JUDGE CARMEN BEAUCHAMP CIPARICK

Judge Ciparick, Associate Judge of the Court of Appeals, received her J.D. from St. John’s University School of Law in 1967. She served as a staff attorney with The Legal Aid Society in New York City from 1967 to 1969, when she became an Assistant Counsel for the Judicial Conference of the State of New York; in 1972, Chief Law Assistant of the Criminal Court of the City of New York; and in 1974, Counsel in the Office of the New York City Administrative Judge. In 1978, Judge Ciparick was appointed Judge of the Criminal Court of the City of New York and in 1982, she was elected to the New York State Supreme Court. In 1994, she became the first Hispanic to serve on the Court of Appeals.

Judge Ciparick is a former vice president and secretary of the Puerto Rican Bar Association and is presently a Trustee of Boricua College and member of the Board of Directors of St. John's University School of Law Alumni Association. She served on the New York State Commission on Judicial Conduct for eight years and held an adjunct professor position in the legal studies department at New York City Technical College for two years. In 1991, she was inducted into the Hunter College Hall of Fame and in 1994 received its President's Medal. In 2003, she received an honorary degree from St. John's University School of Law.

Judge Ciparick’s Remarks at NYCLA Women's History Month
Luncheon, Sponsored by the Civil Court Practice Section
March 15, 2006

Once again, we are celebrating Women's History Month. Thank you so much for bestowing this honor upon me. This year's theme is Women Builders of Communities and Dreams, and what better place to celebrate than here at Vesey Street where so many careers have been built and so many dreams fulfilled.

In the ancient Roman calendar, the 15th of March -- today -- was known as the Ides of March. Unfortunately, it has gone down in history as a day of betrayal and treachery, but we are changing that here. Today is a day for celebration, a day to celebrate what brings us together. It is a day to celebrate our ancestors and our progeny and most especially to celebrate ourselves, the women in the court and those practicing before the courts.
But, indulge me for a few seconds while I celebrate a male among us, the President of NYCLA, Norman Reimer. I want to thank you, Norman, for all you are doing for the profession, and particularly for Civil Court Practice. Your efforts to increase the representation of low income litigants in Housing Court and your focus on who you have identified as a "particularly vulnerable sub-population" of tenants such as the elderly is so commendable and we in the Court system appreciate the partnerships you are forging with the private bar and with government to attain these goals.

Additionally, I, along with many others in this room, appreciate your speaking out recently in a Letter to the Editor of the *New York Law Journal* about the lack of diversity on our appellate courts. You pointed out that here in the First Department, of the 15 sitting Justices, there is only one African-American, one Hispanic, one Asian-American and one woman. In the Second Department, out of 22 Justices, one is Hispanic, three are women and, as you said, "incredibly" none is African-American. I thank you, Norman, for speaking out on this issue and look forward to the work of NYCLA's Task Force on Judicial Selection. Surely the time is right to be addressing this issue as the Court system, elected officials and, yes, even federal judges are studying ways of improving our judicial selection system. The goal of maintaining a diverse judiciary should remain paramount and not be subordinated to achieve other ends. I trust your task force will keep that in mind.

And thank you, too, Judge Judith Kaye for that beautiful introduction. I'm not sure of whom you spoke. After all, you have three phenomenal women colleagues; our male colleagues are pretty terrific, too. But we all agree -- and that's pretty hard for our Court to do these days -- we all agree that you are the best! Talk about Women's History!
Embodied in Judith Kaye is a whole volume of women's history. The first woman partner at her law firm, the first woman on the Court of Appeals; the first woman Chief Judge; and, a Chief Judge who has so gracefully and meticulously brought her feminine touch to the tough business of court administration. Achieving goals that no other Chief Judge has achieved, imposing rules in areas where no one before her dared to tread, establishing a more user friendly court, at the same time improving the delivery of justice to the constituency we serve. Under the leadership of a great woman, we have witnessed a revolution in the creation of specialized courts, from commercial courts to community courts, from domestic violence courts to drug courts, from pilot programs championing permanency for our at-risk children to jury projects. Innovations in security, technology, education and training, ever vigilant in improving the practice from addressing the needs of solo and small practitioners to challenging the Bar to live up to the core values of professionalism. Fiduciary appointments, matrimonial practice, indigent criminal defense, you name it, she is there at the ready. Her latest challenge is advocating on behalf of her judges for much needed salary increases and salary reform in general. There is no task that Judith Kaye undertakes which is not executed well, and Judith, we're all with you on this last one. So there she sits among us, the embodiment of Women's History, a woman with vision who has built a judicial community that has in such a large measure sustained our dreams for a responsive court system.

