

# *Fordham Urban Law Journal*

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*Volume 34, Number 3*

2006

*Article 14*

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## A Tribute to Hon. George Bundy Smith – Leadership

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# A Tribute to Hon. George Bundy Smith – Leadership\*

Fern Fisher

## **Abstract**

A tribute to George Bundy Smith, highlighting his commitment to social justice.

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

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\*Ms. Fisher is an Administrative Judge of the Civil Court of the City of New York

## A TRIBUTE TO HON. GEORGE BUNDY SMITH

### LEADERSHIP

*Fern Fisher\**

I want to thank Fordham, the Metropolitan Black Bar Association, and Judicial Friends for pulling this event together, and I want to thank Fordham particularly for letting me say just a few words. It has been a long evening. I think everybody has said it all, but I do have a few additional things to say.

As I have matured, I learned that leadership is demonstrated in so many different ways and by so many different styles. Some lead by eloquent words, some lead by rolling up their sleeves, some lead by mentoring, and some lead by taking risks.

While writing the script for the video that you saw tonight, I came to understand that George Bundy Smith is all of the above. He is a consummate leader. I had always known that George was a scholar and brilliant; but by sifting through articles, talking to his schools, friends, and family, and looking through photos—especially the photo of the one black face at Andover Academy in a sea of white prep school boys; the picture of the jaunty kid with his hand on the ship, going off to Paris; and particularly his mug shot that he was proud to exhibit—I came to fully understand what a true leader George Bundy Smith is.

I also came to learn what true commitment to social justice is. After sitting there at night writing the script for the video, George, you really, really inspired me to keep working the hours that I continue to work, because it is clear that is what it takes to be truly committed.

What I can add to these tributes is how special Judge George Bundy Smith is to African American judges in the State of New York, and there are quite a few of us here tonight in tribute to him. He truly is the wind beneath our wings. There is no doubt about that which is demonstrated by George pulling you to the side and telling you to put in your application for the Appellate Division or for the Court of Appeals. It is George's constant encouragement,

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it is George's setting the standard that we have to work hard, that we must show judicial excellence, that we have to stay involved.

George and I were on the City Bar Fund together. I hate 8:00 A.M. meetings. I am not a morning person. I am more of a night owl, but when George Bundy Smith walks in the door at 8:00 in the morning for a charitable foundation meeting, what else can you do but be there as well.

George teaches us to stay human, to have a successful 35-year marriage, to have children, and to do it all. We all have our stories to tell about George. The raging debate at the Judicial Friends dinner was whether or not the judges should have music at the dinner. For years we just had a ceremony where we gave out awards and everybody went home. It was George's vote that decided that there would be music, that it's all right for black judges to dance. Indeed, George Bundy Smith and Alene Smith are the first out to do the electric slide every year and Judge Smith can do the electric slide. George has taught us that we have to remain human and retain what makes us unique as African American judges.

Finally, George has taught us that we have to stay kind and humble. Last year, when we were collecting clips for the video and I came back to the office, my staff said that a man brought a package by for me. Later on, I learned it was Judge Bundy Smith. George does everything himself. He delivers checks himself and he delivers photos himself, because he's humble.

I met Judge Bundy Smith when the board of directors of the Metropolitan Black Bar Association was formed over twenty years ago. He has never changed, which is comforting. When you know that there are steady forces in life, such as George Bundy Smith, there is hope that we will achieve social justice in this country. Forces like George Bundy Smith set the standard for the rest of us to continue the work that still needs to be done.

We love you George.

