51st NBLSA National Convention Highlights
March 12-17th, 2019
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Little Rock, Arkansas

"There comes a time when one must take a position that is neither safe, nor politic, nor popular, but they must take it because their conscience tells them it is right."

-Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
Welcome from the National Chair

March 12, 2019

To the NBLSA Members, Alumni, Sponsors, and Friends of NBLSA that are in attendance at the 51st National Convention of the National Black Law Students Association, I greet you on behalf of the National Board of Directors.

I first want to take this opportunity and thank the National Board of Directors and National Executives for all of the work they have led us to allow for us to have an impactful year serving our members. I am truly grateful to have worked with such an amazing and dynamic team of individuals. I can only imagine the great things you will accomplish in the future. Second, I want to thank the National Convention Planning Committee for all of your hard work that has led us to this moment. Without your efforts, none of the activities planned would be able to happen.

I would like to thank our generous sponsors that have made this Convention possible. On behalf of our NBLSA Membership, I thank you for your generosity and furthering the mission of NBLSA as we continue to increase the number of culturally responsible Black and minority attorneys who excel academically, succeed professionally, and positively impact the community. In addition, I would like to congratulate all honorees, speakers, and special guests in attendance at the Convention. Thank you for your continued service and for taking the mantle to serve as exemplars for the future generation of legal practitioners.

Finally, to the NBLSA Membership and Alumni, I want to thank you for being a member of NBLSA that allows us to continue to grow as an Association and further enrich our mission. I encourage you to fully immerse yourself in the programming that will take place over the course of the week. You will be able to network and hear from leading legal practitioners, engage in rich dialogue around issues that affect our communities, participate in oral advocacy competitions, as well as get to know each of your fellow BLSA colleagues who you will see in the future in various capacities.

As we commemorate our 51st year of the Association, the 51st National Board of Directors has committed this year around the theme: “Shifting the Paradigm: Envisioning the Next 50 Years.” Our vision was to increase and engage our members and alumni in new and innovative ways, create and build factful and strategic partnerships, transform our outreach in the community through committed acts of service, and uplift the great work of the Association through collective action and sharing our narrative. This vision has been realized through our collective efforts from the national, regional, and local levels to support our membership and advance our efforts in the community at large. May you continue to be agents and advocates of change as you embark on the next stages of your legal careers.

I am eternally grateful to have been chosen almost a year ago around this same time to lead as your National Chair. This year I have learned immensely from the membership and efforts taking place at the regional and local levels. You have made my time of service all the more greater seeing the impact you are making in both your law schools and the community at large. You are the epitome of Black Excellence! Thank you for allowing me this humbling opportunity to serve you, and I can’t wait to see what is in store for the Association as we move towards our next milestone. I hope you leave this convention ready to “Speak Truth to Power” because we truly need to stand up and speak out as the future legal advocates of tomorrow.

Sincerely,

Brandon R. Cahee
49th National Chair
National Black Law Students Association
On Wednesday, March 13\textsuperscript{th}, it kicked off our oral advocacy day of events where astounding oral advocates who competed at Nationals in the Thurgood Marshall Moot Court Competition, the Constance Baker Motley Mock Trial Competition, and the Nelson Mandela International Negotiation Competitions all gathered to begin their perspective competitions. Teams competed for over three intense days and we would like to highlight and congratulate those who placed at the national level.

Please congratulate the following teams:

**Nelson Mandela International Negotiations Competition**

First Place: Southwestern University  
Second Place: Hofstra University  
Third Place: University of Oklahoma

**Thurgood Marshall Moot Court Competition**

Best Petitioner Brief:  
Sneha Pandya and Alexander Werner (Columbia Law)  
Best Respondent Brief:  
Hannah Rosner and Caleb Woods (Columbia Law)  
Best Oral Advocate: Adanna Smith (University of Baltimore School of Law)  
First Place of the TMMCC: Sneha Pandya and Alexander Werner (Columbia Law School)

Second Place: Lorraine Birabil and Brandon Cofield (Texas A&M University School of Law)  
Third Place: Bethanie Maxwell and Kaleigh Darty (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill)

**Constance Baker Motley Mock Trial Competition**

First Place: Campbell University School of Law  
Second Place: George Washington University School of Law  
Third Place: Case Western Reserve University  
Best Advocate: Nichad Davis (Campbell University)
On Wednesday we also hosted our National Convention Community Outreach event with Our House in Little Rock, AR.

