Remarks on the Occasion of the Renaming of the Robert M. Bell Center for Civil Rights in Education - Morgan State University - Renaming ceremony – April 28, 2010

It is quite appropriate for this Center to be here at Morgan State University and for it to be named in honor of Chief Judge Robert Bell.

This university is in many ways the birthplace of student activism for civil rights and racial justice in this nation.

I hope that this Center will include its mission correcting the historical record of the civil rights movement to reflect central role of Morgan students.

This is particularly important as to the sit-in movement to desegregate restaurants and places of public accommodation before the passage on the 1964 Civil Rights Acts.

The conventional wisdom is that this movement began in 1960 Greensboro, North Carolina.

We have all seen the photographs in books and on websites of the four students sitting at the lunch counter at the Woolworth store in Greensboro.

That incident may have the point in time when the sit ins first got national new coverage. But, it was not the beginning of the movement.

Some day the history books will accurately report that the sit- in movement began five year earlier in 1955, that it began here in Baltimore, and it was started by Morgan Students.

I can even tell you the location.
It was at a Read’s drug store at corner of Cold Spring Lane and Loch Raven Boulevard.

That was as close to this campus that the Baltimore Transit buses stopped.

Commuting Morgan students had to walk from there to the campus.

The drug store had a lunch counter but would not serve black students. They could only get food for take put.

So at least by 1955, Morgan students began to sit- in to protest. At first, they called them “sit- downs”, using a term drawn from the labor movement.

After a few months, the students decided to expand their activities to nearby Northwood Shopping Cent. There they focused on the Arundel’s Ice Cream Store, the Northwood Cinema, and the Roof top Restaurant.

Its is from Northwood that the sit in spread downtown and to other restaurants.

In 1960, the Morgan student began to recruit Baltimore high school students to join the effort.

One of the students they recruited was the Dunbar High student government president, Robert Mack Bell.

As we know, Bob Bell and 11 other students were in 1960 arrested at Hooper’s Restaurant.

Their case went all the way up to the U.S. Supreme Court.

Even before 1960, the students were already having success. Their efforts in 1958 led to a desegregation most of the downtown movie houses, including the Hippodrome and in 1959 their big success was the desegregation of the Arundel Ice Cream chain of stores.
The high point of student activism was 1963.

Student demonstrators had succeeded in desegregating hundreds of area restaurants, theaters, and other places.

But one business that would not budge was The Northwood Theater right up nest to the campus, near where there is now a Burlington Coat Factory store.

In 1963, students decided that enough wa enough and that this would take strong sustained effort and massive civil disobedience.

They began to the Theatre and be arrested in large numbers.

In February 1963, more than 400 Morgan students went in jail out of the theatre. This probably still remains the highest percentage of a college student body to go to jail in protest.

The entire Kappa chapter went to jail following, Lawrence Parker and Ralph McCloud. So did the Delta and other organizations. The women’s jail reached double its capacity.

There reached a point when President Martin Jenkins told Mayor Goodman that if they did not desegregate that movie house, Morgan’s entire student body would be in jail. Finally on February 22, 1963. the owners caved. At that time 345 Morgan students were in jail.

Morgan student activism had begun decades before that.

In 1942, more than 2,000 Marylanders traveled to Annapolis, filled the State House chamber, and demanded an end to police brutality and other racial discriminations. The student leader and the person who spoke for young people on that occasion was Judge Bells predecessor on the Court of Appeals Harry Cole.

This tradition of student activism at Morgan was always with the support and encouragement of several key faculty members.
Such a distinguished Professor G. James Fleming, who as a Morgan student himself had been the very first person to be had been arrested for picketing in front of Ford’s Theatre protesting the discriminatory seating practices, where black had to sit way up in the second balcony.

There was political science professor Robert L Gill, who in 1947 had led a group of Morgan students back down to Annapolis in 1947 to demand increased funding for Morgan.

Other important faculty supporters were English professor A. J. Walker and historian Benjamin Quarles, and Dean of Women Thelma Bando, who somehow got a pass to move freely in an out of the jail assisting students and sending communications to their families.

Mr. McConkie as you plan the work of this Center, I hope you will get the ball rolling on establishing some kind of permanent exhibit that acknowledges and commemorates the special roll that Morgan students played.

I have once or twice mentioned this to Clint Coleman.

Lately I have been talking to my brother Floyd Taliaferro at the Student Center. But, it has just been talk. With the powerful leadership here today, perhaps we can finally get this done.

Perhaps this Center should be the focal point of some activities or an exhibit.

The University might want to have a homecoming of the demonstrators. You might want to capture their recollections as oral histories.

