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THE VALLEY OF OPPORTUNITY

By

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Associate Dean Jeanus B. Parks, Jr., Assistant Dean Sharon Banks, members of the faculty and the Class of 1989, I am delighted to welcome the class of 1989 to the Howard University School of Law. As I look into your faces, I vividly recall my first day at the Howard Law School in August, 1964. It was a good day. Like many of you I had left my home in Omaha, Nebraska, to seek a legal education in Washington, D.C., at Howard University School of Law.

When I arrived in Washington it was hot. The city seemed so large, its people so distant. When I arrived, I did not have a place to stay, little money in my pocket. I was scared to death.

When I finally arrived at the Law School, I felt a sense of confusion. Questions like these came to mind: Where am I to go? What's next? Where do you buy books? Where do I go to finalize my financial aid? Some doubt began to enter my mind. Do you really want to be at Howard Law School?

Perhaps some of you have already asked these same questions. I know that some of you feel uncertain. Its been a long haul since you first submitted your application.

But, you are here, and the faculty and student body welcome you.

Life will now begin to shift to another phase. You are entering a professional school, one that is nearly 118 years of age. You will hear much about academic rigor in the next two weeks, indeed, in the next three

*Opening remarks to the entering law class at Howard University School of Law, August 11, 1986, in the James A. Cobb Moot Court Room.

years. These two words -- academic rigor -- if understood and applied will carry you through the valley of opportunity -- the law school experience. When you emerge from the valley in June, 1989, you will emerge intellectually prepared for the challenges that you will surely face as lawyers in the new century.

Year 2,000 is fourteen years away. When you leave this Law School, the new century will be just a little over a decade away. So, you will close this century as law students and lawyers, and you will open the new century as leaders of the bar.

The prospects of being a new century lawyer should give you pause. The responsibility placed on your shoulders as lawyers in the new century will be awesome. However, the responsibilities that you will face -- as a future lawyer in the year 2,000 really begins today.

Law School is a valley of opportunity. Buried in that valley are treasures of knowledge that money cannot buy, that a large portion of the American population will never have an opportunity for which to search, and that only you have the key to unlock. The treasures in the valley are your teachers who are charged with the responsibility to educate you and to provide you with academic compasses to see through the nights and days of your academic travel.

There are other treasures buried in the valley; namely the library in which the keys to the universe are housed. You will be fingerprinted in the library by the authority vested in the universe. Your fingers will often touch a book with dust on it. It is upon that dust that your fingerprints will be recorded as you open chapters to maps that will guide you through the valley.

Another treasure found in the valley sits next to you. The people around

you set the tone of what kind of image you want the Class of 1989 to have. The treasure that I hope for is a class dedicated to the mission of Howard Law School, and to the standards of excellence. Afforded an opportunity for a legal education, your mission is to become scholars of the first order. Scholars often question what is. Scholars also find methods to correct what is not. You must do the same. However, you must also listen and analyze the issue that is before you. You must ponder and wonder, pause and reflect. You will become so frustrated at times that you may weep or seek a quiet field in which to scream. The valley is often an impersonal space. So is life. You must not succumb to despair. The treasures in the valley oppose despair.

You must not yield to or walk down the easy road of learning. There is no easy road in the study of law. Your peace of mind, your confidence, intellectual arrogance, bottomless thirst, or insatiable hunger can only be satisfied by the treasures in this valley. Seek first the treasures for your peace of mind, to boost your confidence, to balance or strengthen your arrogance, to satisfy your thirst, and to feed your hunger. Do not seek your answers down the easy road -- for there are no lasting treasures on that road. In fact, if you find yourself walking down the easy road, you may forfeit the very opportunity you seek.

Howard University School of Law is a most unusual place. Founded in 1869, it has educated more black lawyers than any other law school in America. Like all law schools, we are proud of our heritage and we are pleased to share it with you. It is our hope and yes our expectation that you will share your minds, your diligence and your ability to survive in order that this rich heritage might continue. Good luck to all of you.