NBLSA was able to give back in committed service with Our House. Our House empowers homeless and near-homeless families and individuals to succeed in the workforce, in school, and in life through hard work, wise decision-making, and active participation in the community. Not only were NBLSA members vested with giving back, but NBLSA Founder, A.J. Cooper also attended and gave back of his time to support this great organization.

During the day of service we participated in helping to sort donation closets for children and adults, helped with technological needs as individuals prepared to go on interviews, as well as participated in hosting professional development workshops to prepare individuals for job interviews and the work force. #NBLSA51 was so proud to advance one of the tenets of mission of making a positive impact in the community.

To find out more about Our House please visit www.ourhouseshelter.org.
On Thursday, March 14th we kicked off our first day of workshops and seminars around our day themed on: “Exploring Careers in the Law.” The day kicked off with greetings from our host Regional Chair, Symon White, bringing greetings on behalf of the region as well as Bobby Forrest, Jr., National Convention Coordinator. In addition, NBLSA was joined by two special guests, Gretchen Hall, President and Chief Executive Office of the Little Rock Convention and Visitors Bureau (LRCVB). The LRCVB welcomed NBLSA to the city, highlighted some of the nice gestures guests of the Convention would be greeted by including welcome and departure screens at the airport as well as banners throughout the city highlighting our convention.

Last, the LRCVB highlighted some items to do across the city, restaurant discounts available for our guests, and how to gather more information from their representatives tabling in our exhibit hall. NBLSA was truly proud to partner with the LRCVB and grateful of their contribution to our National Convention. At the conclusion of the presentation an special token and gift basket was presented to an audience attendee on behalf of the LRCVB.
Our final special guest during the opening session on Thursday was Mayor Frank Scott, Jr., who is the first black elected Mayor of Little Rock. Mayor Scott brought greetings on behalf of the city and received from NBLSA the Vice Admiral Crawford III Trailblazer Award. NBLSA thanked Mayor Scott for his continued service to the community and for forging the path for others interested in giving back of their time and resources as he has demonstrated throughout his entire career.

Mayor Frank Scott, Jr., Mayor of Little Rock and Brandon R. Cahee, National Chair, NBLSA
Other highlights from the welcoming remarks included NBLSA’s Founder, Algernon “AJ” Cooper that brought forth remarks to the audience.

In addition, panelists shared what it meant to be a part of Corporate America and the duties entailed for those interested into entering such a profession.

Following the opening remarks on Thursday, we then held a Corporate Roundtable. On the roundtable included the panelists, Audra Thompson, Senior Associate Counsel, Tort Litigation Group, Walmart, Inc., and Tracie Ransom, Founder and CEO of Ransom Strategies Group LLC. The Corporate Roundtable presented an opportunity where corporate leaders convened to discuss how they got to where they are today, what it means to be a change agent in the community, their role and the impact that their organizations have in making a difference in the community, and to overall inspire the audience that are the future leaders of tomorrow of how they too can attain being a leader in the community.
During the afternoon we were proud to host the A. Leon Higginbotham Luncheon that pays homage to the life and legacy of A. Leon Higginbotham. During the luncheon we were joined by Dr. Gary Ford who wrote a book and produced a documentary film highlighting the life of Constance Baker Motley. Dr. Ford was able to join this conversation to highlight how Constance Baker Motley similarly to A. Leon Higginbotham made a profound impact as a member of the judiciary.

Second, we were joined by the Honorable Marion Humphrey, former and retired judge of the Circuit Court for Pulaski and Perry counties. Judge Humphrey has been a remarkable exemplar of public service during his time as a member of the judiciary and his knowledge and expertise was shared with the audience for those interested in pursuing a career as a member of the judiciary.
Throughout the course of the day we hosted other informative panels that focused on a career in the Armed Forces, transaction law, among many other events that engaged our members to learn about various careers in the law. Please see some highlighted pictures below.

