



The Drum Newsletter

The Tribune Society, Inc. of the Court in the State of New York
P.O. Box 85 • Canal Street Station • New York, NY 10013

2nd Quarter 2005

www.tribunes.org

President's Message

Dear Fellow Tribune Sisters & Brothers,

This issue will be my last curtain call as your president. I leave with mix emotions that include sadness and hope. I feel sadness, with the realization that I am actually leaving the helm. Hope, knowing the new leadership will allow you an opportunity to continue growing and thriving.

As I reflect on the past several years, many of my most memorable moments include the numerous exchanges we have shared at the general membership meetings. You never failed to come out, even in inclement weather conditions. In seeing your dedication always filled my heart with love for each one of you.

As time passes, the Tribune Society will change leadership many times. Continuity will ensure the life blood of our existence and will keep our organization evolving with the times. Please continue the

journey under all circumstances, whether it's favorable or unfavorable. We must preserve what we inherited from our extremely wise founders. They taught us the importance of keeping hope alive. This has not been easy, but thirty - seven years later, we are still standing with pride class and distinction. Many present and past leaders have sacrificed personally, professionally and emotionally for the survival of our beloved Tribune Society.

I would like to end this message with applauding all the past presidents that made it possible for me to follow in their foot steps. Each of us have been contributors in our own unique way. This departure will now permit me to join a very special class of folks, the retired presidents.

May God continue to Bless and keep you strong in body and mind.

Peace forever yours,
Your 19th President

ANNOUNCEMENTS

General Membership Meeting

Thursday, June 16, 2005 - 6:00 p.m.
Federal Court House, 500 Pearl St., Rm. 850, NY - Executive Board Elections

Thursday, September 15, 2005 - 6 p.m.
Federal Court House, 500 Pearl St., Rm. 850, NY - Come and Greet and Meet the newly elected Executive Board
**2005 - 2006 Membership Dues will be collected.*

Illness:

Bronx County Delegate Damon Garrison reports: It is with a humbled heart that I must alert you. Tribune Member **Barbara Remington**, of the Bronx Supreme Court is out due to a terminal illness. Barbara, the love, support and prayers from all your Tribune sisters and brothers are with you.

Necrology:

It is with sadness that we inform you of the passing of **Mr. Charles Dixon**, beloved husband of Tribune Society member **Yvonne Dixon**, Supervising Court Office Assistant of the Mt. Vernon City Courts. A Memorial Service was held on May 31, 05 at McCall's Funeral Home in the Bronx. To Yvonne, our condolences, sympathy and prayers are with you and your family.

Condolences to **Hon. Alison Tuitt** on the passing of his father **Al Tuitt Sr.** past president of the Williamsbridge NAACP and one of the petitioners in the lawsuit to get New York State to provide funding equity to schools throughout the state.

Congratulations and Best Wishes

Pamela Browne on your election as Union Secretary and Senior Court Clerk
Muhammad Small on his graduation from John Jay College of Criminal Justice with a Bachelor of Science Degree in Security Management. He completed his studies with honors (cum laude). Muhammad also informed us that he plans to take the LSAT in December and attend law school.

Two Fallen Heroes

Submitted by Ernest Owens, Recording Secretary

On March 24, 2005 and March 29, 2005, our community and the legal community lost two intelligent, brilliant and courage individuals. One, a Judge, best known for his harsh opinions about judges and police officers, and for making what was considered unorthodox bail decisions that favored defendants. The other, a trial attorney, best known for litigating police brutality cases, on behalf of black clients

and for representing celebrities in trouble. Both sought to make changes in the American legal system and both displayed an unwavering determination to uphold their uncompromising stance to support and uphold the Constitution and to protect the rights of all Americans.

