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Adrenaline of Excellence: The Career of Judge Gerald Bruce Lee

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JUDGE GERALD BRUCE LEE

CLAUDIO GROSSMAN*

When I think of Judge Lee, one word comes to mind, and that is fortunate. WCL has benefited immensely having Judge Lee as one of its most distinguished alums. I myself, as the former Dean from 1995 to July 2016, have been a direct beneficiary of his advice and contributions. The commitment of Judge Lee to our law school was expressed in a myriad of ways. They included membership on the Dean's Advisory Council (DAC), an important source of transformative ideas and actions to further develop WCL's superb and well-rounded legal education together with innovative programmatic offerings, for example, in Intellectual Property, Online Legal Education, Business, Law & Government, International Commercial Arbitration, Trial Advocacy, and Human Rights, among others. Judge Lee was an active participant in all DAC discussion. His contributions were guided by important principles. The first is the centrality of the student experience. Related to this is that Judge Lee was an indefatigable proponent for students who lacked sufficient resources through the development and strengthening of scholarships.

Additionally, Judge Lee was an effective proponent of projecting the law school's scholarship, teaching, service, and engagement and leadership in the community, the nation, and the world. Judge Lee constantly reminded us of the importance of publicizing the school's activities, as a way to contribute to legal education as a whole. A guiding principle of Judge Lee was the need to reflect in the composition of the law school, its student body, its faculty, and its staff, the rich diversity of the nation and world where we live.

To promote his vision of a diverse and engaged institution, Judge Lee was a constant participant in the Annual Sylvania Woods

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Conference on African Americans and the Law. Topics included the creation of opportunities, the criminal law system, and diversity in legal education. Hundreds of members of our community consider this annual conference as essential to community development and to the generation of ideas to improve the legal system.

Judge Lee's importance to WCL goes well beyond his intellectual contributions designed to open up opportunities, enrich curricular offers, and promote diversity. For decades, he has made himself available to advise and mentor students while also offering valuable opportunities for clerkships and externships in his chambers. Throughout my twenty-one years at WCL, Judge Lee served as the annual keynote speaker at our Judicial Clerkships reception, inspiring hundreds of students through his example, insights, and experience. Numerous students have expressed to me how much they value Judge Lee's advice on clerkships and professional development, covering not only general concepts, such as integrity, but also including the importance of punctuality, civility, and effective communication. Judge Lee took an active interest in their lives and continued to be a mentor throughout the course of their professional career.

In addition to his service to WCL, Judge Lee became a member of American University's Board of Trustees in 2010. In that capacity, he has provided sound and sage advice, consistently advocating for the creation of opportunities for students and enriching the educational environment through a diverse student body and community.

Personally, my gratitude to Judge Lee knows no end. No matter the issue—whether creating new programmatic developments, anticipating the ongoing challenges to legal education, opening up valuable opportunities for students, or building a new law school campus—I always found in Judge Lee to be a wise, creative, energetic, and committed person.

The presence and demeanor of Judge Lee always struck me. He radiates a contagious optimism that, who you can be, notwithstanding obstacles or difficulties, depends largely on your own will and commitment. His own life serves as an example of this attitude. Judge Lee pursued a successful career in litigation and on the bench, in spite of the discouragement, which he himself often mentions, of a counselor that did not consider him "college material" and the fact that there were no graduates of higher education in his own family. There have been many firsts in his life, including being the first African American to serve full-time on the Alexandria Federal Court.

Perhaps one of the highest honors a judge may receive is that individuals see him or her as a person fit to judge, a person who satisfies

the highest standards in terms of knowledge of legal systems and passion for justice. For WCL, for its students, faculty, staff, alumni, and the community as a whole, Judge Lee is that person.

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