's Boston regional office. He recalls being intrigued by the work and notes, "The statutes were very new and in the process of being implemented on a national basis."

When Allen joined the Environmental Protection Division of the Massachusetts Attorney General's Office following graduation from law school, the field of environmental law was still in its infancy. In resolving environmental enforcement cases, Allen needed to be creative, drawing not only upon his litigation skills, but also upon other areas of law. He says, "It's an understatement to say that there wasn't a lot of judicial precedent because there was virtually none. There were no ground rules, and I tried to use common law remedies."

After three years with the Attorney General's Office, which culminated in a case in which the United States Department of the Interior was prevented from conducting oil and gas leasing off George's Bank, Allen was ready for new challenges. He decided to leave Boston for Washington, DC, and a position as a staff attorney for the Pollution Control Section of the Environmental and Natural Resources Division of the United States Department of Justice. He quickly became Assistant Chief and then Chief of the defensive litigation area of the section. Allen later was named Chief of the

General Litigation Section of the division.

When Allen joined the Justice Department, environmental statutes continued to be minimal. Passage of Superfund legislation was still a year

He felt he had accomplished all that he could within the public sector. This time, he moved across the United States, to San Francisco and private practice.

Allen brought his understanding

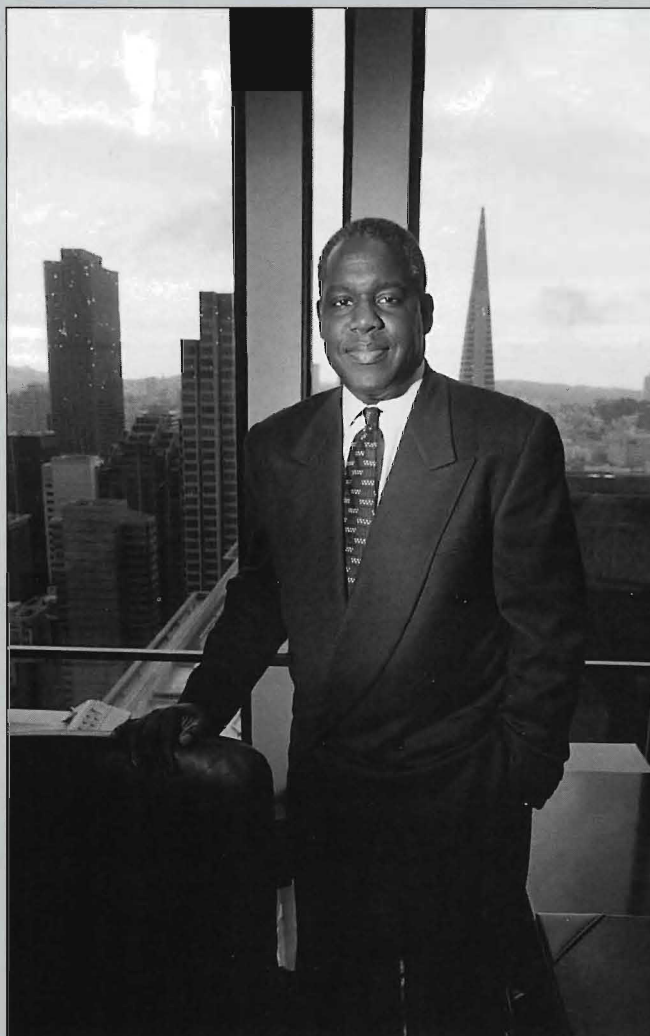
more narrowly focused now; it's one client with one problem, seeking a solution. The problem-solving aspect of private practice is very rewarding."

Allen still finds satisfaction in the practice of environmental law. And though he has been a part of the field's development, he remains surprised by its growth over time. Allen says, "It has exceeded all of my expectations. There is no way I could have predicted that environmental law would become such a pervasive influence on American business and the economy both nationally and internationally."

At Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom, Allen has been able not only to further his career in environmental law, but also to help others begin to pursue their own interests. Allen is among the attorneys at the firm recommending new law school graduates from across the country as Skadden Fellows, who receive funding for legal work in the public interest.

"This has been a very gratifying experience for me," Allen says. "I've had an interest in the public sector based on my time there, and I think this program allows people who want to make a long-term commitment to public service get a start."

