

# SERVICE MATTERS

## 88th Chancellor Albert S. Dandridge III

BY BERNARD W. SMALLEY SR.

**BERNARD W. SMALLEY:** You've spoken fondly about your grandfather and his role as a community leader. How did his role in the community form your view on the role of lawyers in the community?

**ALBERT S. DANDRIDGE III:** My grandfather, Albert S. Dandridge Sr., was the first African-American health inspector in the City of Philadelphia. He obtained that position in the late 1930s. His territory encompassed the bulk of the bars and restaurants in Philadelphia. He knew everyone. He was also a Republican committeeman and ward chair for more than 50 years.

When I was a small child, before we lived across the alleyway from each other, I lived across the alleyway in a home that my grandparents owned. I would go over to visit him and my grandmother almost every day. He loved baseball, and probably because of Jackie Robinson, he loved the Dodgers. We would sit and watch baseball together on television. In all the years that I knew my grandfather, I could probably count on one hand the times that I saw him without a suit and tie. He was always on duty. He lived in a row house in West Philadelphia that had an enclosed front porch. This was his office. Several times during the evening the doorbell would ring and my grandfather would go out onto the porch to answer the door. He would sit down with the person or persons on the couch and chairs on the porch. Sometimes, sitting in his

living room I would overhear the conversations. The people who came to the door were from all walks of life, and all races and ethnic groups: Irish-Catholic, Italian-American, Jewish-American, Armenians and, of course, African-Americans. Their stories would all fit into a pattern:

"Mr. Dandridge, I lost my job."

"Mr. Dandridge, I cannot make my rent this month."

"Mr. Dandridge, I have a problem down at City Hall."

"Mr. Dandridge, my son is in trouble."

"Mr. Dandridge, my daughter is in trouble."

I never heard anyone call him by his first name, except my grandmother. It was always Mr. Dandridge. However, my siblings and I, and all of the kids in the neighborhood, called him "Pop." If you were under 21, you called him "Pop." If you were over 21, you called him "Mr. Dandridge."

I would listen to him help those people who came to visit him on the porch with their problems. I would also see him reach into his own pocket to help. My grandmother wanted to move to a bigger house in a fancy neighborhood. He refused. "These are my people, they need my help. This is where they know to find me," he would tell her. This, more than anything, taught me early on the meaning of service to your community.

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Chancellor Albert S. Dandridge III joined the U.S. Marine Corps right after graduating from high school and served in Vietnam.

**tours in Vietnam. Let's talk about your military background and how your experiences as a Marine have shaped you.**

I joined the Marine Corps right after graduating from high school. My best friend and I were acolytes together at the historic African Episcopal Church of St. Thomas. Since I could remember, he wanted to be a Marine. I did not. He wanted me to join the Marines with him. I did not want to do so. We flipped a coin, I lost.

As you know, the Marine boot camp at Parris Island is located in South Carolina. This was the first time I had ever been in the Deep South. We were the only two African-Americans in our training platoon of about 90 recruits. He got hurt and had to spend two weeks in the hospital and joined another training platoon. So when we were separated, it was just me. I had never before had the “N-word” directed at me by someone who was white. This changed. To give you an example, I did not have the best dental care when I was young. In boot camp, I had to have extensive dental work done and the dentist there saved and restored the teeth that were bad. He did not pull a single tooth. Since all Marines are trained for combat, the dentists were all Navy officers. The dentist that worked on my teeth was a Navy lieutenant commander who had to be in his late 50s or early 60s. When I was sitting in the chair, with his instruments in my

mouth, as part of casual conversation with the other dentists – we were lined up as if in barber chairs – he would use the “N-word” every other word. He talked about how he loved to work on “N-word” teeth. Being alone, 17, and a buck private, there was not too much I could do about it. However, to this day, I have had dentists tell

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me that this was the finest work they have ever seen. There is a moral to this story somewhere. However, I got along. I could run further and faster than most of my peers, I could kick a lot of their butts, and I was smarter than they were. They accepted me. The Southern recruits could not believe that I was black because I broke all of the stereotypes that they had been taught all of their lives. My drill instructors

were hard on me, but they were hard on everyone. However, they were fair to me; I knew they wanted me to succeed. Once I became a Marine, I was part of the club – case closed.

