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## Haywood Remembrances: Alumni

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## HAYWOOD REMEMBRANCES: ALUMNI

I met Haywood in September 1993. As the Dean of the Law School, he welcomed me with his warm smile. He walked throughout the building asking everyone, "How are you?" and "Is everything ok?" Although he was always busy, when he stopped to talk to you, you were his only concern. He lived in the moment; always present.

Haywood loved children, and I am blessed to have a photo of him holding my daughter, who was about nine months old at the time. He applauded me for being a wife, mother, and student.

He was a phenomenal professor. I dropped my Wills class to take Race and the Law. It was amazing to watch him bring out the best in everyone in class. He invited the class to his home in New Rochelle.

We discussed fellowships and careers throughout our three years of law school, and he wrote a thoughtful two-page letter of recommendation on my behalf. I still have a copy.

Haywood loved to dance. He and Jennifer were at the National Lawyers Guild New York City Chapter dinner; he had on his blue suede shoes, and they "cut a rug."

Haywood made you feel like someone special with something to offer the world. I wasn't worried about passing the bar. I was focused on continuing the tradition of excellence he demonstrated on a daily basis. He was a hero, mentor, educator, and friend. He inspired me to be a voice for the voiceless. Thank you, Haywood!

—Tracey Bing-Hampson (1996)

I met Haywood at law school orientation. At the beginning of classes, he invited the whole class to a reception at his home. By then, he knew all of our names and something about each student.

Haywood's open-door policy allowed me to frequently visit his office and consult about student events and movement activities. He often offered to give me car rides into the city, which provided me with the opportunity to talk more with him.

He once tried to persuade me to become a candidate for U.S. Congress, and I reminded him that I was committed to Latin America. He did not give up easily.

When the invasion of Panama took place, Haywood encouraged my trip home with the National Lawyers Guild on a fact-

finding mission. He knew about my history of persecution under the dictatorship, and he showed concern for my safety and family.

The last time I saw Haywood, I was already working at the Center for Constitutional Rights and was very much involved with international human rights and civil rights cases. Haywood was excited about his trip to South Africa. We spoke while I walked with him to the conference room. Before going into the meeting he said to me, "Gilma, I am very proud of you." I gave him a hug and said thanks. I never forgot that moment—that was the last time I saw Haywood. I think of him often, miss him greatly, and above all, I try not to disappoint him.

—*Gilma Camargo, 1991*

Seriously considering an application to CUNY Law School, I had my first encounter with an LSAT prep book about three weeks after the birth of my son, just about the same time I had my first encounter with Jennifer Dohrn during a postpartum visit. That the nurse midwife, who radiated serenity, compassion, and intelligence in her practice, happened to be married to Haywood Burns was an interesting coincidence. Months later, Haywood was roaming the halls of CUNY as we scurried from task to task on the first day of orientation, feeling intimidated and uncertain. As he did with many of my new classmates, Haywood stopped me in the hall to say hello, extended his hand, and warmly asked how I was doing, radiating an uncommon but familiar serenity, compassion, and intelligence. Haywood assured me that I would be as well taken care of at CUNY Law as I had been by Jennifer. He welcomed us into law school, into the CUNY Law family, and even into his home. He brought into this world and nurtured a very special cohort of attorneys, and his serenity, compassion, and intelligence burn as brightly now as they did on my first day of law school.

—*Paula DiStabile, 1991*

Our class had already graduated before Haywood came on board. But I recall the warmth I felt toward him at every reunion I attended. He was a treasure, and he is still missed!

—*Sheila Dugan, 1987*

To me, Haywood Burns is synonymous with CUNY Law School. He embodied everything CUNY stands for—advocacy, activism, altruism, and so much more. Haywood inspired me and countless others to follow his example by developing first-rate legal skills so that we could use the law in the service of poor and oppressed people. He has a place in history among the ranks of the truly great activist lawyers, and I feel so fortunate to have shared a few incredible years with him at CUNY. And he was so much fun! I will never forget Haywood's warm and welcoming presence, his wonderful smile, and the way he took to the dance floor at a school party. Haywood: A Rockin' Revolutionary.

—*Kim Dvorchak, 1995*

Haywood memorably spoke to the incoming freshman Class of 1990 and said, "At most law schools, they say to the incoming class, 'Look to your left; look to your right; and one of you will not be here next year.' Here we will do everything possible to have each of you here next year and at graduation." I thought that spoke volumes toward the philosophy of CUNY Law and Haywood's character. As time went on, the Class of 1990 hit some rough spots. Haywood's thoughtfulness toward resolving of our problems, however, make him one of my best memories of CUNY Law.