There are so many women in this room who share in this history and we all know who we are. So we can feel proud about our many accomplishments. But we cannot become complacent and dwell on our past accomplishments. There is still a great deal of work to be done and some troubling data is emerging. I identified one trend, the decrease
in the number of women at the Appellate Division level. Three years ago, we could boast that we had 12 women sitting at the Appellate Division statewide. Today that number has been reduced to seven. The winter 2006 report of the Center for Women in Government at Albany Law School reports a slow and uneven progress in women attaining top government posts generally and reports that women hold fewer than a quarter of the top jobs in state government around the country and have made few gains in the last eight years. The positions identified by the study include statewide elected officials, state legislators, high court judges, department heads and governors' offices top advisors. The study's project director speculated that the demands made by government positions often interfere with family duties, such as caring for children or elderly parents, and discourage women from seeking office. This may be so, but New York women who should be at the front line of government only hold 24.5% of the highest offices, although comprising 51.8% of the population. The numbers in the State Judiciary are somewhat better. With a total number of 1258, comprising the full time judicial workforce pursuant to OCA's latest statistics, 363 or 28.9 percent are women with the greatest number, of course, being concentrated downstate.

Looking at the private sector, we also see that women lawyers are sparse in terms of leadership roles. The past chair of the ABA Commission on Women in the Profession recently reported that women comprise about 30 percent of the Bar, but only 16% of partners in major law firms -- less than 4% are managing partners -- and only 15 percent of the Fortune 500 General Counsel are women. This may be due to attrition rates, which seem to be higher for women than for men but is also fostered by profoundly male influenced professional norms. It has been said that whatever women do, they must do
twice as well as men to be thought half as good. Luckily, this is not difficult for the women gathered here this afternoon.

But I would like to speak about a young woman, whose life went unheralded, who died last week at age 46 of incurable lung cancer. Her name was Deborah, and she was my friend. Actually, her mother was my friend, but she had also passed away several years ago, having been killed in an automobile accident. I began visiting Deborah last May; in fact, I recall it was Mother's Day weekend and I arrived at her very modest apartment in Queens with flowers, not so much to celebrate Mother's Day but to celebrate our reunion. I hadn't seen Deborah since she was a child, nor had I known of her mother's death until very recently. There was Deborah, a single mom with incurable cancer. She had left a mid-level position at Con Edison because the chemotherapy and other treatment, as well as the pain, would not permit her to continue working. She was applying for disability benefits with all the attendant red tape involved. She had no parents, no husband or partner, no siblings and a very grim future. I befriended Deborah -- visited her several times during the summer. We always had such a nice time. She quizzed me incessantly about her mother, wanting to know as much as I could tell her about growing up with her mom in the '40s and '50s.

She was also very interested in my work. Apparently she had obtained a paralegal certificate along the way, but never actually worked in a law firm. It would have been a cut in salary for her, she said. She was the sole source of support for herself and her son. As the fall progressed, so did Deborah's cancer and she began palliative hospice care, first at home and ultimately at Calvary Hospital. She died last week.

I tell you this story today because, through the ten months or so that I was a part
of Deborah's life, I witnessed the most extraordinary coming together of women who became Deborah's support system. Her illness was long and she was able to reconnect with aunts and cousins, childhood friends and work mates. It was a wonderful experience for me to be part of this group of strong, empowered women, giving strength and comfort to the ever weakening Deborah. Some of her friends would occasionally sleep over. The hospice permitted this. Deborah loved it. She called it her pajama parties. Word had gotten out that she loved chocolate and teddy bears. A teddy bear lay beside her in her bed. I experienced sadness, of course, but also joy, joy at the strength and courage Deborah showed through her ordeal, joy watching her friends so ably take over the difficult task of caring and supporting her, and marveling at the kindness and support each displayed for the other and the bonding that the experience produced. I marveled at the dignity of Deborah's last few hours, grasping her son's hand, surrounded by the women who loved her. I no longer felt "sorry" for Deborah. She had reached the end and would be at peace soon. She had been strong and courageous, determined and disciplined. I felt enriched by the experience, I had made a new friend, several new friends, crossing all social and economic lines, a sisterhood of sorts, helping our friend, Deborah but also sustaining each other as women do so well. We had built a community and encouraged our dream of helping Deborah through her illness.

So, although Deborah's name never appeared on a plaque, nor was she honored for her career accomplishments, she, like many Deborahs out there, is so much a part of our women's history. Part of the fabric that makes us special. Part of the fiber that makes us strong. As the biblical prophetess and judge, Deborah, declared "the glory of victory belongs to a woman." It is this strength that will allow us, as women judges and lawyers,
to make a difference in the institutions we serve -- to build a legal community that fulfills our leadership potential and our dreams for the delivery of quality legal services for the population we serve. And it is this strength and resolve that must be harnessed by organizations such as NYCLA to allow them to continue building a true legal community -- one that will definitely remain in the forefront of reform.

Before I close, I would like to take a moment to acknowledge my staff who always make me look good and very much provide a community and support system for me. My secretary, Christine Carro; my law clerks, Jennifer O'Friel, David Kaplan and Gerard Rath. And I would like to thank the Civil Court Practice Section and your event chair, Robert Goldstein, in particular, for inviting me here today and honoring me with this wonderful lunch and gift. Thank you.