The Marine Corps taught me that most people have biases that can be overcome. They taught me that if you treat people fairly, they will generally reciprocate.

After serving overseas for the first time, and becoming a very young sergeant, the older African-American Marines, the “Montford Point” Marines – the segregated boot camp in North Carolina for black Marines during World War II – would take me under their wings and school me. This was a fiercely loyal and decidedly patriotic group of men. Most of them had fought in three wars. Once they found out that I had the “right stuff” they taught me about what being a Marine and what being a “black man” was all about. Service to the other Marines, and service to God, our country and community, was a large part of that.

**You are known for your honesty and candor. How would you describe your leadership style? How does your military background play a role with how you lead people?**

I tend to be very open and direct with people. I have found that I generally do not have the time, nor the inclination to do anything else. I believe it does come

I care about our community, the Bar Association and members of the bench and bar. I want to be in the room to make sure “bad stuff” does not happen to any of them.

from the Marine Corps. I have found out in combat that those who you think should have the correct answers don't always have them. In combat, bad information or lack of information gets people killed. Therefore, my style is to tell everyone what is going on so that they have as much information as possible. I have found that the correct answer can come from many sources. So I seek input from everyone involved. To give a military analogy, I may have to say, “we have to take this hill.” I am not going to tell you how to take the hill. It may not be a frontal assault, it may be we sneak up on them in the middle of the night. You tell me how we should do it, it's your rear end on the line.

**AI, you have such an impressive record of service to the larger community and the Bar Association, at this point in your career, why was it important for you to become Chancellor?**

As you and I discussed many years ago, I like to be in the room when “stuff” can happen to people. I care about our

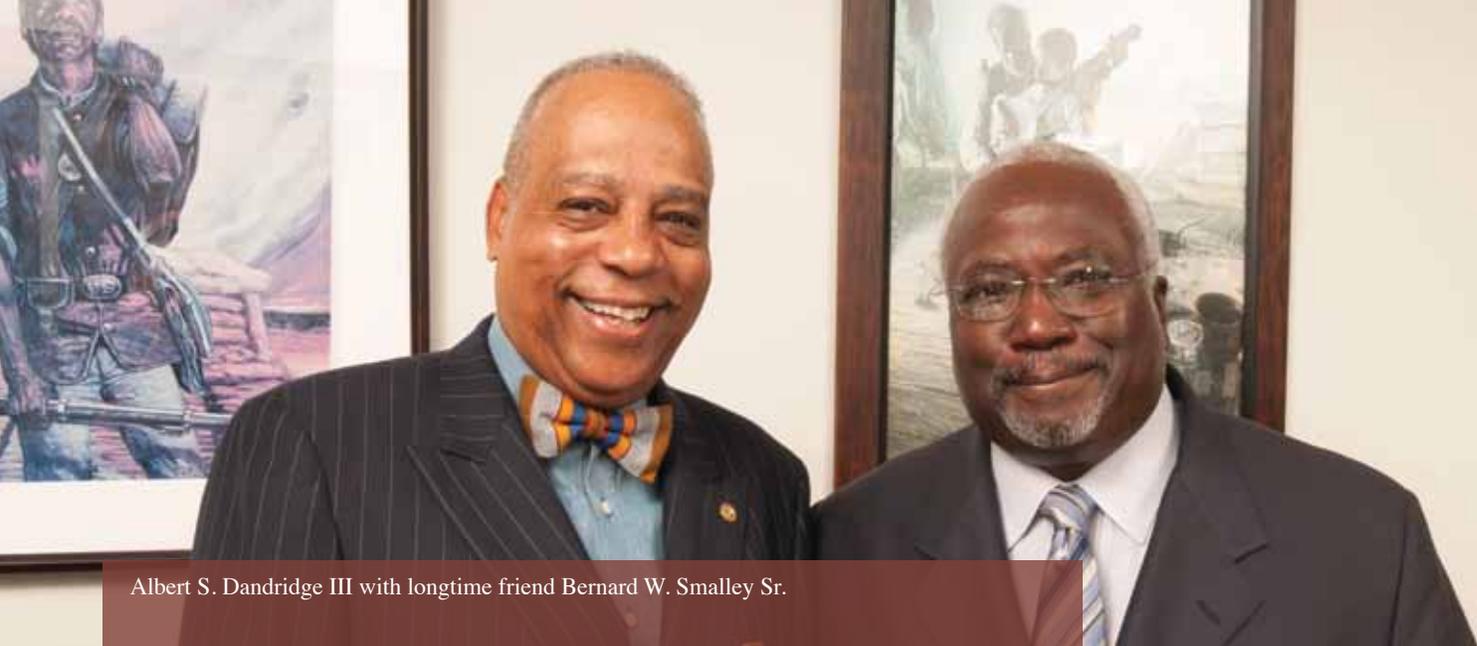
community, the Bar Association and members of the bench and bar. I want to be in the room to make sure “bad stuff” does not happen to any of them.

