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A Tribute to One of Arkansas's Greatest Pioneers of Progress

Cover Page Footnote

The Honorable George Howard, Jr., passed away on April 21, 2007, at the age of eighty-two. He was a man of many firsts, and the University of Arkansas at Little Rock Bowen School of Law is proud to have an endowed professorship in his name and honor. What follows is one of the essays from a collection of tributes to the late Judge Howard, written by some of his strongest friends, colleagues, and admirers. Given the impact of Judge Howard's civil rights work in the state of Arkansas, it is altogether fitting that this tribute to his legacy is included in this Law Review issue that also commemorates the 50th Anniversary of the integration of Central High School as well as other continuing legal efforts in civil rights.

**IN THE SUPREME COURT OF MEMORIALS FOR PIONEERS TO
MANKIND**

IN THE MATTER OF:

A Pioneer of Progress

Judge George Howard, Jr.

United States District Court

Eastern District, Western Division of Arkansas

Late of Pine Bluff, Jefferson County, Arkansas

Sunrise May 13, 1924–Sunset April 21, 2007

No. 2007–In Perpetuity

**A TRIBUTE TO ONE OF ARKANSAS’S GREATEST PIONEERS OF
PROGRESS**

Comes Christopher C. Mercer, Jr., a life long friend of the late Judge George Howard, Jr., fully realizing the frailty of his ability to properly canonize this worthwhile life, however having been requested, and therefore feeling constrained, to express words of tribute to this Pioneer of Progress, states for posterity, as follows, that:

1. I am in a position to give a first hand account of the legacy of the late Judge George Howard, Jr., one of Arkansas’s foremost Pioneers of Progress, because I was born and grew up with him in Pine Bluff, Arkansas. He was born on May 13, 1924, and I was born on March 27, 1924. We both attended Merrill High School, which was the segregated high school for blacks. We were both in law school at the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville in the early 1950s, and both carried on the general practice of law throughout Arkansas for over twenty-five years before he was appointed a federal judge in 1980.

2. A pioneer is described as one who prepares the way, a pathfinder, an explorer, brave, courageous, heroic, and forever remembered for his exploits. Judge Howard exemplified all of those qualities “And Then Some,” as will hereinafter be explained.

3. In the Good Book it is written: “Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.” Genesis 3:19. However, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, in his poem *A Psalm of Life* says: “Dust thou art, to dust returneth was not spoken of for the soul.”

4. The life given us by nature is short, but the memory of a well spent life is eternal. Mortal life ends, but the soul and memory lives eternally.

5. Cicero said—"Memory is the treasury and guardian of all things." Shakespeare said—"Praising what is lost, makes remembrance dear." It is fitting to praise Judge George Howard, Jr., who has been physically lost to us, but whose memory will live eternally.

6. Different cultures have different ways to memorialize and remember those who precede us to the ultimate reward—

- a. Some build monuments of stone;
- b. Some erect shrines of iron;
- c. The Pharaohs built pyramids and tombs;

d. However, the greatest shrine is kept in the hearts and minds down through each succeeding generation, and that is where we will keep the memory of Judge Howard—in our hearts and minds.

7. Everyone leaves a memorial of his own building which might impact society, some to a greater extent than others.

8. What distinguishes mankind from the beast of the field is not the construction of monuments, but the privilege of memory.

9. Only a few persons, in the history of mankind, have had some unique quality that endeared them to their fellowman. Judge George Howard, Jr., was the epitome of the old adages that "Mighty Oaks from Little Acorns Grow," and "A Little Piece of Leather, But Well Put Together."

10. As noted above, I have known Judge Howard since we were kids, about eighty years, and have been a personal witness to all of the trails he has blazed as a fearless and tireless warrior for justice, always fighting the cause of the underdog, and especially dedicated to the battle for civil rights for his people. To accomplish these ends he prepared himself with a legal education, being one of the six pioneers at the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville School of Law (U. of A.).

11. The U. of A. School of Law has established a "Six Pioneers Room" in the atrium of the Leflar Law Center, which carries the photo and a biographical sketch of these six pioneers, namely with entrance dates respectively follow: (1) Silas Hunt, February 1948; (2) Jackie Shorpsire, September of 1948; (3) George Haley, September 1949; (4) myself, Christopher C. Mercer, Jr., September 1949; (5) Wiley Branton, February 1950; and (6) George Howard, Jr., September 1950. Of those first six, all of them except Silas Hunt, who died prematurely in August 1948, finished law school and became members of the Arkansas Bar. The only two living, as of this writing, are George Haley and myself.

12. As a pioneer and leader in his quest for civil rights for all, Judge Howard served as a member and Chairman of the Arkansas Advisory Committee to the United States Civil Rights Commission from 1966 to 1970, President of the Pine Bluff Chapter, and President of the Arkansas State Conference of Branches for the NAACP. He served seven (7) years on the Arkansas State Claims Commission, four as Chairman, a term on the Arkansas Supreme Court, being appointed thereto by Governor David Pryor, and

was named by Governor Bill Clinton to the newly created Arkansas Court of Appeals, where he served until his appointment to the federal bench by President Jimmy Carter in 1980.

13. At his investiture to the federal bench, I remember the appreciation he expressed to three of his contemporaries, myself, George Haley, and Jackie Shorpsire, for being present. I shall never forget the tears of joy I saw in his eyes as George Haley stated in remarks that:

Judge Howard, I am greatly privileged to share in this occasion, for I know you to be a man of great courage and legal ability. And I know you to be an honest man and a just man . . . a family man who with your devoted wife, Vivian, have developed a beautiful, talented family. I know you to be a man of God, who will attempt as the prophet Amos admonished us to "let judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream." Here indeed, distinguished leaders . . . ladies and gentlemen, is Arkansas and America at its best. The history we make here today ought to be known over the nation . . . indeed, over the world. Unfortunately, such creditable, positive news affecting blacks receives little news coverage. But if it were negative, we would be inundated with far greater exposure.

14. As complimentary and satisfying as Judge Howard's service was to the bench, the bar, and the community, his greatest comfort came from his involvement with his church, New Town Missionary Baptist Church, 3600 West 2nd Avenue, Pine Bluff, Arkansas. This was his neighborhood church from early childhood, and he never waivered in his allegiance to it.

15. There was only one other area that shared as high allegiance as his church, and that was his family. His wife, Vivian Smith Howard, was the apple of his eye, and the love of his life for over sixty years. He was justly proud of and devoted to his four (4) children, Sarah Etoria, George III, Risie Rene, and Vivian Alycia.

16. I think I can summarize his true greatness as a pioneer of progress in the three words that a business executive said was the secret to his success—"And Then Some." The business executive said that the difference between average people and great people was that great people not only did what was expected of them, but "and then some." Judge Howard became a great person because he not only did what was expected of him but "and then some."

17. I feel that his heritage and his gift to future generations of Arkansans can be summarized by the six greatest words on earth, expressed by three of the greatest minds who ever lived, who said: (1) Socrates—"Know Thyself"; (2) Cicero—"Control Thyself"; and (3) Christ—"Give Thyself."

18. Judge Howard was the essence of the utterances by those three great men, and he will be "giving himself" throughout eternity with the in-

spiration that future generations will receive from using the federal building in Pine Bluff that has been named in his honor.

WHEREFORE, having duly attested to the greatness of Judge George Howard, Jr., I feel truly honored to have been his friend and recommend to future generations that his life is one they should emulate, and if they do they will be richly rewarded. And we will be forever indebted to Judge Howard because he "Did Some Good in His Neighborhood."

Respectfully submitted,

*Christopher C. Mercer, Jr.**

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