Allen also has other outlets related to the public interest, including serving on the board of the Legal Aid Society of San Francisco, as President of the board of the San Francisco Food Bank, and as a member of the Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights. He says, "There are people and issues out there that, for the lack of lawyering, wouldn't be represented. I've seen what a difference effective advocacy can make in shaping and affecting the outcome of a debate. It's very important to me that all elements of society are heard." ■



Jose R. Allen '76, a partner in the law firm of Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom in San Francisco

away. Creativity remained important.

"Even in 1980 and 1981, people were still feeling their way. Some judges weren't sure about the new-fangled laws," Allen says. "I would go to the federal district court and try to explain a complex statutory or regulatory scheme to a judge who hadn't heard of the law. It made for a very stimulating practice."

By the end of 1985, however, Allen was ready for another change.

of government and of federal agencies to the law firm of Orrick, Harrington & Sutcliffe. He joined his present firm of Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom, where he is a partner, two and one-half years later.

"I'm still representing clients in environmental matters, litigation, and a wide array of issues," Allen says. "At the Justice Department, it seemed that every case had a broad public-policy implication. My work is

Rita Brackeen '83: Applying Her Legal Education in Diverse Settings

"Your education is something that no one can take away from you, and I've been able to do a lot of different things with my law degree," says Rita R. Brackeen '83.

Brackeen currently serves as Associate General Counsel with the New York City Office of Personnel, which administers civil service and licensing examinations and oversees employment matters for agencies ranging from the City University of New York to the tunnel authority. For five years, she has been involved in resolving and litigating employment discrimination and medical testing requirement issues. She also has participated in administrative proceedings with city, state, and federal agencies. In the process, Brackeen has learned the wide range of job requirements for an endless number of city positions and about the specialized area of civil service law.

This is only the latest learning experience in Brackeen's legal career, which she began as Assistant General Counsel for the New York City Department of Probation. For three years, Brackeen recalls being in the courtroom nearly every day.

Yet Brackeen says she never planned to be a litigator. As a law student, the North Carolina native preferred courses related to business law. The opportunity to pursue this interest came in 1987.

Brackeen joined NYNEX Material Enterprises, where she was a manager responsible for negotiating computer leasing contracts. Though the position was managerial rather than legal, the company had sought a person with a legal background.

Brackeen discovered she missed the practice of law. So two years later, she became a New York-based attorney for Amdahl Corporation, a Sunnyvale,

California, computer company. She continued to negotiate computer contracts, but now she was able to make legal as well as business decisions.

She thoroughly enjoyed her work, but a business downturn left her in search of other employment. That search led not to one position, but to four — simultaneously. Brackeen became an administrative law judge for the New York City Taxi and Limousine Commission. She also handled wills, contracts, and other legal issues with another lawyer and

did similar work as a sole practitioner. In addition, Brackeen was a part-time attorney with her present employer, the New York City Office of Personnel.

"It was crazy," Brackeen says. "I did all of that for about two years."

Three years ago, Brackeen's work for the Office of Personnel became full-time, restoring order to her professional life. She continues to see law as a learning experience, noting that she has been able to apply her background in computer contract negotiation by developing a license

agreement for her agency — even as she expands her knowledge of the totally different area of civil service law.

Brackeen views her work today as fulfilling the straightforward goals she has for her career: to make what she calls a "comfortable living" and to continue enjoying the practice of law. She says, "I like advising people and counseling them how to proceed. I like to influence people. That has been my role in the law." ■



Rita R. Brackeen '83, Associate General Counsel for the New York City Department of Personnel

Steven Wright: Serving Boston and New York Through Public and Private Practice

The walls of his office in downtown Boston display highlights of Steven H. Wright's legal career.

A framed certificate notes the 1981 Boston College Law School graduate's clerkship with the Massachusetts Superior Court. Wright recalls of that year-long position, "At the time, I thought it was the most satisfying job in the law because I was helping judges do justice and participating in the trial process at a very high level."

Photographs elsewhere in the room commemorate Wright's more recent experiences and the people with whom he has come in contact: in one, he appears with United States President Bill Clinton; in another, with South African President Nelson Mandela at a United Nations ceremony. These photographs are reminders of Wright's work with a former Mayor of New York City, David N. Dinkins.

