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Alumni Profiles



Photo by Mark Mulville

Hon. Michael A. Battle '81: "There was something very special about the school, and it was the professors."



Photo by Frank Ceasario

Vincent Dunn '89: "I was really happy when I got here and saw how many minority students we had."

THE COLOR of SUCCESS

Four alumni named to Black Enterprise magazine's list of top black attorneys

By Nicole Peradotto

Michael Banks remembers how pleasantly surprised he was when he received the November 2003 issue of *Black Enterprise* magazine. He had already been told that he was to be included in its list of America's 50 top black lawyers, along with former UB Law School classmate Vincent Dunn. What Banks didn't know was that two other UB graduates, Michael Battle and Brent Wilson, had also made the cut.

Selection of the lawyers – who are graduates of a total of 30 law schools – were

made on the basis of research with leading law schools, legal scholars, prominent attorneys and a number of national legal organizations. Magazine editors then identified the best attorneys in 15 categories, ranging from criminal defense to patent law.

Making a quick calculation as he leafed through the issue, Banks discovered that only the law schools at Harvard, Columbia, Howard and the University of Michigan had more alumni ranked in the story. "To end up with four people on a short list – that's a great honor," said Banks '89, a partner at the Manhattan-based firm of Milbank, Tweed, Hadley & McCloy LLP.

"That's another thing that the UB Law

School can point to as an indicator of the kind of education that's available at UB. It reflects the impact of what the school has done with the black community and for black lawyers."

Banks, who was named as a top black lawyer in mergers and acquisitions/securities, focuses in his practice on a range of deals, from securities offerings to financings of power plants, pipelines, refineries and other ventures in the United States, Asia and Latin America. He represented underwriters in a \$536 million leveraged lease financing by subsidiaries of Ahold USA Inc. and represented purchasers in a \$290 million securitization backed by the sale of oil generated by Ecopetrol.

Banks spoke at the 2004 Students of Color Recognition Dinner, held April 2 at the Buffalo Marriott Hotel. At the annual event he and the three other UB alumni named in the *Black Enterprise* article accepted the student group's Distinguished Alumni Award. In doing so each honoree acknowledged a debt of gratitude to the Law School.

"UB was a school that seemed to find a way to work to the strengths of the students," recalled Battle '81, U.S. attorney for the Western District of New York. "There was something very special about the school, and it was the professors. They were always trying to find ways to bring the best out in us, and that, to me, made a real difference."

Battle was named in the category of



Photo by Mark Mulville

Brent L. Wilson '76: "UB has produced tremendous talent, and I'm sure in this group (of students) there is also tremendous talent."



Photo by Mark Mulville

Michael C. Banks '89: "To end up with four people on a short list— that's a great honor."

government. He began his legal career with the Legal Aid Society. Now he is working to prosecute on federal charges James Kopp, already convicted of killing Dr. Barnett Slepian. In 2002, he prosecuted the Lackawanna Six, alleged members of a terrorist sleeper cell who were trained in an Afghanistan camp connected to al-Qaida. All pleaded guilty and were offered sentences of between seven and 10 years.

Vincent Dunn '89 described the Law School as a "low-stress place" where he felt comfortable as a first-year student, thanks in large part to the support he received from the Black Law Students Association.

"It was easy fitting in," said Dunn, a partner at New York City's office of Chadbourne & Parke LLP. "I was really happy when I got here and saw how many minority students we had."

Dunn was named one of America's top black lawyers in banking and financial services. He handles both lenders and borrowers in connection with secured and unsecured transactions, including acquisition financing, vendor financing and raising

working capital. He represented lenders in a \$1.8 billion construction financing case for turbine generators and raised \$500 million to lease the construction of an electric generating facility.

Echoing Battle's praise of the Law School faculty, Dunn singled out Dean Nils Olsen — then a professor — for his constant encouragement. "He would give extra help in understanding civil procedure, and he had a genuine interest in helping minorities do well."

Wilson '76, the senior statesman of the foursome, is also the only non-New Yorker of the group: After his wife landed a job upstate, the Louisiana native transferred to UB Law School from the University of Georgia.

Where there were six black students at the University of Georgia, there were close to 20 at UB. Where there were no black professors at the University of Georgia, there were two at his eventual alma mater. "That was significant to me," said Wilson, a partner at the Atlanta firm of Elarbee, Thompson, Sapp & Wilson LLP, where he became the first African-American attorney to work in a management, labor and employment boutique practice in the Southeast.

Wilson confines his practice to the representation of management clients in labor relations and employment law matters. He also is an arbiter with the National Associa-

tion of Securities Dealers. Wilson successfully defended Hooters of America against an Equal Employment Opportunities Commission charge that the "Hooters girl" concept was discriminatory because it prevented men from waiting tables at the restaurant.

"UB has produced tremendous talent, and I'm sure in this group there is also tremendous talent," he told the audience. "I ask each and every one of you to continue to do what we have done, and that is to work hard and simply be the best that we could so that we could honor the Law School."

"The University at Buffalo Law School is honored by the success of our African-American graduates," says Dean Nils Olsen. "Their prominence is representative of the many extraordinary attorneys of color who have graduated from UB over the years."

"Most significantly, with four graduates on the list of top black lawyers, the UB Law School tied with Stanford University's law school for fifth nationally, trailing Harvard Law School, with 16 graduates; Columbia Law School, with 10; the University of Michigan Law School, with seven, and Howard University Law School, with five graduates," Olsen added.

"This is a testament both to the long-term commitment to diversity that the Law School has made and to the wonderful students of color who have attended UB."

List of top black lawyers' alma maters

Law School	Alumni on list
Harvard	16
Columbia	10
University of Michigan	7
Howard University	5
University at Buffalo	4
Stanford University	4