

For Immediate Release

**MICHAEL A. CARDOZO SPEECH ACCEPTING
THE 2008 CITY BAR ASSOCIATION DIVERSITY CHAMPION AWARD
NEW YORK CITY BAR ASSOCIATION 6/4/08**

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To be presented with this award from Dennis Walcott is particularly special. Dennis is a good friend and one of the most outstanding leaders in the Bloomberg Administration. I am sure Mayor Bloomberg would agree with me when I say that Dennis is the person most responsible for the real progress that has been made in race relations in this City during the last six years.

It is an honor to be accepting this award tonight along with two great New Yorkers who are so committed to diversity, Judge Juanita Bing Newton and James O'Neal.

I want to thank the City Bar Association for this extraordinary honor. This award is the latest example of all the Association has done for me. It was this Association that started me out on the public service journey that I have enjoyed so much and it was this Association that, particularly during my presidency, made me so aware of the importance of diversity efforts.

Last -- but by no means least in thank yous -- is to my extraordinary staff. The award recites that it is being given to an individual responsible for initiating and sustaining change within his or her organization. While I may have been in charge, the only way the diversity principles -- diversity in hiring, retention and promotion and elevation to leadership -- can be carried out is when there are committed people who will do the needed work. I have been extraordinarily fortunate to have such a committed group of people, sitting at that table, to help me.

Let me introduce my First Assistant, Jeffrey Friedlander; the chairs and members of our Diversity Committee, Muriel Goode-Trufant, Betty Lawrence Lewis, Kim Bryan and Drake Colley; the chair of our Women's Committee, Nina Jody; the Chair of our Lateral Committee, Angela Albertus; the Director of Professional Development, June Witterschein, who recognized that training lawyers goes far beyond putting together CLE programs and extends in particular to diversity training; and Stuart Smith, the Director of our Recruiting Office, who makes sure that diversity goals occupy a high priority in our hiring effort.

Why is diversity is so important?

Mayor Bloomberg said it best. "Diversity," he said in his most recent State of the City address, "is what makes our town special." "The presence of diverse New Yorkers makes New York the nation's economic engine, its financial hub, its fashion center, its media mecca and its cultural capital."

[Diversity] is what makes America great,” he concluded.

Diversity of course includes far more than ethnic diversity. As The City Bar properly defines diversity, it is a “an inclusive concept,” and let me emphasize the word “inclusive,” encompassing race, color, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, religion, nationality, age, disability and marital and parental status.”

That was not always the definition. In fact when I was president of this great organization the specific goals of the diversity initiative did not extend to gender. But at that time there was a Task Force on Women which urged that the diversity goals be expanded to include women. And the leader of that Task Force that promoted that change was Barbara Berger Opatowski, now the executive director of the City Bar.

In my view, government law offices should be innovators and leaders with respect to diversity. As lawyers we symbolize the law in a country founded on the rule of law. Government lawyers must not only seek to enforce the law, but they have a special obligation both to do justice and symbolize all that is the best in the law.

Certainly diversity should of the highest priority in the 690 person New York City Law Department. More than 60% of the New York City work force is composed of minorities and we regularly defend, and occasionally litigate against, members of this work force. We represent the Mayor, all City Agencies, the City Council and all elected city officials in a city that itself is close to 50% minority in population. It is smart business, it is smart politics, and most importantly it is the right thing to do to make every effort to have a law department that reflects this diversity, and draws its strength from it.

I appreciate the kind words in the Program about the results we have accomplished. But the statistics that were cited also show that we have a long, long way to go to meet the goals of a completely diverse work place; we cannot rest on our laurels.

But the results we have achieved do lead me to challenge the rest of the legal profession to try to overtake the NYC Law Department in the following areas:

The NYC Law Department has a higher combined percentage of African American and Hispanic attorneys than any private firm in NYC;

The NYC Law Department is the largest employer of disabled attorneys in the entire United States;

The NYC Law Department is the largest employer of openly gays and lesbian attorneys in the entire United States;

The NYC Law Department has a higher percentage of female attorneys than any private firm in NYC.

I hope that this award to the head of a government law office will serve as an incentive to my friends in the private bar, who made great strides in this area, to do even more. I promise you, however, that we will do our very best to try to stay ahead of you.

I accept this award on behalf of what I consider to be one of the great law firms in New York City, and one that derives its strength, just as the city does, from all aspects of its diversity.

Thank you