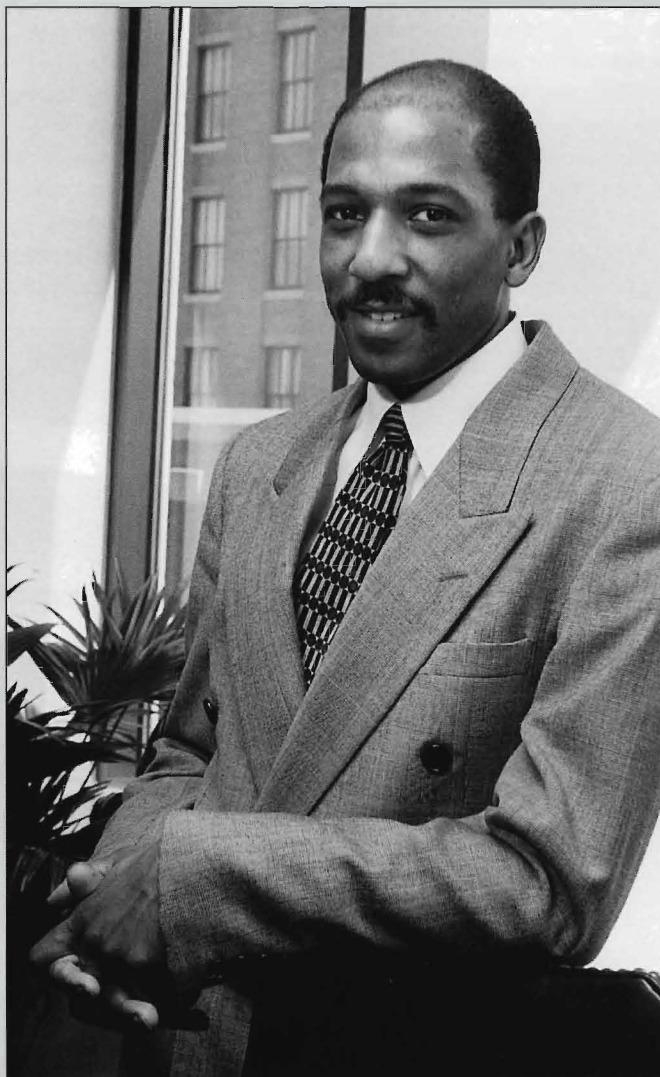
When Wright was hired as Deputy Counsel to Dinkins in 1992, he had spent a decade in both the public sector and private practice — all of it in Boston. But Dinkins' General Counsel also had been Wright's supervisor at the New York City public defender's office when Wright was a law student. And he was aware of Wright's legal accomplishments in Boston.

"It was a job that required me to call upon all of the skills I'd learned in law school and in practice," Wright says of his position as Deputy Counsel. "What I had done before prepared me for the challenges, but my responsibilities were magnified by the issues and size of New York City. I had to resolve problems in a compressed time frame, and every decision was reflected in at least four newspapers the next day."

Challenge aside, the position

appealed to Wright for another significant reason: Dinkins was the first African-American mayor of New York City, and Wright saw his own

establish the first branch office managed and staffed entirely by minorities. And Wright takes substantial pride in having been



After several years in New York City, Steven H. Wright '81 has returned to Boston to form a law firm with his classmate Russell L. Chin '81

role as an opportunity to participate in history.

This was of great importance to Wright, who in the past also had assumed positions not previously held by minorities. Wright had been the first minority to serve as Chief of the Workers Compensation Division of the Massachusetts Attorney General's Office. He also had been recruited by the national law firm of Rivkin, Radler & Kremer to help

associated in the mid-1980s with the Boston law firm of Budd, Wiley & Richlin, which he believes altered community perceptions about minority lawyers through effective work for major institutional clients. Wright considers his attention to paving the way for other African-Americans seeking access to employment not open to them previously as the "thin line of consistency" in his varied legal career.

Now that Dinkins is no longer mayor of New York City and work as Counsel to the Public Advocate — the high-ranking official heading the watchdog agency overseeing New York City services — also is behind him, Wright has returned to Boston. He has become a partner in the law firm of Chin, Wright & Branson, P.C., and along with Boston College Law School classmate Russell L. Chin '81, Wright is building what he describes as "the most diverse law firm in Boston." He says, "We had been talking about practicing together for at least six years. We are now in the process of creating our vision. We stand on our quality, and the firm also happens to be diverse."