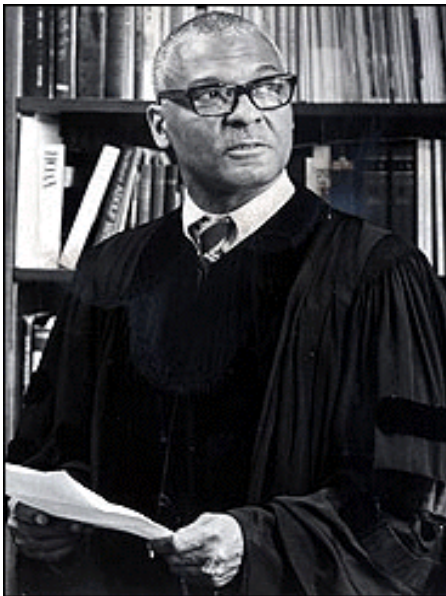
The Tribune Society of the Courts in The State of New York has honored Justice

Bruce McMarion Wright and Mr. Johnnie L. Cochran Jr., Esq., in the past and we now honor them by dedicating this issue of the Tribune Society DRUM Newsletter to them. Both men stood up and joined in the same belief as the Tribune Society. The belief in the fair and impartial enforcement of the law, for all people in the community, regardless of race, color, creed or class.

Honorable Bruce McMarion Wright

Submitted by Ernest Owens, Recording Secretary

“Bail should not be used punitively, to detain people for the sake of crime prevention or to coerce guilty pleas. My aim was to uphold the Eight Amendment of the Constitution, which says, ‘excessive bail shall not be required.’ For some poor people \$50 could be excessive. Bail is set to assure the presence at trial of a defendant, who is presumed innocent until proven guilty.” – Judge Bruce McMarion Wright



A celebration of the life of the late retired Judge Bruce McMarion Wright was held on Saturday, June 4, 2005. It was standing room only in the 750 seat CUNY Aaron Davis Hall theater, when the master of ceremony, Gil Noble welcomed everyone. Many notable Blacks as well as the Harlem

community showed up to support and celebrate the life of the late Judge Wright with his family.

Former Mayor David Dinkins, Congressman Charles Rangel, Basil Patterson, Percy Sutton and many others gave fond reminiscence and insight to their relationships with Judge Wright.

Judge Wright, a longtime resident of Harlem, died in his sleep on Thursday, March 24, 2005, at his home in Old Saybrook, Conn. He was 86 years old. In 1967 he was appointed to the Criminal Court bench by Mayor Lindsay, elected as a Civil Court Judge in 1979, and elected to the State supreme Court in 1982. Justice Wright served in the civil branch for 12 years before retiring on December 11, 1994.

Many will agree with the NY Times article that stated “during his 25 years as a judge, he had gained a reputation as a scholarly and provocative jurist who sprinkled his opinions with literary quotations.” At the memorial celebration, Mr. Noble stated that we should keep the legacy and contributions of Judge Wight alive by recording his history and telling his story to our children.

I recall an old interview on “Like It Is”, when Gil Noble asked Judge Wright the question how can changes be made in the legal system. Judge Wright

replied with a story about Eskimo dogs, with the punch line being “if you’re not the lead dog, the view never changes.” Judge Wright was not the “lead dog,” however, he sought to make changes by being a learned, scholarly judge and maintaining an uncompromising stance for the Eight Amendment of the Constitution.

Maintaining his unquestionable allegiance and integrity, was the cause of Judge Wright’s gained notoriety and the nickname “Turn ‘Em Loose Bruce.” In the 1970s’, Judge Wright courageously challenged the system and upheld the Constitutional Eight Amendment, by releasing suspects he felt were being held under excessive bail.

In 1972, the Patrolmen’s Benevolent Association and the press led unrelenting attacks against Judge Wright, when he twice released a suspect on \$500 bail, who was accused of attempting to kill a police officer. The suspect was later convicted of assault and robbery but acquitted of murder. In 1974, he released a suspect accused of kidnaping, rape and the attempted murder of a police officer. In 1978, Judge Wright released without bail a black man charged with slashing the throat of a white decoy police officer, after two trials, this defendant was found not guilty of attempted murder, but was convicted of second-degree assault. He also made out of court speeches, which drew the

Honorable Bruce McMarion Wright *Continued*

ire from many, when he asserted that white judges often do not treat black defendants fairly and that the acquittal of white officers by white juries had given the police “a license to hunt down blacks and kill them with impunity.”

Judge Wright's opinions and bail decisions resulted in harsh criticism and protests by the police union and other opponents, which eventually led to his transfer to the Civil Court. Judge Wright sued in Federal Court, seeking reinstatement to the Criminal Court. He was transferred back to Criminal Court just as hearings were about to begin. Despite the bail controversy and criticism surrounding Judge Wright, the City Bar Association, called his performance on the bench “decidedly better than average.”

