

INTRODUCTION OF JANET DEWART BELL

BENJAMIN J. WOLFERT

Thank you very much Dean Revesz. The dedication ceremony is such a meaningful part of the N.Y.U. Annual Survey of American Law so we are extremely grateful for the support you have shown this event through the years. Thank you also to everyone in Student Affairs for your help with this event – Paul O’Grady, David Mora, Susan Anderson, and Tracee Nwafor. Finally, thank you to Lisa Boykin and Janet Bell. I cannot tell you how thankful I am for your participation in this event and your help in pulling everything together.

As many of you may know, every year the N.Y.U. Annual Survey of American Law dedicates a volume of its publication to a member of the legal community in honor of their contributions to American law. Traditionally, the role of the Editor-in-Chief is to summarize a few of those contributions which inspired our board to nominate the dedicatee; but in the case of Professor Bell, his contributions to American law and legal scholarship are both too numerous and too profound for me to do them any justice in my brief time up here. Plus, there are many far more qualified people on this stage for that task.

So, as the only student speaking today—and if my fellow students here will permit me to speak for them—I would like to offer a very brief observation of one of the ways in which Professor Bell has impacted American law *students*.

As law students, we are constantly made aware of the many differences between “theory” and “practice”—or to put it differently, the differences between “law school” and “the real world.” Many of us beginning next fall will retreat to law firms or other institutions engaged in the practice of law. There, the riveting policy debates and the scrutiny of the implications of court decisions that became so fundamental to our law school experiences will seem to disappear—or at least become less prominent. Instead, as my conversations with recent graduates have revealed, we will seem to become something other than *students* with theories and opinions—we will become practitioners, with clients, bosses, and cases. I am fairly certain that for all of us this transition will present numerous challenges and that we will quickly find ourselves in a situation where it will appear difficult if not impossible to reconcile our beliefs with those of our clients or bosses. In other words, I’m sure we will all

face moments early in our careers where it will be difficult to “practice what we preach,” something that as students seemed so easy to do. And perhaps to ease our discomfort in these situations, we will remind ourselves of the differences between “theory” and “practice”—“law school” and “the real world.”

Professor Bell, through both his scholarship and actions, constantly reminded students that this does not have to be the case. Professor Bell spent his career as a legal scholar *and* a practitioner and at every step was able to stay true to his own theories and convictions. Whenever he faced a conflict between his beliefs and countervailing professional pressures, he never let the former succumb to the latter.

In a 1992 interview referenced in an article on Professor Bell in *Time Magazine*'s Person of the Year Issue, Professor Bell said that he was “grateful for the opportunity to, in so public a way, practice what I have preached for so long.”

As my fellow students and I begin to cope with the anxiety of transitioning from law school life to “the real world,” I think that we all—whether knowingly or not; and regardless of whether we were lucky enough to know him personally or to take a class with Professor Bell—are grateful to have Professor Bell's career as a shining example, reminding us that we should never forget those debates in our classes or lose our identity as students with ideas; and more importantly we should never be afraid to practice what we preach. This is one of the many ways in which Professor Bell has impacted American law students, and one of the reasons why I am so thankful that the board of Annual Survey voted overwhelmingly to dedicate our Sixty-Ninth Volume to Professor Derrick Bell.

On behalf of the Board of Editors of the N.Y.U. Annual Survey of American Law, I am honored to welcome you as we dedicate our Sixty-Ninth Volume to commemorate the scholarship and legacy of Professor Derrick Bell.

BENJAMIN J. WOLFERT
Editor-in-Chief

N.Y.U. Annual Survey of American Law

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

JANET DEWART BELL

Thank you very very much. Derrick would be so pleased. I have to say a couple of quick things. One is that he picked all the speakers because this was planned, we started about a year ago, and he would be so pleased with the fact that they were able to speak today. And so many former students! You can be presidents of universities, you can be heads of Fortune 500 companies, but in Derrick's mind, you are always a student, because he loves students. And so, I just want to say thank you to the speakers, thank you to Dean Revesz, thank you to President John Sexton. And on behalf of the Bell family, we really do appreciate the fact that people not only keep in mind his memory, but really carry on his legacy, and that's very important.

Love, soul, they are things that we can talk about in this university, and in this law school, and for me they are represented and embodied by John Sexton. Everyone knows we love John Sexton. And when Derrick died, there was no other choice but to have John Sexton do the eulogy. And so thank you again for that. I'm wearing my special edition N.Y.U. scarf because we bleed N.Y.U. colors in the Bell household. And John is right that Derrick actually proclaimed that he was happy being at this university.

People talked about Derrick and his legacy. One thing I want to mention is about his civil rights work. He was the lawyer for Medgar Evers' children and he was there with Medgar Evers just two weeks before Medgar Evers was assassinated. So the work that Derrick did was dangerous work, but he never talked about it and he never complained about it. He always said that the people who were there were the ones who were heroic and courageous because he could always get on a plane and leave, which he did. So his respect for people and his love for people was extended for everybody he worked for, even those people he protested against sometimes.

A couple names, you have heard a lot of names here today, but I would be remiss if I really did not mention two people who were with Derrick, as were many people in the room, right up to the very end. And this is his longtime and loving secretary, administrative assistant, whatever the title is called, Gail Thomas, and his fellow, Joy Radice. They made the last year, what became the last semester, so wonderful. Derrick was never more happy until he came back to the school in that wheelchair. We saw you that day, that was one of

the happiest days I had ever seen because he was coming back to an institution he was happy with, coming back to the students that he loved. The week before he died we were talking to someone and she said, "What will you miss most?" Derrick looked at her and he said, in his nice, quiet, sweet way, without hesitation, he said "When I die, I'll miss my family, and I'll miss my students." Students were always very very special to him so I want to thank Ben Wolfert, who is a wonderful example of a student, and the students on the Annual Survey, thank you so much for this great honor for Derrick. And I also want to say, Derrick was a person of joy! So alright with the long faces here, alright, we are celebrating, we are celebrating a wonderful life. So I want to leave you with these words that Derrick, besides being brilliant and courageous, and all the things you heard, was really a person who loved to dance, and sing, and joke, and tease and who really carried joy with him wherever he went. He wants other people to do that in spite of the struggle. The struggle will continue but we can still do, as Gloria Steinem said at the memorial service, the electric slide protest while we are struggling for the rights. So just remember the scholarship, yes, but the joy, and the purpose, and the life of meaning and worth. Thank you so very much.

JANET DEWART BELL
Communications and Management Consultant
Widow of Professor Derrick Bell