Shanara Gilbert was my third-year House Counselor. I admired Shanara for her even temper and skills as a lawyer. When I heard Haywood and Shanara were killed, I was in the middle of a trial in the Bronx. As it turned out, the judge was good friend of Haywood, and I learned of their deaths when she called a recess for the day. It is difficult in life to maintain vision and principles. I have a picture of Haywood in my office to remind me of someone who did just that.

—*Linda Geary, 1990*

I saw a picture in a newspaper of this middle-aged guy with wild hair playing basketball with some younger-looking adults. The caption said he was the dean of a very unique public law school in New York City, and he was playing in the annual faculty-student-alumni basketball game. I was drawn in! I hadn't played basketball since high school, but if the dean of the law school was playing . . .

During my third year, I interviewed with the Federal Public

Defender in San Diego, California. Despite my excellent clinical experience with Shanara Gilbert and Soffiya Elijah in the Criminal Defense Clinic, I didn't immediately get a job offer. Haywood called the Public Defender on my behalf; the offer followed shortly. That was the beginning of my professional career in criminal defense of the indigent accused, more than twelve years ago.

To say that I am forever in Haywood Burns' debt would be an understatement. Even cooler than his basketball playing or his hooking me up with my first public defender job, however, was his enthusiastic participation in the Electric Slide at those silly little dances at CUNY Law. Nothing but a smile comes across my face when I remember Haywood Burns!!!

—*Marty Glennon, 1994*

I first met Haywood Burns when my law society at Brooklyn College was seeking a speaker for our law day. My advisor told me that the society was having difficulty getting this Black law professor from the Urban Legal Studies at City College to do it. Since the professor was extremely busy, I called the program and made an appointment.

When I met Haywood Burns I explained my law society's dilemma: We had never had a Black law professor speak at our law day (this was 1978 or 1979). Haywood accepted the invitation, and I asked him about his transportation costs. He answered, "No costs. I am taking the train to Brooklyn." Then he said to me, "By the way, we have a law program here at City; maybe you might be interested." He explained what the Urban Legal Studies Program was about and asked me if I had any lawyers in my family. I said that my cousin had a private practice in Canada. Haywood asked his name, and I was shocked when he said, "He is a friend of mine." So I told him that I would think about the program.

Haywood was a sensation at my law day event; the law students loved him and his lecture. I was impressed that Haywood Burns, being so popular, was such a simple person. He actually took the train to my college. He made time for the event because he felt it was important for the students to have a Black law professor speak. Needless to say, I transferred from Brooklyn College to the Urban Legal Studies Program, even though I had to give up one year of credits to do so.

At City College, Haywood was always helpful to the students in the program, even when we disagreed with him politically. After

City College, I applied to CUNY Law School and was accepted. When our Dean Charlie [Charles Halpern] left, I contacted Haywood to find out if he would apply for the deanship. He asked to meet the students first. I, Bob Zuss, Susan Sangree, and others arranged to have Haywood speak, and again the students loved him. Haywood was accepted and became the first African-American dean of a New York law school.

The legal world lost a scholar, humanist, and leader; but I lost a friend.

—*Khalick Hewitt, 1986*

#### YOU CAN'T SEE IT, IT'S ELECTRIC!

In fairness to all the stories that will be told to honor this Prince of a Man, I will not even begin to tell one fraction of the inspiring moments that come to mind when I think of my mentor, teacher, brother, and, above all, friend, Haywood Burns. There really are “fellow travelers,” who meet the world head-on and dare to make it a better place. They engage in discussions, make plans, keep promises, and pass on the gifts of courage and commitment. They walk arm-in-arm in times of battle against the tyrants and false rulers. They chant, sing, stomp, and slide toward the fall of a status quo that is anti-people and hostile to historical truths. I see Haywood as I have always seen him, walking—no, running—toward justice. I see him even now defying prison walls and putting a human face on the suffering of imprisoned African-American men in Attica, who were stripped of their dignity and brutalized under the “color of law.” I see him zealously advocating in courts of white supremacy. I see him in South Africa, taking final breaths in preparation for his everlasting journey.

