

RON FANFAIR



JAN 31

Morgan
recognized
for setting

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example for aspiring jurists

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Do I belong here and is anyone even going to hire me if I graduate?

Bilingual lawyer, social affairs commentator and social justice advocate Anthony Morgan grappled with those lingering questions while pursuing law studies at McGill University nearly a decade ago.

“I was inspired by the Black radical tradition in Canada and when I was in law school, I couldn’t see where my ideas and desires to support Black people would get me in a very practical sense,” he recounted. “Who would hire someone that wanted to speak openly and honestly about issues of anti-Black racism and where does one find work like that in Canada? I wasn’t interested in going to the United States. I was really nervous and because I couldn’t figure out a path, I struggled in law school and wasn’t the strongest student.”

Just six years after earning degrees in civil and common law, Morgan was honoured last week with the Charles D. Gonthier Award that honours emerging leaders among recent Faculty of Law graduates.

He was recognized for the example he sets for aspiring jurists through his professional achievement, community service and public outreach.

The award was created in 2008.

A former Quebec Superior Court, Quebec Court of Appeal and Supreme Court judge, Gonthier retired in 2003 and passed away six years later.

“I never met him, but I am familiar with his outstanding contributions, which includes mentoring,” said Morgan. “In thinking about that aspect of his life, I am particularly thankful for this award and the mentorship that I received as a young law student from Professor Adelle Blackett who played a crucial role in my journey. She really helped ground me. In my first year, she gave me a job as a research assistant. Jobs for first-year law students are hard to come by. She saw some potential in me and took a chance by exposing me to other ways in which I could eventually use my legal education once I got through the challenging phase.”

A full professor since September 2015, Blackett is a Canada Research Chair in transnational labour law and development at McGill University’s Faculty of Law.

She said Morgan inspired confidence, demonstrated genuine commitment to community and showed the ability to draw people together to work for a common cause.

“His sharp intellect and powerful oratorical skills were unmistakable during class discussions, but Anthony’s classmates could tell that he cared about social justice and the quality of human relationships,” said Blackett who was a 2016 Trudeau Fellow. “He took the time to mentor other students, including those aspiring to come to law school. It was my pleasure to supervise some of the outstanding research that he undertook and to count him as a research assistant on one of my own projects on labour law and development.”

The former Black Law Students Association of Canada (BLSAC) president also credits 2017 Gonthier Fellowship recipient Dr. Vrinda Narain, the associate dean (academic) in the Faculty of Law, who introduced him to Quebec’s first Black judge, Juanita Westmoreland-Traore who hired him as a judicial intern, and the four Black female students in his law

Morgan recognized for setting example for aspiring jurists — Ron Fanfair class – Sasha Hart, Ashley Adams, Yeniva Massaquoi and Annamaria Enenajor -- for helping him overcome the challenges he faced in law school.

“Had it not been for these people, I couldn’t be anywhere near where I am now,” said Morgan, the only Black male in his class. “There were times when I thought I would drop out. I never thought that six years after leaving McGill, I would be standing here accepting this award. I am really fortunate that I had people that leaned on me and showed me the way to do this work in a way that would allow me to be successful.”

He also counts the support of Montreal lawyer Laurent Kone who was his best friend in law school and the BLSAC vice-president for Quebec.

“Though he was a couple of years ahead of me, he always had my back,” said Morgan. “He drove with me for 16 hours from Montreal to Halifax through a blizzard to attend a BLSAC conference. Those are things you never forget.”

One of the highlights of his time at McGill was meeting Frederick Phillips who, in 1956, became the first Black person to graduate from McGill’s Faculty of Law and Quebec’s first Black lawyer.

Morgan, who interviewed the 93-year-old trailblazer in 2010 for the law school digital magazine, ‘Focus Online’, said the meeting was humbling and inspiring.

“He was really helpful in helping me understand what it was like to be Black in Canada and a Black male law student back then,” said Morgan who also has a Bachelor of Arts degree in ethics, society & law from the University of Toronto. “The one thing I will never forget is how proud he was that in all of his years (36) in practice, he never once had a law society complaint.

“While that may not seem significant, you have to remember the era he practiced in and the fact that some people perceived him as a Black man who was ‘uppity’. There were those who undermined him and sometimes questioned his qualifications. In the face of

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everything thrown his way, he displayed a high level of professionalism. His connection to his community also helped. When I asked him why he chose to pursue law, he said he wanted to be more than just a porter....It was during that meeting with Mr. Phillips that I said if he could make a way for himself, surely I could find a way.”

Called to the Bar in 2013, Morgan has appeared at several levels of court, including the Supreme Court of Canada and before two United Nations Human Rights Committees. He is regularly sought out by media, human rights and community-based organizations and academic institutions to provide analysis on racial justice issues in Canadian law and policy, particularly in the areas of policing and the criminal justice system.

The middle of three children was a Grace Kennedy Ltd. law intern in 2007, a Humber College instructor and human rights, equity and diversity adviser and a policy & research lawyer with the African Canadian Legal Clinic before joining Falconers LLP in April 2016.

Morgan sits on Legal Aid Ontario’s (LAO) test case committee that provides the organization with expert independent advice on applications for legal aid assistance for public interest matters.

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