**Your legal career spans 36 years and you've been a member of the Bar Association for 31 years, what differences have you seen in the profession and the association? What's better? What's different?**

I, like so many others, believe that the practice of law is becoming more of a business than a profession. But I also believe that that tension has been around for a while. It is a complicated issue that has no simple answer. I do not think there is the same camaraderie amongst our members, nor the legal profession as a whole, the way there used to be, because we do not know each other like we used to. I believe that part of the reason was that many years ago, the bar and Bar Association used to be populated by men who stayed in their ethnic and practice silos. Today, the bench, bar, our practices and the Bar Association are much more diverse. This







Albert S. Dandridge III with longtime friend Bernard W. Smalley Sr.

is a good thing. We are making strides in the inclusion of all races, genders and cultures. We are reaching across the world to share positive solutions to problems and issues that affect other bar associations and the world community, not just our Bar Association and city. But, we could be doing more and we could be doing more to foster collective endeavors. We do need to get to know each other better and to join together to serve the common good. We used to do that in the more closed bar, we now need to do this in a more inclusive environment.

We are all in this together.

**You are currently a partner and chief diversity officer at Schnader Harrison Segal & Lewis LLP, and you are one of the founding members of the Philadelphia Diversity Law Group (PDLG). How would you rate Philadelphia law firms on their respective diversity efforts? Do you think firms should abandon diversity committees and the like? How do you plan to**

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**further the Bar Association's diversity efforts initiated by former Chancellor A. Michael Pratt?**

Quite frankly, we have not done a good job at all. Philadelphia habitually ranks near the bottom of major cities in its diversity efforts. We tend to do a good job at recruiting diverse students – at least in the large firms – but we do not do a very good job at retaining them. Every firm is willing to hire the editor-in-chief of the law review, magna cum laude graduate of Harvard Law School. But not every person of color is Barack Obama. However, we have come a long way – a person of color with those exact credentials could not get hired in hardly any major Philadelphia law firm 65 years ago.

We have to come up with better ways to retain attorneys of color, especially women. The PDLG law firms have had a tremendous record in recruiting talent of color, but they, like everyone else have struggled to keep talented attorneys of color. At the end of the day, to me, it comes down to a very simple question. Are the majority firms and businesses willing to mentor and train diverse attorneys so that they can entrust major matters to them?

No, I do not think firms should abandon diversity committees. Someone needs to be the beacon for the right thing to do. Years ago, this concept was built into the DNA of many firms. I am not sure it is there anymore. Yes, I believe the Bar Association's Office of Diversity started by Mike Pratt, is still very important. That office is an important resource to all firms that are trying to do better with diversity and inclusion. I believe that one of the missions of the Bar Association and its Office of Diversity is to assist lawyers and firms in doing things that they cannot do for themselves.

**What role does the Bar Association play in the practice of today's lawyer?**

As I said, I believe one of the missions of a Bar Association is to do for the bench and the bar what they may be unable to do for themselves. I believe the overriding mission is to make lawyers proud that they are lawyers.



Young U.S. Marine Albert S. Dandridge III with his grandfather, affectionately known as "Pop."

**What tradition do you think should be restored to today's legal practice?**

A tradition of service to our community. Firms that encourage their attorneys to participate in the Bar Association support the entire city, not just the legal community.

**What is on your agenda for the upcoming year?**

I have outlined some of them above:

- Service to our community
- Enhancing the opportunities of attorneys who are women

of color  
• Service to our veterans.

**How will you know that your term as Chancellor has been a success? What do you hope is your legacy?**

That when people walk up to me and tell me "thank you," then I will know that I made a difference. ■

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