State Archivist Dr. Edward Papenfuse and I have for about 10 years taught a seminar at the law school called “Race and the Law: The Maryland Experience.” Our students and the staff of the State Archives have done much of the research of the sit-ins. We have collected the names and the press. We have found most of the arrest records and
court papers. Your alumni office could find the former students present locations.

I am willing to help. I have many of the photographs and documents. I like to design exhibits.

Clarence Logan, who was the leader in the early sixties, has kept every new clipping and other items. Reverend Doug Sands, the original leader back in 1955, would also be willing to help.

Working together we could put together a fantastic and informative, reunion, program, and permanent exhibit. What do you think?

I can think of no better place to get this part of our nation's history straight than here at the Robert M. Bell Center for Civil Right in Education.
Robert M. Bell Center for Civil Rights in Education

Naming Ceremony
April 28, 2010
Honorable Robert M. Bell, Chief Judge, Maryland Court of Appeals

Chief Judge Robert M. Bell was born in Rocky Mount, North Carolina on July 6, 1943, and reared in Baltimore. He attended Dunbar High School where, in 1960, twelve Dunbar High School students entered a downtown Baltimore restaurant, were refused service and were, subsequently, arrested and convicted for trespassing. One of the students, Robert M. Bell, led an appeal of the verdict in a landmark civil rights case, Bell v. Maryland, which eventually was argued before the United States Supreme Court and brought an end to de facto racial segregation in Maryland. Judge Bell continued his education at Morgan State College, where he received his B.A. degree in 1966. He then went on to Harvard University Law School, where he received his J.D. in 1969.

Thus began Robert M. Bell's historic odyssey through Maryland's legal system, first as an attorney at the firm of Piper and Marbury, then as a judge with 25 years service on the Maryland bench. Judge Bell came to the bench in 1975 as a judge of the District Court of Maryland for Baltimore City. He next served as a judge for the Circuit Court for Baltimore City from 1980 until 1984, when he was appointed judge to the Court of Special Appeals of Maryland. In 1991, Judge Bell was appointed to the Court of Appeals of Maryland. With his October 23, 1996 designation, by Governor Parris Glendening, as Chief Judge of the Court of Appeals, the state's highest court, Robert M. Bell became the only active judge in the State to have served at least four years on all four levels of Maryland's judiciary, and the first African-American to be named the state's chief jurist.

In that capacity, he manages over 3,000 employees and determines the annual budget. In addition to his many duties as chief judge, Judge Bell lectures frequently at schools and community groups. His involvement also includes serving as Chair of the Judicial Compensation Committee and the Maryland Mediation and Conflict Resolution Office (MACRO), formerly the Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) Commission. He also chairs the Committee on Building Public Trust and Confidence in the Justice System. In addition, he is a member of the Judicial Education Committee and the State Bar Committee on Judicial Administration. Judge Bell holds memberships in the National, American, Maryland State, Baltimore City and Monumental City Bar Associations.

Among his many awards is the 1996 honorary doctorate he received from Morgan State University.
Robert M. Bell Center for Civil Rights in Education

Naming Ceremony
April 28, 2010
2:30 p.m.

PROGRAM

Welcome .................................. Pace J. McConkie, Esq.
Director
Robert M. Bell Center for Civil Rights in Education

Remarks .................................. Mr. Dallas R. Evans
Chairman
Morgan State University Board of Regents

Reflections of Colleagues ............. William H. Murphy, Jr., Esq.
Founding Senior Partner
Murphy PA

Larry S. Gibson
Professor of Law
University of Maryland School of Law

Reading of Resolution ................. Pace J. McConkie, Esq.

Dedicatory Remarks .................... Dr. Earl S. Richardson
President
Morgan State University

Response ............................... The Honorable Robert M. Bell
Chief Judge
Maryland Court of Appeals

Closing Remarks ....................... Pace J. McConkie, Esq.

Reception

Music provided by the Morgan State University Jazz Ensemble
The Center for Civil Rights in Education, established at Morgan State University, unites research, teaching, training and advocacy on integral civil rights issues in education at the pre-kindergarten, elementary, secondary and postsecondary levels. It is instituted for the identification and study of current issues and challenges related to equal educational opportunity, particularly with respect to low-income African American and other minority students seeking real and meaningful opportunities for educational excellence and advancement.

The Center convenes the needed intellectual capacity by bringing together academia, the legal profession, advocacy groups, policymakers, civic and community leaders and organizations, and students to develop and promote substantive research and collaboration of research, strategies, remedies, solutions, programs, public policy initiatives and appropriate legal and community-based advocacy necessary to overcome obstacles to educational achievement, eliminate continuing policies or practices that foster discrimination or perpetuate segregated conditions in education, and enhance educational opportunity for all students regardless of race, ethnicity or background. Its mission and purposes are national in scope, providing critical leadership, resources and focus to the relevant educational issues at home and in communities throughout the nation.