

REMARKS ON GETTING THE MINORITY IMPACT AWARD

Washington DC

January 4, 2024

Thank you for that generous introduction. Thank you to the members of the AALS Section on Minority Groups and particularly the Awards committee who made the selection, including Professors Chisolm, Winograd, Toussaint, Wingfield, Gonzalez, Rice, Loza de Siles, and Khan. I am grateful to you.

I particularly want to thank the members of the NYLS community who are here, and especially Dean Anthony Crowell, who enables me with generosity and grace (and the necessary resources) to pursue my various racial justice projects. I also want to thank Deans La Piana and Gewolb.

May I congratulate Professor Frank Rudy Cooper on receipt of the Clyde Ferguson Award and Professor Ngozi Okidegbe on the Derek Bell Award.

I am the last to go – so I will be brief.

In Professor Chisolm's e-mail to me to inform me that I will be receiving the Impact Legacy Award, she noted that the award is given in "recognition of your sustained commitment to social justice and your transformative impact upon legal education throughout your tenure in the legal academy." I recite this quotation to make a few points – they are rather obvious points and I hope that you don't mind my repeating them:

The first is that the commitment to social justice is an involved, intricate, and complex affair. At the core it is messy. It is all of that because we may all agree on the shared goals – whether they be racial

or gender justice, or other goals – but we do not necessarily all agree on the journey to reach those goals. Finding agreement on that journey lends itself to complexity and messiness – and demands from us empathy and kindness.

The second is that we may share obvious indicators of our common identity – our race, ethnicity, gender, physical ability, and the like – but we may not always share those aspects of our identity that are not obvious and may be hidden. For example, our emotional and psychological make-up, our experiences, histories, desires, predilections, prejudices, fears, and other components of our inner psychological and emotional architecture. These often get in the way of understanding – and account for the complexity and messiness. Here compassion too may be helpful.

Third, ours is a profession that is wonderfully nurturing, creative and exciting. Since I started teaching law in Australia in the late 1980s and at CUNY in the early 1990s, I've always loved what I do. Many of you who know me will recognize how I've always maintained that being a law teacher is a great job. For a range of reasons. But as exciting and nurturing as our profession can be, it may often reinforce narcissism and insecurity – sometimes in the same individual. It is sometimes hard to pursue social justice in the face of such challenges. Generosity is a wonderful antidote.

But – and this is my 4th and final point – that the reason for this award and your choice of me could have been bestowed on any number of people in this room. I know many of you who should also be standing here – because you too epitomize what this award means. You have collectively and individually inspired me, challenged me, influenced me, and criticized me. And have permitted me to expand my intellectual and ethical bandwidth - while also making me a better colleague,

teacher and scholar. The point is that impact and legacy are made as a collective project. At the core it is about our shared humanity – what we in South Africa refer to as *ubuntu*. So while I am deeply grateful for this recognition, none of what I have done would have been possible without this community and particularly members of this section.

I am deeply grateful to you. Thank you!