On Thursday evening, NBLSA was graciously hosted by the University of Arkansas at Little Rock’s William H. Bowen School of Law (UALR). UALR hosted the Chair’s Reception and greetings were brought from the local BLSA Chapter President as well as the Dean of the Law School, Theresa Beiner.
On Friday, March 15th we focused on the theme of Social Advocacy where the day began with an opening session in the form of a Coffee and Conversation. The panel explored strengths and pitfalls of mobilization around issues that affect the African-American community. The session also identified how we, as a culture, need to focus on the building and maintenance of momentum around issues that are advancing our communities. During this opening session, Representative John Walker, D-District 34 of Little Rock, received the Vice Admiral James W. Crawford III Trailblazer Award. In addition, this panel included Furonda Brasfield, Executive Director of the Arkansas Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty (ACADP) and Jaribu Hill, Founder and Executive Director of the Mississippi Workers’ Center for Human Rights.

Other sessions and workshop throughout the day included panels entitled: “Separate and Still Not Equal,” “The Breakdown of the Black Dollar,” and many other sessions focused on social advocacy and economic justice as well as other that continued our theme of exploring careers in the law from Thursday and networking skills for students.

On Friday afternoon, NBLSA hosted our Sadie T.M. Alexander Luncheon where we were honored to have as our keynote speaker Theresa Cropper that we affectionally know and call “Momma BLSA.” Momma BLSA spoke to invoking the spirit of Sadie T.M. Alexander and the convention theme of Speaking Truth to Power. Momma BLSA as the 10th National Chair of NBLSA and first woman truly left the audience invigorated to lead and be exemplars of change, social justice activists, and to speak truth to
power. To introduce the luncheon and pay homage to the family and life of Sadie T.M. Alexander, NBLSA was gracious to have join us Mr. Alexander Dawson IV, President of Penn Law’s BLSA Chapter. Mr. Dawson brought greetings on behalf of the family of Sadie T.M. Alexander as she was the first woman to graduate from the University of Pennsylvania Law School.

On Friday evening NBLSA hosted our Rep Your Region Cookout where students and alumni showed up and showed out repping their favorite regional/NBLSA t-shirts. This time was a social networking event for students to get to know one another.

On Saturday morning guests of the convention were implored to sightsee around town and participate in a guided tour of the Mosaic Templars Cultural Center in Little Rock. The center celebrates the achievements of African-Americans in Little Rock. Thereafter, NBLSA hosted a brunch which was a great event where students were able to unwind from the week of events and plenary to further socialize with each other.

Later in the evening, NBLSA hosted our Annual A.J. Cooper Legacy Awards which celebrated the historical history of Little Rock and fully honed into our theme of Speaking Truth to Power! “Celebrating Leadership Through Service.” We were graced to have as our honorees of the evening Theresa Cropper “Momma BLSA” who received a NBLSA Honor for her dedication to the organization and commitment to being a role model for others in the legal community.
Theresa Cropper “Momma BLSA” and Marwa Abdelaziz, National Vice-Chair

NBLSA also had another special guest and honoree in store for our participants of the A.J. Cooper Legacy Awards. This individual is truly phenomenal and helped shaped the course of history as a change agent during the 1950’s as they chartered the course of desegregation of public school after Brown v. Board of Education. This individual was none other than Elizabeth Eckford. NBLSA wanted to honor the Little Rock Nine for their service and for being exemplars of excellence. We were so gracious to have Ms. Eckford join our Gala and bring remarks to the audience.

Our Keynote of the evening was none other than L. Chris Stewart who further helped us realize our convention theme and brought a charge to the audience to leave the convention and go and speak truth to power in all they do as the future change agents of tomorrow. L. Chris Stewart is Managing Partner and CEO of Stewart Trial Attorneys, a personal injury litigation law firm. Chris handles a variety of cases including wrongful death, civil rights, shootings, and sexual assaults.
L. Chris Stewart is also recognized for his work with the cases of Walter Scott and Alton Sterling in addition to having received the first billion-dollar jury verdict in U.S. History for a rape victim. L. Chris Stewart received a NBLSA Honor for his valiant work in the legal community.

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To conclude our evening we ushered in the new leadership of NBLSA for the 2019-2020 academic year. We are esteemed to announce the newly elected officers of the following positions:
In addition to oral advocacy competition awards given, NBLSA recognized the Region of the Year which was the Western Region. Congratulations!

NBLSA 51st Board of Directors would like to send a sincere thank you for your support throughout the year and for making our Convention an ultimate success. We are truly proud to have served the Association for the 2018-2019 academic year and look forward to what is in store from the 52nd Board of Directors.