

## **Introduction of Liman Colloquium Speaker: Cory Booker**

**Dean Harold Hongju Koh**

**March 1, 2007**

Welcome to this, the start of the 10<sup>th</sup> Arthur Liman Public Interest Colloquium at Yale Law School. My name is Harold Koh, and I will introduce the Program and our keynote speaker.

The Arthur Liman program was founded 10 years ago to honor Arthur Liman, one of the country's great superlawyers and a prominent partner at the New York law firm of Paul, Weiss. Arthur died in 1997 after a distinguished career dedicated to the public service spanning four decades. He represented scores of important corporate clients, and was a trial lawyer and counsel of the first rank. But he became best known for his extraordinary public service record, first as counsel for the New York state investigation into the 1971 Attica prison uprising, and then as chief counsel for the Senate Iran-Contra hearings in the mid-1980s

To commemorate the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Liman program we welcome back to his alma mater a public servant, who at the tender age of 37, is already the stuff of legend.

Our speaker today, the 36<sup>th</sup> mayor of New Jersey's largest city, Newark, was born in Washington, D.C.. His parents, two civil rights activists saved and sacrificed to support his education. He grew up in northern New Jersey, where he attended Northern Valley Regional High School at Old Tappan, excelled academically, was an All-New Jersey Football player, and became a self-described trekkie.

He traveled west to study at Stanford University, where he earned a B.A. in political science and an M.A. in sociology, played varsity football, made the All-Pac Ten Academic team; — and was elected to the council of presidents. While he was there, he ran a student-run crisis hotline and organized Stanford students to help youth in East Palo Alto

From there he won a Rhodes Scholarship to study at Queens College, Oxford, where he was awarded an honors degree in modern history, began a lifelong love of the Talmud, and became the President of the L'Chaim

Society, to signify his commitment to end tensions between Jewish and African Americans.

In 1994, he came here to Yale Law School for his degree and, while here, worked in LSO, legal clinic, served as a Big Brother, and was active in the Black Law Students Association. As a law student he was legendary and beloved by his fellow students. One of his classmates told me that everyone wanted him to join their student organization just so that they could elect him President

After law school, Booker did not take the easy path but returned to his beloved New Jersey. In 1997, 40 years after Arthur Liman graduated from law school, and the year the Arthur Liman program was founded, he went to serve as the public interest as Staff Attorney and Skadden Fellow for the Urban Justice Center in New York and Program Coordinator of the Newark Youth Project.

When only 29, he entered electoral politics, knocking on tens of thousands of doors to upset a four-term incumbent to get elected to the Newark City Council. Upon being elected, he proved that he would be a different kind of city councilman, one who would live his politics in daring and creative ways. He moved into in Brick Towers, a notorious public housing project in Newark's Central Ward, and organized tenants there to fight for improved conditions. In 1999, he went on a 10-day hunger strike in front of one of Newark's worst housing complexes in Newark, an effort that resulted in increased police presence and improved security for residents. For five months in 2000, he took to the streets and lived in a motor home, which he parked on the worst drug corners in the city, inspiring residents and businesses to fight against drug dealing. Although regularly outvoted 8-1, he proposed a variety of Council initiatives to improve housing, young people's services, law and order, the efficiency of City Hall, and reform of the education system.

In 2002, instead of running for re-election as Councilman, he ran instead for Mayor of Newark. This pitted him against long-time mayor, Sharpe James in a bare knuckles electoral brawl that is unforgettably documented in Marshall Curry's Academy-Award-nominated documentary entitled *Street Fight*. During the 2002 campaign any businesses that put Booker signs on their property ran the risk of a police shakedown. The city machine accused Booker of being a puppet for white Republican interests,

and of being a carpetbagger, even though he lived his whole life in New Jersey and his whole professional life in Newark.

Undeterred by his narrow loss, he founded Newark Now, a grassroots nonprofit group, opened his own law firm, Booker, Rabinowitz, et al., and became a senior fellow at Rutgers University's public policy school.

Last year, older and wiser, he reentered the Newark mayor's race again and this time won with an astonishing 72 percent of the vote, soundly defeating Sharpe James' Deputy Mayor. As important his entire slate of City Council candidates, known as the "Booker Team," swept the Council elections, giving him secure control of the city's government.

But again, even before taking office, he showed he would be a different type of Mayor. He successfully sued Newark in state court to stop the city from selling land at discounts to Sharpe James's campaign contributors. Just before he took office in late June, New Jersey investigators foiled an assassination plot against him by local gang leaders in response to his promises to take a harder line on crime. Upon assuming office as mayor of Newark on July 1, 2006 --just the third person to govern the city since 1970—he announced a 100-day plan to implement reforms in Newark by adding police officers; ending background checks for many city jobs, helping former offenders find city employment; refurbishing police stations; improving city services; and expanding youth programs and services.

He introduced his proposed Newark City Budget of nearly \$700 million, calling for an 8 % increase in the city's property tax, and increasing the number of city employees by more than 200. He appointed a new director of the Newark Police Department, and named as Deputy Mayor his Yale Law School classmate Stefan Pryor and brought a group of able young YLS grads into city government in a way not seen since John Lindsay became mayor of New York.

For these accomplishments, *TIME* magazine called him "The Savior of Newark," U.S. News and World Report named him one of America 's Best Leaders and Esquire magazine named him one of the country's 40 Best and Brightest.

My friends, this is a man who has lived his politics, who has put his body on the line for his principles and who has made a lifelong and inspirational commitment to social change and advancing the public interest.

During the decade that the Arthur Liman program has been in existence, he has lived a lifetime of public service. We can think of no one better to honor the 50<sup>TH</sup> anniversary of Arthur Liman's graduation, the tenth anniversary of the Liman Program, or to give us here at his alma mater an urban mayor's perspective on public interest advocacy, than Hizzoner,

*Mayor Cory Anthony Booker.*