How were his perceptions about racism shaped? In the Amsterdam News obituary, Herb Boyd wrote, “Some elements of Wright's adventurous life, which included six wives, can be gleaned from his memoir, particularly his early years as the mixed offspring of a Black father and a white mother, the racism and rejection he

encountered when trying to enter Princeton University, and the even more personal slights and affronts during his stint in the military (while serving in segregated units during World War II).”

Judge Wright also had worked for a major New York law firm, but said he was told that he could not hope to become a partner.

Judge Wright was a graduate of New York Law School, an avid reader, amateur painter, and the author of three published volumes of poetry, and a book, “Black Robes, White Justice”: about race and the judiciary. The Tribune Society honored Judge Wright with a book signing when “Black Robes, White Justice” was published. His son also said that he “was very much involved with prominent jazz musicians, such as Art Blakey and the Jazz Messengers. He was a real renaissance man and a great family man.”

Judge Bruce McMarion Wright is survived by his wife, Elizabeth Davidson-Wright, his brother, Robert of Willingboro, NJ, five sons from previous marriages, Geoffrey, a Civil Court Judge, Keith L., a Democratic

State Assemblyman, Alexis of Chicago, Bruce of Washington, and Patrick of Harlem, a daughter, Tiffany of Brooklyn, and two grandsons.

“I have never changed my mind about the Eight Amendment. To say that I would've done things differently means to me I would have been a good boy, kept my mouth shut and availed myself of the benefits of the system. I don't think I can do that. I don't think I could ever do that.” – A statement made by Judge Wright a few days before he retired.

Sources:

The New York Times, www.nytimes.com/2005/03/26/nyregion/26wright.html.

RIP Cut Em Loose Bruce, www.publicenemy.com/pb/viewtopic.php.

A Celebration of the Life of Judge Bruce McMarion Wright, CUNY Aaron Davis Hall, Sat., June 4, 2005.

This Judge Believed in Justice For All. www.newsday.com/news/opinion/columnists/ny.

Maverick Judge Bruce Wright dead at 86. www.amsterdamnews.org/News/search/Article.

Johnny L. Cochran Jr.

Submitted by Ernest Owens



Mr. Johnny L. Cochran Jr., was born in Shreveport, Louisiana on October 2, 1937. He died on March 29, 2005 of an inoperable brain tumor at his home in the Los Feliz section of Los Angeles. He was 67 years old.

“I become an attorney to try to insure that the law applied equally to people of all races and religions, to guarantee that we are all entitled to the equal protections of the Constitution.”

Johnnie Cochran with David Fisher, *A Lawyer's Life*, by Thomas Dunne Books, NY 2002

Mr. Cochran was the eldest of four siblings, the great-grandson of slaves and the grandson of a sharecropper, who grew up in LA, wanting to be a lawyer. Masterful, fierce, flamboyant, electrifying are but a few of the adjectives that are used to describe Mr. Johnny. Cochran, Jr. He was also a very committed and inspiring humanitarian, active in many charities.

He graduated from Los Angeles High School, went on to graduate from

UCLA, and earned a law degree from Loyola Marymount University in 1962. During his career he wrote two books, “Journey to Justice, 1997” and “A Lawyers Life, 2002”. He also received many awards, the only attorney ever in Los Angeles, to receive both the Criminal Trial Lawyer of the Year Award and the Civil Trial Lawyer of the Year Award; he received the Los Angeles Criminal Courts Bar Association Award 1977; Pioneer of Black Legal Leadership Award, Los Angeles Brotherhood Crusade, 1979; Outstanding Law Enforcement Office of 1979; Hon. Loren Miller Award, John M. Langston Bar Association, 1982-1983; Alumni Award of Excellence in Professional Achievement, UCLA, 1988; Outstanding Criminal Defense Attorneys, Southern California 1989; and the 1995 National Law

Johnny L. Cochran Jr. *Continued*

Journal Trial Lawyer of the Year. The Los Angeles Business Journal honored him, as one of the top 50 trial lawyers of 1999. Johnny L. Cochran Jr. Journal Trial Lawyer of the Year.

