

Howard University

Digital Howard @ Howard University

Selected Speeches

J. Clay Smith, Jr. Collection

6-10-1986

An Investment in a New Century

J. Clay Smith Jr.

Follow this and additional works at: https://dh.howard.edu/jcs_speeches



Part of the [Legal Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Smith, J. Clay Jr., "An Investment in a New Century" (1986). *Selected Speeches*. 95.
https://dh.howard.edu/jcs_speeches/95

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the J. Clay Smith, Jr. Collection at Digital Howard @ Howard University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Selected Speeches by an authorized administrator of Digital Howard @ Howard University. For more information, please contact digitalservices@howard.edu.

HOWARD UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF LAW

AN INVESTMENT IN A NEW CENTURY

By

Dean J. Clay Smith, Jr.

The Howard University School of Law has a long and illustrious history. Founded on January 6, 1869, in Washington, D.C., with an initial enrollment of six students, it opened its doors as a department in the University which had been founded in 1867. The Law School was accredited by the American Bar Association in 1930 and by the American Association of Law Schools in 1931.

John Mercer Langston was selected as the first dean of the Howard Law School. Dean Langston aided in the election of President Ulysees Grant in the presidential election of 1869. Dean Langston, an ex slave, was educated at Oberlin College, and was a successful member of the Ohio Bar.

In 1875 Dean Langston resigned the deanship to become the acting president of Howard University. He subsequently served: as Consul General of the United States to the Republic of Haiti, Congressman from the Commonwealth of Virginia and the first president of Virginia State College.

Howard University School of Law has been fortunate to have a succession of distinguished deans and faculty, comprised of both blacks and whites, who have charted the School's course for more than a hundred years. In 1882, Benjamin F. Leighton, white, was appointed dean. He served in that capacity for thirty-nine years. During Dean Leighton, tenure, the faculty was enlarged, and included the most famous names in law lectures, names such as John Marshall Harlan, Associate Justice of the Supreme Court, and the visionary dissenter in Plessy v. Ferguson.

In more recent years, the Law School has been led by men and women of vision who believed that disadvantaged Americans should have an opportunity to study law. These deans have included: Dr. Charles Hmlton Houston, Dr. William Henry Hastie, Dr. George M. Johnson, Dr. James Madison Nabrit, Jr.,

Spottswood W. Robinson, III, Clarence Clyde Ferguson, Jr., Patricia Roberts Harris, James Aaron Washington, Paul E. Miller, Sr., Charles T. Duncan, Wiley A. Branton and John T. Baker.

The Howard Law School is different from most law schools. It is different because it has traditionally beckoned all peoples to its classroom. Throughout the history of the Law School, it has opened its doors to minorities, to the disadvantaged, to persons of all races, colors, religions and creeds. In 1872, four years after the Law School was founded, Charlotte E. Ray became the first woman to be graduated from the School. White women applied and were admitted to Howard because other American law schools barred them from admission on the basis of gender. Because of the affirmative policy of Howard Law School, white women, such as Emma Gillette, a founder of American University School of Law, and Cynthia Cleveland, the niece of President Grover Cleveland, were admitted and were graduated from the Law School, as were men, such as George N. Atkinson, later Governor of West Virginia. In the wake of these notables, some of the outstanding black female scholars who have made their mark include: Goler Teal Butcher who became the first woman editor of the Howard Law Journal in 1957, and Ms. ^{Cynthia}~~Clara~~ Straker who served as Law Librarian and Instructor. Women of all races continue to receive their education and serve on the faculty at Howard Law School and to make valuable contributions to society.

Our distinguished graduates include several from Puerto Rico. In 1915, Diego Engenio Ramos was graduated from the Law School. He later became the Recorder of Deeds at Arecibo, Puerto Rico. A 1923 graduate, Benigno Pacheco Tizol became the General Counsel for the Catholic Church of Puerto Rico, and was a pioneer member of the Inter-American Bar Association. No ethnic group is unrepresented in our history of graduates. Not all law schools in this nation can boast of the opportunity afforded by Howard University School of Law.

The Law Faculty has always played a strong and vigorous role in the accomplishments of the Law School. Since the inception of the Law School, the faculty has been racially diverse, starting with Albert Gallatin Riddle, a white abolitionist writer and vigorous advocate of equal rights in the period following the Civil War, to other white professors such as Professors Howard Glickstein, Newton Pacht, Irving Ferman and others who have distinguished themselves.

The Law Faculty has always had strong and dedicated teachers. Among those who have carved their contributions in the minds of such students as Associate Justice Thurgood Marshall of the United States Supreme Court, are: William H. H. Hart, William E. Taylor, Leon A. Ransom, George E. C. Hayes, W. Robert Ming, Ollie May Cooper, Dr. Oliver Morse, Jeanus B. Parks, Jr., and the venerable Herbert O. Reid, Sr., the current Charles Hamilton Houston Distinguished Professor of Law.

The Law School progressed through the 1960's under the strong, dynamic leadership of Harvard law graduate Clarence Clyde Ferguson, Jr., who personally was responsible for securing large financial assistance grants from major foundations during that period. These funds allowed blacks and disadvantaged law students to receive financial aid needed to defray tuition costs and to supplement work study programs.

Today, the Law School looks forward to the New Century with the hope, strength and dedication provided by its distinguished faculty and students. Our multi-talented faculty, representing many of the finest law schools in the country, builds upon over a hundred years of experience in training students for the practice of law.

Howard University School of Law remains committed to the ideals and the

enthusiasm personified by John Mercer Langston. Its faculty seeks able and dedicated students who desire to enter the professional ranks of lawyers. The University and the Faculty encourage you to consider and to apply to a Law School that has as its hallmark the poststop of excellence, a Law School that holds justice for all Americans as its trademark of the past and its investment in the future.

June 10, 1986