

New York Law School Recognizes Hon. Cory A. Booker, Mayor of Newark, New Jersey; Students; and Faculty at 119th Commencement

By LaToya Jordan

In 2011, *TIME* magazine named the Honorable Cory A. Booker, Mayor of Newark, New Jersey, as one of the most influential people in the world for his work as “Newark’s biggest cheerleader.” At New York Law School’s 119th Commencement on May 13, 2011 at Lincoln Center’s Avery Fisher Hall, Mayor Booker became a cheerleader for the Class of 2011, which gave him a standing ovation for his inspirational words.

“You were born with a particular genius,” Mayor Booker told the graduating class, which included 493 candidates for the Juris Doctor (J.D.), 63 candidates for the Master of Laws (LL.M.), and four candidates for the Master of Arts (M.A.) in Mental Disability Law Studies. “You have a God-given calling that you must every day try to answer. You must follow your own moral compass. ‘You were not,’ as my parents would say, ‘born to fit in, you were born to stand out.’ One of our great presidents, Abraham Lincoln said, ‘Everyone was born an original, but sadly most die copies.’ You cannot let that happen; you must stand up for who you are.”

Mayor Booker shared many anecdotes from his life, including one that stressed the importance of innovative thinking and determination. He recalled one of the first times he gave a speech, to a classroom full of students in East Palo Alto, California. The students were not receptive to his remarks, so he offered a \$5 bribe to the person who could raise his or her hand the highest. When the shortest student in the class ran from the room, Mayor Booker believed the student was embarrassed, but instead, the boy told him he was trying to run up to the roof to make sure his hand was raised the highest.

Drawing inspiration from this story, Mayor Booker challenged the graduates to stand up for their beliefs through their actions. “Class of 2011, make this nation real, not by hoping it or wishing it; make it with your own bare hands, by every day standing up for your truth and for your love, by every day doing the kindness and decency and love that this nation yearns for. I believe that if all of you live with this courage of your convictions, that we as a country will move forward . . . that we as a nation will indeed find a way to get to the roof.”

Booker was sworn in as Mayor of Newark, New Jersey, on July 1, 2006, following a sweeping electoral victory. Under his administration, Newark has led the nation among large cities for reductions in shootings and murders since July 1, 2008, achieving decreases of more

than 40 percent in both categories. The transformation of the Newark Police Department under Mayor Booker’s leadership, together with the deployment of more than 100 surveillance cameras throughout the city, has led to Newark setting the nationwide pace for crime reduction. At the commencement ceremony, Mayor Booker added an honorary Doctor of Laws to his impressive list of degrees, which includes a B.A. and M.A. from Stanford, a B.A. from Oxford, and a J.D. from Yale.

The ceremony also featured several awards given to students and faculty, as well as student remarks delivered by Joan Virginia O’Hara ’11. O’Hara reminisced about the lessons she and her fellow graduates learned at the Law School. “We have indeed learned a lot of very important and necessary rules in law school, but it’s how each of us in our own way chooses to use those rules that is significant,” she said. “With those rules, we bring our convictions to life. One of the most valuable lessons that our brilliant and supportive faculty at this law school has taught us is that as lawyers, who we are is just as important as what we know.”

Some of O’Hara’s fellow graduating students had the opportunity to share memories about their law school experiences and publicly thank family, friends, and professors for their support during law school in the “Shout-Out 2011” video presentation. The video was played before the commencement ceremony began and can be viewed on the Law School’s YouTube channel at: www.youtube.com/newyorklawschool.

The President’s Medal of Honor was awarded to Harry H. Wellington, Professor of Law and Dean Emeritus of New York Law School, who was unable to attend the ceremony due to advanced illness. Dean Richard A. Matasar accepted the award on his behalf, sharing the message that Dean Wellington was honored and humbled to receive the award. The Medal of Honor is given to the Law School’s most outstanding and accomplished alumni and its most generous benefactors, and acknowledges those who have made the most significant contributions to the history of the Law School by their exemplary professional lives and their generosity. Dean Wellington helped build New York Law School’s reputation by putting together and overseeing a first-rate faculty of renowned scholars. He passed away on August 8, 2011 and will be fondly remembered by faculty, staff, and alumni for his inspiring leadership, unswerving dedication to the rule of law, and devotion to teaching and to the legal profession. (See “In Memoriam” article on p. 76.) 