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Tributes

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF CHIEF JUDGE ROBERT BELL

WILLIAM L. REYNOLDS*

On April 19, 2013, a Symposium, attended by a very large audience, was convened in Baltimore to celebrate the life and times of Robert Mack Bell. The Symposium, organized by Judges Toni Clarke and Pamela Brown, honored an extraordinary person. Robert Bell has been a judge in Maryland since 1975, and he has been the Chief Judge of the State since 1996. Bell is the first African American to be Chief Judge, a distinction that serves as a capstone to a long career of firsts, beginning with his arrest as a sit-in demonstrator in 1960, as a fifteen year-old.¹ Chief Judge Bell's distinguished legal career needs no re-telling here.

What does need to be said is what a fine, fine person he is. In my many years as a contemporary of Chief Judge Bell, I have heard almost no criticism—ever—of the Chief. One may disagree with him—I certainly have done so; but the disagreements are never personal. I shall not heap more praise upon the Chief; he needs none. Three things do need to be mentioned, however. First, Chief Judge Bell has been the premier cheerleader for the state's judiciary; he has traveled

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1. The case eventually made it to the Supreme Court; it is known as *Bell v. Maryland*, 378 U.S. 226 (1964); see generally William L. Reynolds, *Foreword: The Legal History of the Great Sit-In Case of Bell v. Maryland*, 61 MD. L. REV. 761 (2002) (describing the strange procedural history of the case).

far and wide to sing its praises, both to outsiders and to the judges themselves; I know that this is something that has been much appreciated by his peers. Second, on a topic near and dear to my own heart, he has been a strong advocate of continuing judicial education. Third, I envy his famous bow ties.

At the Chief's request, the Symposium did not focus on him personally, but on the changes that have taken place in Maryland in his lifetime—changes which he played a major role in bringing about. The first Tributes discuss the civil rights experiences of those in Chief Judge Bell's generation, and how the law changed as a result. Thus, Professor Lenneal Henderson talks about the civil rights experiences of young blacks from Chief Judge Bell's generation. Professor Leland Ware then focuses on the developments in civil rights during the 1960s. Pamela Cardullo Ortiz discusses Chief Judge Bell's leadership in securing access to justice. Professor Michael Higginbotham finally analyzes Chief Judge Bell's opinions on jury selection and race to show how he has always fought for racial tolerance.

Chief Judge Bell has always been a leader in alternative dispute resolution ("ADR"), a subject which has become increasingly important in recent years. A Tribute by Professor Deborah Eisenberg, Rachel Wohl, and Toby Guerin addresses the changes in ADR in Maryland in recent years, changes that have made this state a leader in ADR and owe much to Chief Judge Bell's leadership. Professor Barbara Babb shows us how Chief Judge Bell's interest in family law led to the creation of a Family Court system in this state, a tribunal that has become a national leader. Professor José Anderson then traces the growth of the Maryland Legal Aid Bureau, a reflection of Chief Judge Bell's commitment to access to justice.

The Symposium closes with a loving Tribute from Professor Tanya Washington, who recounts her year as a clerk for Judge Bell. Tanya, whom I am proud to claim as a former student, applied for her clerkship with the Chief at my insistence, and here describes in loving detail what it was like to clerk for him.

Any reader of these Symposium pieces cannot fail to appreciate the seismic shifts in American society in the last half century, and the role that a wonderful man named Robert Mack Bell played in them. His has truly been a splendid life. Enjoy retirement, Chief (although I doubt that you will ever "retire").