For those of us who grapple with the question of whether there is a higher power—a force, a God, deity, or Supreme Being—even we skeptics must put Haywood down as the exception to our guarded views. We must at least entertain the possibility that perhaps there really are saints or angels who walk among us. Surely, in the realm of legalese, Haywood must be regarded as the statutory “will,” not the “should;” the “and,” not the “or.” Haywood was deliberately genuine in his righteous optimism. Many times, we were privileged to see him bring together those who might not have otherwise sat in same room. Under Haywood’s guiding, sup-

portive, never-controlling hand, leaders were born and movements were built.

After several years of not seeing Haywood, I caught up with him at a fundraiser for one of the Panther 21. I performed with my band; Haywood, who had many lives, read some of his powerful poetry. I saw Haywood as he was leaving, and we exchanged a huge bear hug. I told him I planned to go to law school. He looked at me in a puzzled and somewhat parental way and said, "Why aren't you coming to my school?" Ever the rebellious child, I said, "I'm more than forty years old and this is my fifth career. I cannot go to an unaccredited law school. I need a job when I graduate and am competing with twenty-year-olds." Haywood looked at me and said, "We will be fully accredited; just come and check it out." I did and the rest is, of course, history. As usual, he was right: CUNY was where I needed to be.

Lest I continue to confuse the readership about the meaning of the title of this tribute to my friend, Haywood was the best dancer and he could really do one of my favorite line dances—the Electric Slide. So, this is to you Haywood, from one dancing poet to another:

*Electric slidin' into poetry, fire words  
 Claimin' verse; justice chants  
 Electric slidin' where everyone could join in  
 Even if they didn't know the steps  
 I met up with you after years of toiling in  
 Separate/together places  
 I met you after years of toiling in  
 Separate/together places  
 You, always lookin' out for me  
 And other rebel-rousers  
 I see you dancing round and round with  
 Our loved ones, Kianga,\* Luis, Bruce, Vicki Gray and Fannie  
 And the many thousands gone*

Slide on. We'll meet you on the victory dance floor!!!

\* *Kianga was my beloved youngest daughter. She passed away after a sudden illness on February 6, 1997.*

—Jaribu Hill, 1995



I will never forget how much Haywood treated us like his family. I didn't realize just how much he cared about us as individuals until the night in 1992 when he and his wife Jennifer showed up at a Village club to watch my then-boyfriend perform. I think I mentioned the date and place in passing during a student/faculty event weeks before; he actually remembered. Haywood and Jennifer stayed for the whole set, and when I tried to thank him for coming, I'll never forget what he said: "This is part of your life. Of course I wanted to come."

Haywood will always be one of my heroes as a lawyer, but, more importantly, as a wonderful human being.

—*David Hyland, 1993*

I was a student in Professor Burns' final Constitutional Law class. We were discussing the examination details one day, and I asked him what would constitute a failing grade. Professor Burns, a supporter of the pass-fail grading system, said, in good humor, "Please don't use the F-word in my class."

Haywood Burns was, in the words of a classmate, a man with bragging rights, but he never bragged. A colleague said of Haywood that his convictions were not the flavor of the month—he was a man of unyielding basic principles.

Perhaps the Rev. Calvin Butts said it best at Haywood's funeral when he told the story of Job, whose enemies were saying terrible things about him. Job said to God, "What am I going to do, the whole world believes these lies—even my wife! Who is going to defend me?"

God answered without a second thought: "Haywood."

—*John Hynes, 1998*

I remember Haywood as having an incredible memory and being incredibly personable. My "Haywood memory moment" is this. First year, 1987. Welcoming party at Haywood's house in Manhattan. He personally greeted each and every one of us, and I clearly remember him doing so since I didn't know anyone else there. I remember the house being warm and welcoming. He came up to me, and we spoke about what I had been doing in the years before entering law school. I had recently quit my job as an assistant editor at Marvel Comics. Haywood never forgot that and often com-

mented on my former job as he passed me in the hall or saw me in school. I think he remembered everything I ever told him. I remember his soft voice, his fuzzy beard, and his gentle manner.

