



Pictured above are Judge U.W. Clemon, Justice Ralph Cook, Anne-Marie Adams, Jim Pratt, and Angela Hall.

The Birmingham Civil Rights Institute Honors Legacy of Justice Oscar Adams

By James R. Pratt



Justice Oscar Adams

On Friday, May 1, 2009, I had the honor of substituting for Alabama State Bar President Mark White during a reception that the ASB hosted at the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute for the attendees to the Eleventh Circuit Judicial Conference. At the urging of President White, Anne-Marie Adams, the widow of Justice Oscar Adams who was the first African-American to serve on the Alabama Supreme Court, agreed to present Justice Adams's robe on loan to the Institute for display. Unfortunately, President White was unable to preside at the reception due to a medical procedure, but he deserves the credit for the idea and planning of this event. I also give special thanks and recognition to Elizabeth

North for her role in organizing this event.

The reception was very well attended by both judges and lawyers, many of whom had never seen the Institute. All in attendance were treated to a very special ceremony. Presentation participants included Frank Adams, brother of Justice Adams; Angela Hall, the Institute's vice president of publications and special events; U. W. Clemon, former chief judge of the United States District Court for the Northern District; and Ralph Cook, former Alabama Supreme Court Justice.

After welcoming the attendees, I explained that, since the opening of the Civil Rights Institute in 1992, only one robe has been displayed at the Institute.



Holding her bouquet of red roses is Anne-Marie Adams with Frank Adams, brother of the late Justice Oscar Adams.

It is a white robe with a hood, which represents very dark and troubling times for the Civil Rights movement, Birmingham and the region. By displaying Justice Adams's judicial robe, we honor the legacy of a great man and a great jurist. This robe stands as a symbol of progress within the Civil Rights movement, hope for the future and the proposition that the

rule of law is our best opportunity to obtain equality and justice for all.

Following these opening remarks, the Honorable U. W. Clemon, who now describes himself as retired and not reversible, gave the attendees his own personal view of the essence of Oscar Adams. Judge Clemon, currently a shareholder at White Arnold & Dowd PC, was Oscar Adams's law partner in the firm of Adams, Baker & Clemon, so he was able to add insight concerning Justice Adams's accomplishments as a man, a lawyer and a supreme court justice. It is particularly noteworthy that not only did Justice Adams go on to become the first African-American justice of the Alabama Supreme Court, but both of his law partners made significant contributions as well. Judge Clemon became the first African-American federal district judge in Alabama and Jim Baker became Birmingham's first African-American city attorney. This historic law firm made great contributions not only to the Civil Rights movement, but also to the legal community in Birmingham and the state.

After Judge Clemon's remarks, Anne-Marie Adams and Frank Adams presented Justice Adams's robe to the Institute and Justice Ralph Cook presented Anne-Marie with a dozen roses in appreciation for her magnificent gesture.

I believe all who were in attendance and witnessed this meaningful event in the history of the Institute were moved by its significance and reminded of the importance of the judiciary and the history of this state. ▲▲▲



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