Chin, Wright & Branson, P.C. is primarily a business law firm. Yet Wright's clients range from Bank of America to tenant associations that hope to develop 400 affordable housing units through the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development. The clients are a reflection of Wright's belief that it is possible both to operate a profitable business and participate in matters that make a difference for people.

Since late last year, Wright also has taken *pro bono* cases through the firm. Outside his law practice, he serves on the board of the Big Brother Association and also visits local schools to discuss the Voting Rights Act as well as other civil rights issues. In addition, he is working with the city of Boston to introduce a youth hotline modeled after one in New York City through which young people help their peers locate needed services.

"I'm interested in a career that makes a difference and also reflects my ideas and goals," says Wright. "If I can offer help to others, I will do so willingly." ■

Judge Susan Winfield: Making a Difference for Families in Washington, DC

Superior Court Judge Susan R. Holmes Winfield '76 has been deciding civil and criminal cases in Washington, DC, since 1984. Of all the issues she has resolved, none has affected her more than those related to families.

"These cases matter to the parties more than any others," says Winfield, who was involved with some juvenile cases as a litigator in private practice and also spent five years as a prosecutor in the United States Attorney's Office. "In criminal cases, you pretty much know what you're going to do. On the civil side, it's all about money; there's no righting any wrong. But if our family circumstances are awry, we can't function properly."

The single mother of one biological and one adopted child, Winfield speaks from both experience as a judge and the perspective of a parent, adding, "I've been through the process of legal adoption. And just the act of parenting makes me appreciate the stakes involved."

Winfield feels she has been able to use her authority as a judge to make difficult situations less painful. She explains, "When you have to separate a child from a parent, you do it because you can. When a couple is divorcing and you can bring some dignity to it, you do. Sometimes you can tone down the vehemence. Sometimes you simply empower a child or a parent to move on from a terrible incident. Then you really do make a difference in people's lives."

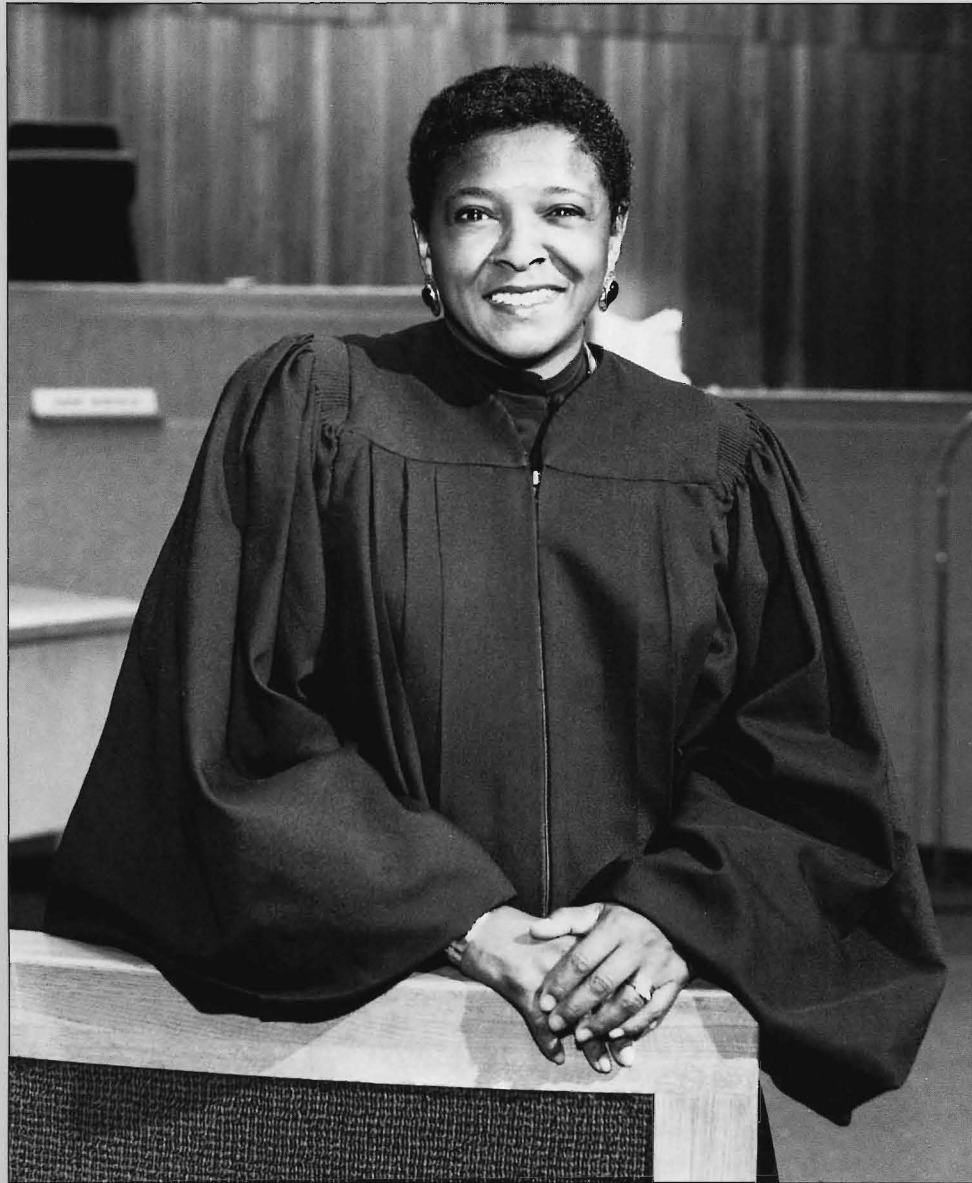
In the past decade, Winfield has seen young people and other family members with increasingly serious troubles. She notes that more juveniles have come before her for ever-more violent offenses. She says, "Some are just violent; their violence is not excused by a cocaine high or other drugs.