—*Shoshanna Malett, 1990*

In the early 1990s, thousands of Haitians fled their homeland for the United States after President Jean-Bertrand Aristide was ousted in a military coup. Some of the Haitians actually made it to the United States and applied for political asylum. Others were intercepted at sea and detained at the now-infamous U.S. military prison camp in Guantánamo Bay, Cuba. A group of CUNY Law students started the CUNY Haitian Refugee Project to assist Haitians with their asylum claims and to publicize their plight. Haywood was a strong supporter of the project and a participant from its inception. He directed us to foundations which provided the funds to get law students to Florida, where the need for asylum assistance was greatest. He attended some of our meetings and guided us in press outreach. When some of us went on hunger strikes in solidarity with Haitians hunger strikers in Guantánamo, Haywood joined in as well. He was encouraging, nurturing, and full of ideas. Yet, despite Haywood's stature as Dean and a civil rights leader, to the unknowing observer he would have appeared to be just another student participating in the project. He inspired us then and continues to inspire my work as a civil rights lawyer. I try to draw on his unflagging dedication to human rights; his remarkable ability to relate to people of all stripes; and his subtle, yet so forceful, style of persuasion, which is hard to describe and even harder to emulate. I must assume that many others do as well. In that way and many others, Haywood continues to inspire us in his absence.

—*Bob Rose, 1994*

Haywood was still Dean during my first year at the Law School. I assume others will write about his wonderful accomplishments as a dean and as a professor, but there are two moments I would like to mention.

The first took place at a fancy dinner at Terrace on the Park to celebrate the School's tenth year. We'd been working hard all semester, and it was the dead of winter. That night the school had

hired a kicking live band, and we all got up to dance. It was a big relief to be having fun together. I looked over to see Haywood and his wife Jennifer dancing with each other. I don't think I have ever seen two people so intense, so utterly happy. You could tell how much they were in love just from their eyes.

The other thing that really struck me was Haywood's office—instead of diplomas, he had Ben Shahn's portraits of Cheney, Schwerner, and Goodman on his wall behind his desk. These were his credentials. He embodied the wonderful values of the Civil Rights movement—nonviolent resistance; fighting together for the rights of the oppressed; challenging power with strength, warmth, and grace—every day of his life.

—*Joy Rosenthal, 1996*

I remember the day. April 4, 1996. I was visiting Main Street Legal Services when the news arrived. After the pronouncement, we fell deaf and all movement slowed as if in water. Those hurried and haunted earlier years at CUNY School of Law suddenly galvanized; the artist's oeuvre complete. An era had ended, and we all knew it.

Haywood Burns painted with a broad brush, forging and contouring the school's legacy while never forgetting and always appreciating the considerable reputation-building potential of the student body. He wanted for us a place at the table with all other law students so, with his blessing, Brian Germano (1993), Francisco Guzman (1993), and I co-founded the CUNY Law School chapters of the ABA Law Student Division, the ABA Student Body Association, and the CUNY Law Review. In the fall of 1992, the founding articles and bylaws of the CUNY Law Review were filed with the Office of Student Affairs with the counsel and support of Haywood. Funding was scarce, but he got us editing our first submissions. Thanks to Haywood, I represented the Law School at the ABA annual meetings, the New York State Bar Association Law Student Council, and the Association of the Bar of the City of New York (ABCNY) Committee on Law Student Perspectives, which was the first time a law student sat on any ABCNY committee. We owe so much to Haywood for ensuring our student voice with these organizations. Unstoppable, he also co-produced with me CUNY Law, a local legal talk show on cable-access television broadcast from 1992–94.

Haywood made being a law student fun and broadened the

experience exponentially. His work as an attorney, advocate, leader, and dean were great, and heavy are the shoulders of any dean that carries his mantle.

—*K. Jacob Ruppert, 1994*

I first met Haywood Burns twenty-four years ago, as a candidate entering the Urban Legal Studies Program (ULS) where he was Dean. He later became a huge influence in my life and a significant reason for me to attend CUNY Law School instead of the Kennedy School at Harvard, even before he became CUNY's Dean. The story I remember so vividly was not how I came to know Haywood, but, rather, the exact moments when I knew that I had met a giant who would forever affect my life.

I was a seventeen-year-old freshman at ULS, and he gave a guest lecture at our undergraduate Constitutional Law class. His topic was the death penalty. It was not a lecture on law or precedent. Instead, Haywood engaged in a conversation where he shared with us his objections to the death penalty based on history, law, facts, and ethics. I had written position papers against the death penalty and thought there really was not much more to learn. In the first two minutes, Haywood began enumerating and articulating his objections by beautifully interweaving personal observations and legal analysis; this continued for two fascinating hours. He seemed to step out of the pages of history and conversationally take each of us on a personal tour of the unusually cruel and equally illogical and immoral practice. For years, I kept the notes from that cherished lecture and even managed to quote from it in front of Haywood. After the class, I shared with him that, according to Jewish teachings, a Rabbinical Court that gave one death sentence in 100 years was "deemed to be a murderous court." This man, who had just delivered the single most competent and complete discourse on a subject anyone has ever heard, had the patience to intensely focus his beautiful intuitive eyes on mine and listen to and thank seventeen-year-old me for sharing a fact he probably knew. All these years later, I am still moved to tears by the way Haywood demonstrated the grace, intuition, and inspirational leadership that made this epic person a great teacher as well.

