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## Tribute in Honor of Oliver W. Hill, Esq.

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Or online at:

<http://stbernardproject.org/index.html>

If none of these organizations strikes a chord with you, the New Orleans Times-Picayune has compiled a list of contact information for organizations providing disaster assistance. Go to:

<http://www.nola.com/timespic/stories/index.ssf?/base/news->

[24/1190442926208060.xml&coll=1](#) to learn how to help struggling musicians, hospice patients, pets of displaced families, the mentally ill, and just about every other group you might imagine.

One last word from Teresa: “Most importantly, and everybody says this, please urge friends and relations to visit New Orleans if possible. That would be a painless (albeit fattening) way to support our recovery.” New Orleanians, NAACA wishes you all the best, and I, for one, will be back soon.

### **Tribute in Honor of Oliver W. Hill, Esq.**

Jonathan K. Stubbs, Professor of Law  
University of Richmond School of Law

*I wrote this tribute to my mentor, legal role model and friend, Oliver W. Hill, Esq., before he passed away recently but was unable to read it to him before his passing. I am honored to leave this written memorial. – J.K.S.*



Mr. Hill, in saluting you, allow me to mention a few salient points of your remarkable life’s story. At the beginning of the twentieth century, in Richmond, Virginia, you were born into a nurturing family. Nevertheless, you confronted many challenges. Eleven years before your birth, in *Plessy vs. Ferguson* the Supreme Court upheld and promoted segregation. In practice, *Plessy* meant that in Roanoke where you spent much of your youth, the legal and social system provided a public high school education for white children but not for African Americans. Dual school

systems with high schools for whites and makeshift “training” schools for blacks exemplified the oppression you experienced.

When you moved to Washington, D.C. to obtain a high school education at Dunbar High School, a public high school for African Americans, the strong self-esteem that you developed in your foster parents’ home in Roanoke served you well. At Dunbar well-trained teachers helped you in the evolutionary process of deciding what to do with your life. During the Roaring Twenties, as an undergrad at Howard University you analyzed the 13<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup>, and

15<sup>th</sup> Amendments to the Constitution and concluded that in its decisions interpreting the amendments “the Supreme Court had lost its cotton picking mind.” You promptly decided that someone needed to bring a case to the Court to persuade the Court to correct its mistake in *Plessy*, that you were somebody, and that you would prepare yourself accordingly.

When you matriculated in 1930 at Howard Law School you worked daily under the instruction of Charles Hamilton Houston, the brilliant dean and leader of the Law School as well as professors William Hastie (later the first black person appointed to the federal bench), George E.C. Hayes (subsequently one of the lead counsel in the District of Columbia companion case to *Brown*), and Leon “Andy” Ransom (a gifted teacher and advocate). These remarkable educators groomed you and your law school classmate and lifelong friend, Thurgood Marshall, in the struggle to overturn *Plessy*.

As you began practicing law in the midst of the Great Depression, most of your clients were broke and many had charges against them that could have resulted in their electrocution if they were convicted. To protect the constitutional rights of criminal defendants, on numerous occasions you went into jurisdictions in which your own personal safety was in jeopardy.

*You risked everything* to challenge a social system which enshrined white supremacy in the law. For example when you returned to in Richmond, Virginia in 1939, the salaries of black teachers started at three hundred and fifty dollars and were capped at nine hundred and ninety nine dollars per year. For white teachers the salaries started at one thousand dollars and topped out at one thousand eight hundred dollars. In 1940, you and your colleagues managed to persuade the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals to equalize the salaries of black and white teachers. **I salute your**

**courage.**

As a soldier in a segregated army, you risked your life on the beaches of Normandy fighting in a war to make the world safe for democracy and for a nation that denied many blacks the right fundamental to a democracy—the right to vote. Three years after World War II ended, you ran and were elected as the first African American elected to Richmond City Council since Reconstruction ended. **I salute you for your sterling example.**

In addition, you and your law partner Spotswood Robinson, III, made time in your hectic lives to listen to the appeals of a valiant group of high school students in Prince Edward County, Virginia led by Barbara Johns. You and Robinson accepted their case which became one of the four cases consolidated by the Supreme Court in *Brown*. You were part of the team effort of many lawyers, clients and activists who worked assiduously for a quarter century to achieve vindication in *Brown*. **I salute you for your compassion and perseverance.**

And yet this was only the tip of the iceberg. Repeatedly you saved the lives and liberties of the poor and powerless without financial compensation and at great peril to your own life. You endured crosses being burned on your lawn, obscene phone calls nightly from 1947-1961, and a myriad of odious acts. You stood the test. **I salute you for long suffering endurance.**

At the national level you served on President Truman’s Commission on Contracts Compliance (the predecessor to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission). As Assistant to the Federal Housing Commissioner you helped develop President Kennedy’s executive order designed to end the official United States government policy of promoting housing segregation. For decades, the FHA fought to prevent the “infiltration” of African Americans and Jews into “homogeneous”

neighborhoods. **I salute your tenacity.**

Time does not permit me to mention all of the numerous awards that you have received but which include the ABA’s highest award, as well as the NAACP Spingarn Medal and the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

You are a rare person who did more than aspire to achieve something great. You made a substantial, enduring contribution to humanity. The destruction of legal segregation in the United States heralded in *Brown* was a shot heard around the world for human freedom and dignity. Your work inspired similar movements to achieve human rights in places like South Africa.

You continue pointing us towards a vision of a world without war and filled with justice. You implore us to recognize that change is inevitable and that we must guide change for the common good. Though you

are unable to see physically, your vision for humanity is awe inspiring. As you say in the concluding chapter of your memoirs, progressive evolutionary change can spark “a renaissance in human relations in the twenty first century.” Like you, I seek that renaissance. On a personal note I am honored to call you mentor and friend, and it gives me the greatest pleasure to salute you,  
OLIVER WHITE HILL, Esq.



Prof. Stubbs

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*Last, but absolutely not least, we are delighted to reprint the words of our Judge-in Residence, John M. Greaney of the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court. It is a powerful, inspirational message, and, like the food and music of New Orleans, it is worth savoring.*

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### **Luncheon Remarks by Justice John M. Greaney**

Presented at NAACA’S New Orleans Seminar

When the invitation arrived from NAACA via e-mail, I was puzzled. My law clerk screens my e-mails (a result of some incendiary e-mails I received after the *Goodridge* decision approving same sex marriage in Massachusetts). She told me that I had an e-mail from NAACA. This couldn’t be, I thought. You see, you have chosen a name that gives the organization an acronym similar to the original acronym for the national association of plaintiffs’ trial lawyers. That organization was the National Association of Claimants and Compensation Attorneys (NAACA). The lawyers entirely



Justice Greaney addressing NAACA members at business lunch

abandoned NAACA because the words “claimants and compensation attorneys” too closely identified them with plaintiffs’