The Los Angeles Business Journal honored him, as one of the top 50 trial lawyers of 1999. On February 26, 1999, at OCA's Ninth Annual Program to Commemorate Black History Month, Tribune Society President Patricia Parker honored the keynote speaker, Johnny Cochran with the Distinguished Service Award. In November 2001 at The Tribune Society's Thirty-Third Anniversary Dinner Dance, Mr. Johnnie Cochran was given the Community Service Award.

In 2003 he was the recipient of the Black History Maker award from the Associated Black Charities. He also served as a broadcaster for CourtTV and as a legal expert for NBC.

After receiving his law degree in 1962, and passing the California Bar in 1963, he began his law career with the Los Angeles city attorney's office, starting off by handling drunken driving and misdemeanor battery cases. He later prosecuted Lenny Bruce, the comedian, on criminal obscenity charges.

In his autobiography, Mr. Cochran wrote that he had "an uncomfortable feeling about prosecuting black men, who allegedly resisted arrest." Why? Because as a prosecutor he had witnessed, first hand, the increasing amount of unchecked police misconduct, coupled with the role race played in the criminal justice system. Johnnie Cochran believed he could not make the changes in the system that needed to be changed and went into private practice in 1966, with his own law firm of Cochran, Atkins & Evans. In 1978, the L.A. County District Attorney, selected Mr. Cochran to be Assistant District Attorney, the No. 3 position in the office, and suggested he change the system from

the inside. Johnny accepted, becoming the first African American to hold this position. One major change initiated by Johnny, was the policy of sending a prosecutor and a district attorney investigator to the scene of every police shooting. Other changes were slow to come and Mr. Cochran returned to private practice in 1981.

Throughout his career Mr. Cochran has served as the attorney for many, covering the famous, celebrities, and the wealthy, to the obscure and struggling client, black and white. His notable high profile clients included - Reginald Denny, Abner Louima, Elmer "Geronimo" Pratt (a former member of the Black Panther Party), Todd Bridges, James Brown, Angela Lgwe, Cynthia Wiggins, Michael Jackson, Sean "P.Diddy" Combs, rappers Tupac Shakur, Snoop Dogg, and Kadiatou Diallo. He also represented Reginald Oliver Denny, the white trucker beaten by a mob during the 1992 riots that followed the verdict of not guilty in the trial of police officers charged with assaulting Rodney King. Mr. Cochran was a member of the criminal defense team, known as the "Dream Team" that defended O.J. Simpson during his murder trial. Members of the "Dream Team" included Robert L. Shapiro, F. Lee Bailey, Alan M. Dershowitz, Barry Scheck and Mr. Neufeld. Perhaps the most famous phrase used by Mr. Cochran during his defense of O. J. Simpson, "If it doesn't fit, you must acquit," will always be associated with Johnny Cochran, a phrase that propelled him into the national limelight.

Prior to the O. J. Simpson murder trial, Mr. Cochran had gained the well-deserved reputation as the masterful Los Angeles trial attorney who continually challenging the Los Angeles police department for acts of violence, misconduct and police brutality and racism it used against the citizens of LA, the Black citizens of LA, and won quite a few acquittals or large settlements for his clients.

After the O. J. Simpson trial, in 1997 a new national law firm was established - The Cochran Firm, which was devoted mostly to personal injury cases. Mr. Cochran had stated that the O. J. Simpson case "gave me the platform to try to change some of those things that need to be changed in this country." He also wrote that he was involved in only a few of the firm's cases and often just tangentially. "My name was often enough to cause the other side to initiate settlement discussions." In 1999, Mr. Cochran became the Senior Partner in the National Plaintiff's and Personal Injury Law Firm, Cochran, Cherry, Givens and Smith, which today has offices in Alabama, California, Chicago, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Louisiana, Missouri, Nevada, New York, Tennessee, Texas and Washington, D.C., specializing in personal injury cases.

Johnny Cochran is survived by his wife, Dr. Dale Mason Cochran, two daughters, Melodie Cochran and Tiffany Edwards, a son, Jonathan, his father, Johnnie L. Cochran, Sr., and two sisters, Pearl Baker and Martha Jean Sherrard.

"An injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere"

Johnny L. Cochran Jr.

Sources:

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