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CONFERENCE HIGHLIGHT—RISING STAR AWARD: COMMENTARY

By Lydia Edwards, J.D.*

It means a great deal to receive this year's Rising Star award. I am especially honored because the African-American students in the law school, rather than the faculty or administration, gave me this award. The fact that so many of my peers think as highly of me as I do of them is humbling.

Receiving the award on the 10th Anniversary of the Sylvania Woods Conference on African Americans and the Law is also incredibly humbling. So many leaders in the African-American legal community I have only read about or heard of their greatness at the law school before my time attended the conference. To all of the amazing speakers, professors, students, judges, and lawyers before whom I am honored, I would like to say both "thank you" and "I shall try." The "thank you" is not just for the award, but also for the much easier road that I traveled into law school.

While Sylvania Woods was not there to see that incredibly beautiful room filled with brilliant legal minds, civil rights leaders, and the next generation of African-American scholars, I was wholly moved. To all the unnamed people before me, especially in the legal field, who paved the way for me to be the first lawyer in my family, I thank you. I thank you for the opportunity to exercise my potential. I am not forgetful that it was only a gen-

eration ago that the room I saw filled with brilliant African-American legal minds could have represented all of the African-American lawyers in existence in some states. To Ms. Weaver, especially, I extend a special "thank you." She is the surrogate mother to so many of us at the law school. She has been my calming force and voice of reason. She has also encouraged me and been there from the very beginning in helping *The Modern American* come into being.

Because of the support and trailblazing of so many ahead of me, I promise "I shall try." I shall try to be the best lawyer I can be and represent myself in a professional and ethical manner at all times. I shall try to break as many glass ceilings and limitations and bring with me as many people representing the incredible diversity of the United States as I possibly can. I shall try to fight against injustice. I promise never to let any person be disrespected, denigrated, or abused in my presence without speaking out. I shall try simply to be a better person, to give back and follow the tenants of my religion, to love my neighbor, and treat others the way I want to be treated. I shall try to remember most of all to be a flea for justice and keep biting, no matter how daunting the amount of injustice. Enough fleas can bring down the mightiest of dogs.



* At the 10th Annual Sylvania Woods Conference, Lydia Edwards received the Rising Star Award. This prestigious award is given to the outstanding African-American graduate at the American University Washington College of Law ("WCL") each year who best exemplifies fellowship, congeniality, and willingness to help others during his or her tenure at the school.

Ms. Edwards' contributions to the WCL community include, founding *The Modern American: A Publication Dedicated to Diversity and the Law*, serving the and Finance Chair of the Student Bar Association, and serving as a member of the Moot Court Honor Society.

In addition to her studies and many contributions to WCL,

Ms. Edwards tutored children in Washington, D.C.'s Shaw District, helped protect voters' rights during the 2004 national election, taught constitutional law to public high school students in the District of Columbia through the Marshall-Brennan Fellow Program, and spearheaded efforts at WCL to help victims of Hurricane Katrina by organizing an "Alternative Spring Break" trip to Gulfport, Mississippi. After her first year of law school, Ms. Edwards clerked at Henrichsen Siegel, P.L.L.C., where she worked on employment discrimination and civil rights cases. During her second year of law school, Ms. Edwards clerked at the Lawyers' Committee on Civil Rights Under Law, where she worked to ensure local governments and municipalities complied with affirmative action plans. Finally, the Berkeley Journal for African American Law and Policy selected her article, *Protecting the Black Freedmen: Is the Thirteenth Amendment the linchpin to securing Civil Rights in Indian Country?* for publication. It discusses the civil rights of black members of the Cherokee and Seminole tribes.

Currently, Ms. Edwards is a law clerk for Massachusetts Superior Court where she will rotate between civil and criminal dockets and four judges. She will join the Boston office of Holland & Knight, LLP in 2007.