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Introduction

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INTRODUCTION

Kristin Booth Glen†

Fifteen years isn't very long in the history of law, a notoriously slow moving profession, but the period from 1983 to 1998 has surely been significant in legal education, marking the first decade and a half of a remarkable institution: City University School of Law, "CUNY," as it is affectionately known. Adding a law school to the City University – the third largest in the country – had been a dream for many years, but in the late 70s and early 80s everything came together under the leadership of then-Chancellor Joseph Murphy, with help from many others.¹ Countering the argument that there were already too many law schools and too many lawyers, CUNY Law was designed, from the outset, to stake out a unique position in legal education. Its explicit mission was to educate lawyers for practice in public interest and public service, as well as to aid in diversifying the Bar by recruiting and training lawyers from historically under-served communities.

Charles Halpern, certainly one of the founders of public interest law, was recruited as the first Dean, and a remarkable faculty was drawn from the cream of public interest practitioners and legal academics with a commitment to social change through law. They worked tirelessly with excitement and extraordinary vision to create an entirely new curriculum, which would train students in all the "lawyering skills" – ten years before the MacCrate Report!² – as well as traditional legal doctrine and analysis. On September 20,

† Chair of the New York State Bar Association's Committee on Public Interest Law, Kristin Booth Glen served as a member of the judiciary from 1980 as a Civil Court Judge, Supreme Court Justice, and an Associate Justice of the Appellate Term, First Judicial Department. In 1995, she left the bench to become the third Dean of the City University of New York School of Law.

¹ Since this is hardly a history of the law school, space prevents enumeration of all the friends and supporters whose efforts made CUNY possible. But the efforts of three "pols" (a term used in this case with affection and admiration) were critical, and each has maintained their connection with the school from its earliest days. They are: Richard "Dick" Brown, then an Appellate Division Judge, now Queens District Attorney; Emanuel "Manny" Gold, recently retired as a New York State Senator; and Seymour "Sy" Boyers, who served with Dick Brown on the Appellate Division, Second Department, and is now in private practice – but who most significantly has been Chair of our Board of Visitors from the beginning.

² American Bar Association Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar, Legal Education and Professional Development – An Educational Continuum: Report of the Task Force on Law Schools and the Profession: Narrowing the Gap (1992) [the "MacCrate Report"].

1983 the doors opened – in an old primary school building in Bay-side, Queens – to the first, intrepid class of aspiring lawyers whose goals were less personal gain than making the world a better place.³

Fifteen years later, looking a little more like a “regular law school,” and now located in a facility designed specifically for us, CUNY has lost none of the excitement and commitment involved in training its students to become lawyers “In the Service of Human Needs.” So, when we began to talk about how to celebrate the birth, growth and extraordinary accomplishments of this first fifteen years, it should be no surprise that we eschewed the traditional testimonial dinner, seeking instead a way of celebrating which would both showcase CUNY’s leadership in public interest law and help us think deeply and well about what would be required to continue that leadership into the changing world of the new millennium.

The Symposium on the Future of Public Interest Law, co-sponsored with relevant Committees⁴ of the American Bar Association, New York State Bar Association and Association of the Bar of the City of New York, was the result. We have been honored by the generous and enthusiastic participation of our friends, leading figures in legal education, the organized Bar, and a variety of important public interest institutions and practices. What follows, ably edited by students at CUNY, is the thoughtful, sometimes regretful, often optimistic, creative, provocative and always committed result. And, by the way, we also had a really great dancing party!

³ We are proud that a member of that inaugural class, Robert E. Banks, now Director of Legal Services and advocate at Gay Men’s Health Crisis, participated in the Symposium’s featured round table. Many of his classmates, who have gone on to distinguished careers in public interest law, could also have ably represented the alumni/ae and their organizations’ constituencies.

⁴ These were the ABA Standing Committee on Professionalism and the ABA Standing Committee on Pro Bono and Public Service, the New York State Bar Association Committee on Public Interest Law, and the Committees on Pro Bono and Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar of the Association of the Bar of the City of New York.