

THE



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# The Mitchell Memorial

The contribution to America of Clarence M. Mitchell, Jr., was a set of standards of decency framed in law that survive him and profoundly affect the lives of millions of Americans every day.

The memorial to him from his community is a living court house that thousands visit every day in search of justice from their society. Here the law of Maryland is put into practice in ways both noble and mundane affecting everyone.

The rededication of that 85-year-old court house yesterday, on the late Clarence Mitchell's 74th birthday, was, in the words of Chief Judge Robert I. H. Hammerman, "a celebration, a rejoicing." What characterized Clarence Mitchell in the civil rights struggle, his co-worker Joseph L. Rauh said, was "unwavering faith in the legal process." And as Benjamin L. Hooks, chief executive of the NAACP, said, "unless we complete the unfinished task, Clarence Mitchell will not rest, though court houses are rededicated."

So it is not a sterile monument, not merely the name carved in the stone outside or the medallion by James Lewis placed inside (now in plaster with the bronze casting soon to arrive) — splendid as these things are — but a vibrant court house throbbing with life and law, with the mighty and the lowly, with misery and happiness, today and every working day into the future.

The building is worn down after 85 years and the proliferation of the justice administered inside. So the rededication is physical as well as spiritual. The administrative judge of the Circuit Court of Baltimore city, Joseph H. H. Kaplan, has set in motion a long overdue program of physical

improvement to the building, its public places and court rooms. A stained glass dome is completed over one public place with seven more to come, refinishing of 14 doors is underway and a program of painting and plastering is in hand.

The object is not merely cosmetic but to serve the public better as the house of law. Three new elevators, if they survive the budget process, will be installed next fiscal year. True functional renovation — to make the 1900 building and the Court House East (the former federal court house), conform to the needs of 1990s — must await further study and funding in later years. Even now it is being planned and advocated.

This building was 10 years old when Clarence Mitchell was born. Here he worked as a young reporter (as his brother, Representative Parren Mitchell recounted), denied access to certain files and places available to white reporters, unable to dine at any place near by. He helped bring changes, first in this court house, and later in American society, using the law and using his wits to get the law to conform to the Declaration of Independence and to the Constitution. Appropriately enough, the master of ceremonies yesterday was a black federal judge from South Carolina (Matthew J. Perry), nominated to the bench by the most notorious former arch-segregationist still in the U.S. Senate (Strom Thurmond), thanks to the persuasive powers of Clarence Mitchell.

The renewal of the old Baltimore Court House in the name of Clarence M. Mitchell, Jr., is right. The true memorial to him will be the quality and equality of justice carried out inside.