

## UNDERSTANDING OUR CHANGING COMMUNITY

with

# JUDGE FANON A. RUCKER

*As explained by Bill Santen in the July issue of the CBA Report, the Senior Lawyers Division will be publishing a series of articles, each written by a veteran lawyer, seeking to reveal who the author really is, what s/he really wants in life, and how we are going to achieve an even better community.*



“If you want to go to law school because you want to make money, don’t do it...be a used car salesman. But if you want to go law school because you want to change the world or make a difference, by all means you should do it.” Those were the words of advice I received from an Indiana Court of Appeals Judge (now Supreme Court Justice) in the summer before my senior year in college when I told him of my intentions to pursue a law degree. With those words in mind, I have tried to devote my legal career to “making a difference”.

I am Judge Fanon A. Rucker. I was born and raised in Gary, Indiana, a little rough city outside of Chicago. The neighborhood I grew up in was crime-ridden, poor and dangerous by any measurable standard. As a senior in high school, my guidance counselor recommended against me going to college because, according to her experiences and studies, she believed my chances of professional success were slim. In fact, her exact words were that I “shouldn’t waste my time going to college.” Fortunately, I was mentored and encouraged by many who motivated me to succeed despite others’ expectations of my future.

During my sophomore year in college, I watched a man in Los Angeles get beaten by police after he was involved in a traffic stop. The subsequent acquittal of the officers and the riots that followed piqued my interest in pursuing a law degree and representing those who were marginalized and mistreated by society, whose civil rights were violated or who were otherwise victims of discrimination.

I graduated from the University of Cincinnati College of Law in 1996. As a student, I had the honor of clerking for federal

Magistrates and Judges Jack Sherman and Robert Steinberg. After graduation, I accepted a position with the City of Cincinnati as an assistant prosecutor. Five years later, I went into private practice and joined the law firm of Manley Burke, then Santen & Hughes. At the firms, my practice areas were focused on civil rights, employment law, municipal law, business litigation and a small amount of criminal law. During those years in private practice, I was involved in many high-profile civil rights cases that gave me the opportunity to do quite a bit of television and radio. As the law director of a village, I provided legal advice and representation to public officials and drafted the laws that kept the village running.

In 2007, I was appointed to the Hamilton County Municipal Court, where I currently serve. Every day, I hear approximately fifty criminal cases with an active civil docket of approximately forty cases. I often call municipal court “the most exciting place on earth”, and if you came to watch for a couple of hours you would most certainly agree!

Considering where we are and where we’ve come from, I believe the most valuable thing we as a community can do is to listen to one another. Our country developed, often through extreme turmoil, because of a mixture of positions and ideals, not a unilateral ideology. Unfortunately, many of us are so focused on the correctness of our own experiences and beliefs that we don’t just disagree with an alternate possibility, we fold our arms, close our eyes and try to yell down anything unfamiliar. The reality is that we live in an incredibly diverse world; and, if we actually take the time to listen and consider, we will accomplish so much more than if we don’t.

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*Judge Rucker has served as a prosecutor and law director and represented clients in cases ranging from civil rights to employment discrimination at all levels of federal and state court. He serves as a judge on the Hamilton County Common Pleas Court.*