Clinton Heralds Historic Brown Ruling

By Colin Morris

Before a packed crowd in the Low Library Rotunda, former President Bill Clinton heralded the 50th anniversary of Brown v. Board of Education and its positive reverberations throughout American society, but he also highlighted the struggles that still remain.

The former president was the keynote speaker at the second event in a yearlong series cosponsored by Columbia and the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund (LDF) celebrating the landmark ruling that barred state-imposed racial segregation in schools. Law Professor Jack Greenberg, director of the LDF from 1961 to 1984, who was awarded the Presidential Citizens Medal by Clinton in 2001, gave the opening remarks. Clinton was introduced by Columbia President Lee C. Bollinger, who noted that the former president “has been a national and international leader on issues of integration and its benefits.”

“I came today to remember the lessons of Brown…and to remind you that school is not out on America’s struggle to build one nation, and to bring the world together across the racial, religious, ethnic and tribal lines that divide it,” Clinton said. The president emphasized that Brown was not just a big victory but also an early one, which may have given its winners a false sense of security. He noted that it was not until an entire decade later that the Civil Rights Act of 1964 passed.

For Clinton, the legal intricacies of the Brown ruling are less important than the enduring core values Brown set into place among the American public. Humans love to separate and categorize most things in life, Clinton explained, which, in social terms, can yield unintentionally divisive results.

“There’s nothing like the real thing for inspiration. Those of us who fancy ourselves as well-educated sometimes remind ourselves how smart we are by all the distinctions we can make. You can’t navigate the world unless you can put the reality into little boxes. Differences make life interesting, but common humanity is more important. I think Brown really represented a turning point in the inner life of America,” Clinton said. Brown “offered a vision of a better America.”

Clinton said that he didn’t believe the victories of Brown expected overnight results. “Most of the folks weren’t surprised that we continued to have problems with integration elsewhere. Those who have passed on probably wouldn’t be surprised that there are schools that...

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Columbia’s Center for Career Education Hosts Diversity Recruiting Conference

By Peter Kohel

More than 50 employers ranging from arts nonprofits such as the American Symphony Orchestra League to government organizations like the Peace Corps and the CIA to businesses such as Citigroup and Microsoft convened on campus Feb. 5 to alert students of all racial, ethnic and gender groups to career opportunities with a wide range of industries.

The Diversity Recruiting Conference, which will become an annual event, was hosted by the Center for Career Education with the support of Goldman Sachs. Some 350 students registered for the event and 200 submitted resumes. The program included a Demographic Panel on the social and economic impact of the changing U.S. population and workforce, as well as two industry sessions with representatives from a wide range of companies and organizations.

The sessions were followed by a networking lunch, which included another panel on diversity recruiting practices featuring Adlar Garcia of the Alumni Association and Lance Verge, vice president of global diversity recruiting at Goldman Sachs.

The Demographic Panel was chaired by Professor Gary Okiba, director of the Center for the Study of Ethnicity and Race at Columbia, who asked the panelists to focus not only on the broad social implications of recent demographic trends, but also to examine their effects on “our lives as members of the American community.”

Brian Welle, director of research at Catalyst, a nonprofit organization whose mission is to advance women in business, reported that from 1997 to 2002, while women did not fall behind, they failed to make strides in the percentage of corporate officer positions they held. In 1997, 11 percent of corporate officer positions in Fortune 500 companies were held by women. In 2002, that number had increased to only 16 percent.

Still, Welle said that a sea change was taking place during that time in the business world that could eventually result in greater gains for women. During the competition for talent in the hot mid-‘90s economy, “many organizations discovered that women were underrepresented—they were a talent pool that wasn’t being tapped to its fullest potential.” A large number of companies then looked inward, studying their corporate cultures and norms, and decided that many of their practices were exclusionary.

This introspection led many firms to institute diversity policies and more closely monitor gender hiring. The changes were motivated primarily to achieve greater social justice, but, according to a just-released Catalyst study, they also appear to be linked to greater profitability.

“For those Fortune 500 companies with the greatest female representation in corporate officer positions, their return on...