—*Steven Salsberg, 1989*

I knew of Haywood Burns prior to my attending the Law School; however, I had never met him until my enrollment at the School in 1988. His name was already a hallmark in the social justice movement, so anyone involved had to have heard of him. I was honored to attend a law school where he led the helm. It may well have been one of the reasons why I applied only to CUNY School of Law.

I once went to his office to find a way to further honor the great and notable personalities who had received honorary degrees from the Law School. I have always felt that their names and faces should be exhibited in a special place in the Law School, creating something of a “hall of honors.” I don’t really remember why I never pursued my idea further, but I do remember sitting with him that day in his office. He was seated at his desk with his graying Afro and his impressive, strong stature. Behind him were remarkable sketches of Chaney, Goodwin, and Schwerner—three Mississippi civil rights workers murdered in the Sixties. The sketches were touching and fragile and the man in front of them a stalwart of justice and strength. Our conversation was not long, but the image of that moment lingers.

The honorary degrees we bestow from our honorable Law School are all important and impressive; however, my life is honored even more significantly by meeting, studying, and walking the halls of the Law School with Haywood Burns and particularly for sitting in his office on that memorable day.

—*Nancy Schaefer, 1992*

Throughout my three years at CUNY Law, I was active in the Public Interest Law Association (PILA), spending two years as an officer. Haywood was a strong supporter of PILA, and during the preparation for the 1996 PILA fundraising auction, I approached Haywood for a donation. Having Haywood for my Liberty, Equality, and Due Process course (a lecture class of 160 students), I was understandably in awe of him, and I was very nervous about sitting down with him one on one, especially to ask him to contribute to our cause. I had never had any personal contact with him before that meeting, but when I sat down in his office, he greeted me by name! It was almost magical that he could know who I was out of the sea of faces he encountered in our course and the others he taught. I immediately felt welcomed and comfortable, and it was a turning point for me as a new law student—from that moment on,

I truly felt like I belonged at CUNY. Haywood subsequently became more like a peer to me—someone I could talk to anywhere or anytime; someone who played basketball beside me in the PILA Basketball League; someone who inspired me to contribute as much as I possibly could to the CUNY Law community. Since graduation, I have continued to support PILA; I have volunteered for reunion organizing; and I became an officer of the CUNY Law Alumni Association. I guess I can trace it all back to that meeting with Haywood. To me, Haywood was CUNY Law.

—*Jeff Schwartz, 1998*

Others will be sending in stories and tributes about Dean Burns that are warm, personal, and speak volumes about his life; but in my short time at CUNY Law I really did not get to know Dean Burns on any measurable personal level. Yet, his passing was felt deeply and the void will not ever be completely filled. He was MY dean and I will always feel a sense of loss. He was a man with a large presence, but sensitive enough to know the value of a reassuring smile. I always felt that he was the best example of the human side of CUNY Law and that his involvement was crucial to the future of the School. He will be missed by CUNY Law and all people of the world who care about the betterment of the human condition.

—*Ira Sessler, 1996*

I met Haywood in the great Civil Rights movement of the late 1960s, but we became dear friends when I attended CUNY Law School and even dearer when he fell in love with and married one of my closest friends, Jennifer Dohrn. Teacher, mentor, brother, joker, dancer, we shared politics and—what was always dearest of all to Haywood—family. He loved the Law School and its students, and his time at the School brought together his life's work as a teacher of those historically denied access to higher education, scholar of racism and the law, and human rights activist.

There has scarcely been a day in these last ten years I have not bitterly missed his profound and brilliant mind, his counsel, his bear hugs and beautiful smile, his unrivalled selflessness. Michael Ratner and I wrote a tribute to him in the *Yale Law Journal* after he died, remembering “his boundless enthusiasm, his delight in

human variety, his unique capacity to listen and encourage, his extraordinary charm and sweetness.”<sup>1</sup> No one can take his place.

—*Eleanor Stein, 1986*

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Ratner & Eleanor Stein, *W. Haywood Burns: To Be of Use*, 106 YALE L.J. 753, 755 (1997).