But it's still a small enough number that, although some are truly unreachable, the vast majority are just angry — and anger can be managed. I put the kids on probation

to domestic violence cases so that communication across divisions is improved and treatment rather than punishment is emphasized.

Outside the courtroom, Winfield

Winfield intends to remain a judge and mentor in the years ahead. She says, "I'm beginning to realize that I am part of the the 'old girl' network; the pioneers



For more than a decade, Judge Susan R. Holmes Winfield '76 has been helping to make difficult situations less painful for the families she sees in court

and tell them to come back and let me know how they're doing. They're pleased to have a judge, a powerful person, care about them. You become a surrogate parent."

Winfield also is undertaking a new project serving adults. She is redesigning the way the court responds

continues to address family issues and the needs of young people. She speaks to various community groups to dispel public misconceptions and alleviate fears about juvenile offenders. She is involved with the Boys and Girls Clubs and with a mentoring group sponsored by Kappa Alpha Psi.

are gone. And there still are a lot of Black law students today who are the very first in their families to go to law school. I think it's very important to have women and minorities who function as extended families through mentoring." ■

Ruby Wharton: The First Black Woman Graduate Has Provided a Voice for the Unheard

“I always had an interest in defending people who needed defending. I got into a lot of trouble for that in elementary school, junior high school, and high school. I was chided for that by relatives. But I yearned to speak for those who could not speak for themselves, to articulate

Wharton came to law school in the fall of 1966, following graduation from Southern University in her native Louisiana. She had been to Boston once before, in the summer of 1965, to attend a Harvard Law School program for students from predominantly Black colleges and universities. She had liked the area

arriving at apartments only to be told by landlords that advertised vacancies did not exist, “I learned that prejudice and racism are not unique to the South. But that helped to make me stronger.”

When Wharton earned her law degree, she acted on her desire to help those who could not defend

In 1975, Wharton and her family — she was now a parent as well as a wife and lawyer — moved to Memphis, Tennessee. She started a private practice known as Adams & Wharton and also became a part-time Assistant Public Defender for Shelby County. It was her first experience with criminal cases, but Wharton felt she simply was continuing to help others. She explains, “I was still defending people. Even though they were accused of crimes, they still needed help.”

Five years later, Wharton turned strictly to civil law and private practice, forming a partnership with her husband. With Wharton & Wharton, she has handled probate, workers compensation, divorce, and adoption cases.

