

Prologue

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This year, the Wiley A. Branton Issues Symposium celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary. The symposium honors Wiley A. Branton, a stalwart in the civil rights arena. In 1989, the National Bar Association held the first Wiley A. Branton Award Luncheon and Issues Symposium in Mr. Branton's hometown of Little Rock, Arkansas. Since that year, the NBA has used this symposium as an avenue to discuss the pressing social, legal, and political issues affecting our communities. In honor of our esteemed civil rights leader Wiley A. Branton, who was also one of the "Six Pioneers" who integrated the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville,¹ the NBA commemorated this historic milestone by holding a symposium series on the theme of "Education: The New Civil Right" in four locations across the country. Five law schools partnered with the NBA in this endeavor. The University of Houston Law Center, St. John's University School of Law, and the Ronald H. Brown Center for Civil Rights and Economic Development at St. John's University co-hosted the East Coast Symposium in Queens,

* 2014–15 President, National Bar Association; Partner, Thompson Coburn, LLP. President Meanes works in the litigation group at the firm's St. Louis, Missouri office. She represents corporations, public agencies, and financial institutions. The National Bar Association (NBA) is the nation's oldest and largest national association of almost 20,000 African American lawyers, judges, educators, and law students. The NBA has 84 affiliate chapters throughout the United States, Canada, United Kingdom, Africa, and the Caribbean.

† 2014 National Chair, National Bar Association Wiley A. Branton Issues Symposium Series; Associate Professor of Law and Director of the Business Law Center, Western State College of Law, Fullerton, California.

‡ 2014 National Vice-Chair, National Bar Association Wiley A. Branton Issues Symposium Series; Former Senior Assistant Dean and Adjunct Professor of Law, Georgetown University Law Center. Dean Bellamy is also a beloved mentor to President Meanes, Professor Porter, countless Georgetown graduates, and many members of the NBA. He has over thirty years of service to the academy and the bar.

1. See *Six Pioneers*, U. ARK., http://www.uark.edu/rd_vcad/urel/info/campus_map/473.php (last visited Jan. 28, 2014).

New York on October 10, 2014. The Western State College of Law held the West Coast Symposium in Fullerton, California on October 17, 2014. The Southern University Law Center hosted the Southern Symposium in Baton Rouge, Louisiana on October 30 and 31, 2014. The symposium series concluded with the Midwest Symposium in Fayetteville, Arkansas on November 7, 2014 at the University of Arkansas School of Law.

The symposium series featured constructive dialogue on education as a civil right, the school-to-prison pipeline, public school versus charter school education, and students with disability issues. Each issue was framed in light of the unequal educational opportunities in public schools for African American youth. The symposia, however, were just the beginning. We now hope to inspire our communities to create tangible solutions to the problems disproportionately experienced by African American students in our nation's public education system. One such disparity involves disciplinary actions in today's public schools, where African American students face exclusionary discipline at astonishingly higher rates than other students, according to a recent study conducted by the United States Department of Education Office for Civil Rights.² Children arrested at school, or expelled or suspended due to zero-tolerance policies, are far more likely to end up in prison than students who do not face such disciplinary action. This phenomenon is commonly known as the "school-to-prison pipeline." In response to this pressing crisis, the NBA created a pro bono project in which students who face disciplinary action in public schools receive free legal representation at disciplinary hearings.

The symposium series speakers came from a broad array of backgrounds. Speakers included law professors, private practitioners, community activists, college and university administrators, and lawyers from governmental agencies. Several of the speakers have published essays and articles in this issue of the *Arkansas Law Review*. Each author documents and analyzes the pressing issues for African American students in today's public schools and prisons.

2. See Press Release, U.S. Dep't of Educ., Expansive Survey of America's Public Schools Reveals Troubling Racial Disparities (Mar. 21, 2014), available at <http://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/expansive-survey-americas-public-schools-reveals-troubling-racial-disparities-1>.

Through the generous support of the University of Arkansas School of Law, Dean Stacy Leeds, and the *Arkansas Law Review*, this symposium issue commemorates this historic time in the history of both the NBA and our nation, as we collectively celebrate the sixtieth anniversary of the United States Supreme Court's decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* and the fiftieth anniversary of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. The National Bar Association thanks the organizers, speakers, and volunteers who helped make this symposium series a phenomenal success. There are some people who we could not have done the symposium series without, specifically Rev. Dr. William M. Meanes, Sr. and Thompson Coburn, LLP. The NBA also thanks the host schools and regional chairs, including Dean Leonard M. Baynes at the University of Houston Law Center, Elaine M. Chiu at St. John's University School of Law, Gary A. Farwell, Esq. in Los Angeles, California, Dean Stacy Leeds at the University of Arkansas School of Law, Tracie Woods, Esq., Vice Chancellor John Pierre from Southern University Law Center, and Dean Allen Easley at the Western State College of Law. Finally, the NBA greatly appreciates the help of Victoria C. Duke, Esq. and Professor Tracie R. Porter, who served as the NBA's co-editors of this symposium issue. We thank them for their faithful commitment to scholarship and service to the legal academy and the bar.

This symposium issue documents the legacy of not only the NBA's commitment to fight for issues of justice and equality, but of the many scholars and activists who have dedicated their lives to working toward solutions to problems that have plagued the African American community, and in particular, the education of our youth—which is “The New Civil Right.”

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