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Boston College Law School

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Students Tour Library Exhibit

5/12/03--On May 9, nearly 30 students from Charlestown High School visited Boston College Law School to see the latest addition to the Law Library, the traveling exhibit *Long Road to Justice*. The exhibit, a multi-media exhibition of historical photographs, artifacts, and court records of the African American experience in the Massachusetts Courts, is on display in the Library until October 10.

After viewing the exhibit, the students sat down to lunch and a discussion with BC Law Professor Robert Bloom. "What I want you to get from this, what I want you to understand, is that it doesn't matter what your background is, you can succeed," Bloom said. "You don't have to be rich to become a success. The path is open to everyone."

The students, mostly aspiring attorneys who are in their last years of high school, had done background research on the history of African Americans' ascent to the Massachusetts bench. They seemed impressed both by the exhibit and by the Law School facilities and faculty. A student asked what kind of cases Professor Bloom had worked on as an assistant district attorney. The most memorable, he said, were those where he had made a difference in people's lives, and in some cases had helped change the law. He described a case where he had helped a juvenile who had been caught stealing a car. "They were supposed to treat him as a juvenile but they didn't," Bloom said. "This was a young kid who was in over his head. They sent him to an adult prison without a hearing. I still remember the look on his mother's face. She was really scared for him. I argued successfully to get him out of there." As a result of that case, Bloom said, they are now required to hold a hearing to determine what steps will be taken in such a situation.

*Long Road to Justice* tells the story of the experience of African Americans in the Massachusetts justice system by focusing on three aspects: how the Massachusetts courts handled the issue of slaves and slavery; how African Americans have struggled to gain equal educational opportunities through the courts; and how African American participation in the court system as attorneys, judges, litigants, and jurors has evolved over the centuries.

The exhibit, which opens officially to the public on May 26, began in 1996 under the leadership of The Honorable Julian T. Houston, Massachusetts Superior Court; principal scholar Professor Randall Kennedy, Harvard Law School; and a committee of scholars and historians. It has since toured a number of locations. *Long Road to Justice* is sponsored by the Justice George Lewis Ruffin Society, which promotes the advancement of minorities in the criminal justice professions.

Photos of the visit