Wharton has not abandoned her mission to advance the needs of others, however. She serves on the boards of the Memphis-area airport authority as well as of a local hospital, encouraging these businesses to consider diversity in their staffing, especially in the upper echelons of management. She also has helped to ensure that inner-city children can participate in the activities of the Boy Scouts of America by providing scholarships for uniforms and other necessities through the District Council. And Wharton has worked with Dismiss House, a transitional residence for former prisoners that assists them in successfully returning to society and avoiding recidivism.

“I make a living through my law practice, so I can do the other things I like to do independently,” Wharton says. “Where there is a wrong, I try to speak to the issues that are wrong, especially where these have kept women and Blacks out. Unless a person has the issues raised, one can avoid thinking about them.” ■



Ruby R. Wharton '69 has defended and expressed the needs of others through a career both in public interest law and private practice

and express the desires and needs and hopes of African-Americans who had been kept from voting and other rights they deserved as American citizens,” says Ruby Roy Wharton '69, the first Black woman to graduate from Boston College Law School.

and was interested in spending more time in a place so different from her home state. At the urging of then-Dean Robert F. Drinan, S.J., Wharton chose to attend Boston College Law School.

She says of her experience in Boston in the 1960s, which included

themselves. She received a two-year Reginald Heber Smith fellowship for poverty law and joined the Atlanta Legal Aid Society. She later married another legal services attorney; relocated to Washington, DC; and used her legal skills to serve the disadvantaged there.

Walter Prince: A Career Combining Legal Practice and Law Teaching

Walter B. Prince '74 came to Boston College Law School because he wanted to be a corporate lawyer. In the more than 20 years since graduation, he has yet to hold such a position, and he emphatically adds, "Thank goodness! I have no interest in that."

Instead, Prince has built a varied legal career in both the public sector and private practice. He began as a public defender serving the Boston neighborhood of Roxbury, the community in which he had been raised. He thrived in his work but chose two years later to turn to prosecution, joining the United States Attorney's Office in Boston. After only one year, Prince became Chief of the Major Drug Traffickers Prosecution Unit.

Prince enjoyed the work, recalling that he was able to try cases against some of the best lawyers in the country. But he also knew that he eventually wanted to enter private practice and did so in 1980. Within five years of forming Brown & Prince in Boston, he was a highly regarded criminal lawyer handling first-degree murder cases and other complex matters. Then Prince decided to return to the public sector and to leave criminal law behind.

He became General Counsel for the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA), overseeing a staff of 25 attorneys and diverse legal issues. Slip-and-fall cases, employment suits, environmental problems, and international contract negotiation all fell within Prince's scope of responsibility.

The work broadened Prince's experience, and it also allowed him to make the transition from criminal to civil law in private practice. In 1988, Prince became a partner in his current firm —

Peckham, Lobel, Casey, Prince & Tye. His clients range from small businesses to large corporations, which he has assisted with legal concerns ranging from negotiating the sale of a theater to drafting drug and alcohol policies for an organization's workforce. Prince remains involved in some criminal litigation, which he

opportunity and a foundation for the next step."

And one aspect of his work has been constant. Since 1981, in addition to practicing law, Prince has taught Trial Practice at Boston College Law School. He says, "The deep secret in my life is that I always wanted to be a teacher; I took a lot of education

them, what they think of contemporary issues. I enjoy being with the students."

But Prince is not likely to turn to academia on a full-time basis in the immediate future. He still has a substantial goal to accomplish in his legal practice. Prince explains, "I have yet to



Walter B. Prince '74 is currently a partner in the Boston law firm of Peckham, Lobel, Casey, Prince & Tye as well as an adjunct faculty member at Boston College Law School

still finds extremely satisfying, but it represents less than ten percent of his practice.

Prince sees a clear logic in his career path, despite its many turns over the years. He explains, "Each has been a building block and has provided a tremendous educational

courses as an undergraduate. Teaching keeps me in touch with reality. In practice, I'm in my own world, which consists of dealing with business, commercial, and legal issues. In some respects, that can be narrow. It's refreshing to hear the ideas of students — what is important to

argue before the United States Supreme Court. I've argued before the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court, the Appeals Court, the First Circuit Court, and the Second Circuit Court. I think I'm ready to go to the Supreme Court. I just need the vehicle." ■