

Judge shares wisdom

By Stephanie Cole

What is success? Is it fortune, power, wealth, position? Many and more of the above adjectives are often scales used to measure success. What is humanitarianism? Is it goodwill, selfishness, patience, generosity, kindness? To many success and humanitarianism may appear to be at opposite side of the street. Few individuals have been able to cross these sides, let alone join them.

One of the few is federal administrative law Judge H. J. Belton Hamilton, a resident of West Linn, Oregon. In response to the mentioning of his achievements, Judge Hamilton slowly smiles with an expression that quietly acknowledges his achievements.

As noted by the Lake Oswego Review of Oct. 1975, "The ability to organize and direct people is quickly recognized as one of the character traits which got Judge H. J. Belton Hamilton where he is today." Upon meeting and conversing with Judge Hamilton, one can quickly note that he, unlike many other prominent individuals has not forgotten who he is, or let success go to his head.

Judge Hamilton ventured into law while in the military through the acquaintance of a young man who had just graduated from law school. At that time, Blacks in the military were enlisted men and the whites were officers. There was a fine line drawn between the two. Judge Hamilton notes, "This person was able to say almost anything he wanted, get away with most of what he wanted to get away with and at the same time stay within the roles."

"I was very impressed with the person who had a legal education, and it occurred to me the amount of political power that a person accumulated just from the kind of knowledge this man had. I was impressed with the amount of influence and power he had with his skill. I then began to shift my interest toward law."

Previously, Judge Hamilton aspired to be a physician. He received preparations for medical school during his adolescence and as a T-3 enlisted in the military during World War II. Ironically, Judge Hamilton has been able to incorporate the difficult profession of both law and medicine into his administrative speciality.

Judge Hamilton received his legal education at Stanford University in 1949, graduating with a A.B. in Political Science. At that time, it was known that Stanford didn't accept many Blacks. In defiance, Judge Hamilton decided to attend Stanford. After Stanford, he attended the Northwestern School of Law and Lewis and Clark College in 1953. Later he pursued post graduate interdisciplinary studies in Public Affairs at the University of Oregon during 1960 - 61.

Q. Did you encounter any barriers because you were Black while studying for your law degree?

A. "I don't know if I faced barriers because I was Black. Much of this depends upon the personality of the individual and how the barriers are set up. Some things turn out to be advantages. Some people thrive on challenges and negative motivation, and I think perhaps I'm one of these people."

Q. What type of person are you?

A. "I'm the type of person that if you told me that I couldn't do something that I would be more likely to be motivated to do it, then I would if you told me to come on, I would like to have you do this. What would be a barrier to some might be an encouragement to me."

Q. Did you use your color to your advantage while



JUDGE H. J. BELTON HAMILTON

you were pursuing your legal education?

A. "I don't want to down play the fact that there is racism in our society which affects us all. When I was in law school, I never accepted the notion that I was anything other than just a law student who happened to have Black skin. I figured I knew as much law as anybody else. I had a calling card, so being Black was to my advantage."

Judge Hamilton's legal career consisted of being admitted to the Oregon State Bar, private law practice in Portland, first Black Assistant Attorney General in Oregon's history, and various other credits. Currently, Judge Hamilton is a federal administrative law Judge, specializing in the medical - legal area for the State of Oregon.

A. Do you view your profession as a role model for Black children and youth?

A. "I do speaking for young people, hopefully there are young Blacks who will see me as a model and it will be useful to them. I also find that I don't object to it, that I also serve as a role model for white children."

Q. What advice would you give to young people aspiring for a career in law?

A. Vernon Chatman of the Urban League often sends young people up to my office, where I talk with

them. Sometimes they're able to sit in on a hearing. I try to tell young people that if you want to be a lawyer, first of all, you need to study. You need also to have a general idea of what a lawyer does for a living, the wide range of the field. Often you may not be happy in temperament or otherwise in functioning as a lawyer. However, being a lawyer has a full range to accommodate people with different types of temperaments. Functioning in law school requires a certain attitude about things. Being a lawyer requires that you be willing to raise questions. Things that most people take for granted. I would tell people after working hard, develop a certain attitude about life, to events in which I call the three R's: 1) Rhetoric, 2) Reality and, 3) Record. The most important thing to remember is the record because the record will remain after what was said is gone."

Judge Hamilton welcomes at anytime, people who are interested in law to come up and visit him. Besides his profession as a lawyer, Judge Hamilton is currently President of the Portland Urban League, a re-elect term in which he is serving.

Judge Hamilton is also a family oriented man. He builds his surroundings around his wife, Medori and his two children, Konrad, a junior at the University of Oregon and Camille, a student at Stanford University.

The best assessment of Judge Hamilton was summed up by himself after his appointment to Assistant Attorney General in 1955.

In a statement to the *Oregonian*, the Attorney General's Office said, "Hamilton will be the first Negro attorney to serve on the legal staff of the State Department of Justice."

In response to this statement, Hamilton expressed that he was "not receiving this appointment because I am a Negro. I am not a Negro lawyer, but a lawyer who happens to be Black."

In other words, he earned it!



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