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## A Tribute to Hon. George Bundy Smith

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# A Tribute to Hon. George Bundy Smith\*

William Michael Treanor

## Abstract

Opening remarks at ceremony honoring Judge George Bundy Smith, including anecdotes from past students, an overview of Judge Smith's career and accomplishments, and a recognition of distinguished guests in the audience.

**KEYWORDS:** judge, judges, george bundy smith, new york state court, tribute

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## **A TRIBUTE TO HON. GEORGE BUNDY SMITH**

### **WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION**

*William Michael Treanor\**

Good evening and welcome. I am Bill Treanor, Dean of Fordham Law School. Tonight is a very special occasion. We pay tribute to a great jurist and a great man, a leader who has inspired us all with his personal courage, his intellectual strength, and his profound commitment to justice and equality. Tonight, we pay tribute to the Honorable George Bundy Smith.

At Fordham Law, we have just concluded our centennial year. The Law School's first dean was a man named Paul Francisco Fuller. As a child he had been homeless, an orphan growing up alone on the streets of New York. He achieved the pinnacle of the legal profession, becoming one of the preeminent international lawyers of his generation. At the end of his career, he gave back by remembering all that he had overcome and starting this school. Dean Fuller started a school dedicated to the twin goals of promoting excellence in the legal profession and to opening doors.

As we start our second century, it is very fitting that we are honoring a member of this community whose career beautifully reflects those twin goals of excellence and opening doors.

Tonight, we will hear from many people who know Judge Smith well. Former clerks, colleagues, and friends will share stories of his life, character, and career. The details of his career success will be presented here tonight in detail. As we begin, I would like to share with you Judge Smith's special connection to this Law School.

Judge Smith has been an adjunct professor at Fordham Law for twenty-five years. His dedication to his students is legendary. Since he joined our adjunct faculty in 1981, he has been imparting not just the letter of the law, but also an appreciation of its importance in protecting individual liberties to hundreds of Fordham Law students. In teaching New York Criminal Procedure, Judge Smith has earned a reputation among Fordham Law students as being both tough and gentle at the same time; former Dean John D. Feerick said of Judge Smith that his students would never risk

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being unprepared for his class because he sets the standard for excellence, but also speak reverently of his humility, gentleness, and soft-spoken nature.<sup>1</sup>

Fordham alumna Rose Gill Hearn, who is now Commissioner of the New York City Department of Investigation, recalled that she opted to take New York Criminal Procedure at night, even though she was a day student, simply because she had heard so many good things about Judge Smith. It was a decision well worth her while—she was inspired to practice criminal law by Judge Smith’s enthralling discussion of the material he lived every day in the courtroom, his engagement of students, and his lively back-and-forth relay of the Socratic style. Another recent graduate told me that he had planned on a career in investment banking, but, after taking Judge Smith’s class, he fell in love with the law for the first time, and became a criminal lawyer.

A few comments from his teaching evaluations:

The only law professor who has made me understand that the Socratic Method can be a good teaching tool. He has perfected it!

Clear and precise.

The Professor, being a New York Court of Appeals Judge, carries a courtroom demeanor into the classroom, which “imbues” the class with a professional and lawyerly atmosphere. But, though he is all business during class, there are moments when the professor will crack a gentle smile and say something funny. His sense of humor is as wonderful, and you can tell that he is a kind man.

Judge Smith often traveled a far distance to get to class but one would never know it since he was always very energetic and responsive when conducting class. You never knew he had just come from a full day’s work unless he told you. He was very focused and made sure students understood the legal principles he was teaching. [I] particularly enjoyed how Judge Smith used his own courtroom experiences to help understand or demonstrate what he was teaching.

I believe he is the best professor I have ever had at Fordham Law.

As those in this room well know, Judge Smith is a man deeply devoted to justice—a man who can “look back on a successful legal career” and know deeply that he has advanced the cause of democ-

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1. John D. Feerick, *George Bundy Smith—A Good Lawyer*, 68 ALB. L. REV. 207, 208-09 (2005).

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racy and extended its benefits to so many. We are grateful that he has imparted this profound and vital commitment to so many who serve as lawyers in New York State and, in particular, to our students. Judge Smith, tonight, this room is filled with just a few of those people whose lives you have touched. We thank you for all you have done, and for the hope you inspire in us for all that has yet to be completed. You have served so many, as mentor, leader, teacher, and friend, and tonight, we are happy to give back to you—to show you just a small portion of our appreciation by gathering here tonight to celebrate a tremendous legal career that has truly changed the face of jurisprudence and of civil rights both in this state and in this nation.

I am grateful to our co-sponsors for tonight's event, the Metropolitan Black Bar Association and Judicial Friends. I would also like to thank Jay Chien, a 2006 graduate of Fordham Law who tirelessly and with the great enthusiasm coordinated the arrangements for tonight's tribute event, and thanks to Dean Matthew Diller, who supervised the planning for this tribute.

Finally, I would like to express my profound gratitude to each of you for being here tonight. As Jay would show me the ever-growing list of distinguished attendees, I was simply awestruck. Your presence is a very fitting tribute to tonight's legendary honoree.

I would like to recognize just a few of the distinguished guests here tonight: Congressman Charles B. Rangel, who soon will chair the House Committee on Ways and Means; members of Judge Smith's family here tonight; and the sixty-two members of both the federal and state bench who are in attendance this evening, including nine current and past members of the New York State Court of Appeals.

In particular, I would like to recognize Associate Judge Albert Rosenblatt, Judge Smith's colleague on the New York State Court of Appeals, whose last day on the bench was November 16, 2006. Judge Rosenblatt, on behalf of Fordham Law School, I congratulate you on the conclusion of a truly exceptional career on the bench.

**CLOSING**

I would like to thank again tonight's co-sponsors, the Metropolitan Black Bar Association and Judicial Friends, and to thank once again the Honorable George Bundy Smith, for being an inspiration to us all—your life demonstrates the essence of a career dedicated to the service of others.