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PERSPECTIVE

Q&A with Justice Candace Cooper (ret.) of the 2nd District

Robert Gagnier

Robert Gagnier: Did your parents have a strong influence on you; and if so, did they help point you in the direction of law and ultimately to become a judge?

Candace Cooper: My parents did have a strong influence on me, and I am grateful to say that I was raised in an intact family with both my mother and father at home. My father was a police officer and later worked as an administrator in the justice department. My mother was primarily a housekeeper, and later took reservations for the former TWA airline. Neither one of my parents were college grads, yet both were smart. As a result, they encouraged all four siblings to go after their degrees. And I can humbly say that all of us have turned out successful. On one occasion, I was asked if my parents had pressured us to go to college and I answered no — and my mother started laughing. There was pressure that was steady and firm, but not in the sense of a demand, but rather encouragement.

RG: With almost three decades of judicial experience under your belt, what were some of the more memorable experiences?

CC: I have to tell you there are two things that I do not do. I do not carry grudges because I cannot remember them long enough; and I leave all work matters back at the office or courtroom. I will tell you that I have run across some interesting cases over the years. I had the “Night Stalker” (Richard Ramirez) in my court the first few months for a preliminary hearing. When I was assigned to the courthouse in Santa Monica as the supervisor of that building when I was on



JUSTICE CANDACE COOPER (RET.)

the Los Angeles County Superior Court, I supervised the building during the O.J. Simpson civil trial. And while I did not try the case, I oversaw the logistics for the case, from coordinating with international media, the fire department, the police department, and juror movements. I have done everything from traffic tickets to murder appeals on the court of appeals and was on the bench for 30 years. It was a good run.

RG: After such an illustrious career, you are now working for one of the leading companies that specializes in alternative dispute resolution. How did this come about?

CC: Well I can tell you that although judicial salaries are decent in the general sense, they are not adequate if you have children who you plan on enrolling

in a private university. So around 2009, I decided that 30 years of public service was going to be sufficient and decided I was going to look for something that would enable me to take better care of my family and our expenses. So eventually I was invited to join JAMS, which is one of the leading ADR companies in the country. I started doing arbitration and mediation with JAMS and I can tell you that it has been an excellent transition allowing me to take care of my daughter's educational expenses and moving along and advancing in what will be my final career. I have done well with the company. I am on the board of directors; and am an equity owner at the company. JAMS has been advantageous to me, having served my family and myself well.

RG: How have you come to embrace the numerous roles at JAMS?

CC: One thing about being a judge, (and I absolutely loved my career), every day was like having your own personal soap opera play out in front of you. And I am a person who can get bored easily. Often what happens in the court could not make it on television. Boredom was never an issue, and with 30 years of experience as a judicial officer, moving over to the world of ADR and its numerous roles was not difficult for me at all.

RG: You have lived through both the Watts and Los Angeles uprisings (rebellions/riots), as well as the current Black Lives Matter and defund the police movements. Have you seen progress in your eyes; both from a personal and professional standpoint with respect to how Blacks are both perceived and treated both in the courtroom and in the eyes of law enforcement?

CC: Since I first graduated from law school, there has been a massive amount of change. In the downtown law firms of Los Angeles, I do not believe there were any Black partners of any major law firms. All the Black lawyers in downtown L.A. at that time could probably meet and fit in a closet — that is just how few of us there were. We are talking about a time when women in general were not entirely welcome into these professions, so minorities or people of color were not even seriously discussed. From then to now, there has been a lot of changes. There are more Black doctors, lawyers and heads of Fortune 500 companies now as well. However, I will say that there are serious problems with how Blacks are both perceived and treated — and the obstacles are still there. The political climate we find ourselves in now is distressing, and

I can see people who want to reverse the advances that I have witnessed in my career.

RG: What are your thoughts about the BLM movement juxtaposed against other civil rights groups?

CC: I am a 1,000% behind the Black Lives Matter movement and any other movement that is designed to improve the lot of oppressed people and try to obtain more fairness and quality for them in this country. It seems that at one point recently you could not go a week before an unarmed and non-threatening Black person was being killed by one law enforcement agency or another.

RG: Many youths today may have a hard time relating to past Black civil rights leaders and may see them as being a part of a bygone era. Do you think the day and age of the single leader has come and gone, and what are your thoughts on the amount of

influence that Black artists and athletes have on the youth of today?

CC: I think that it is easier to create a movement with a charismatic leader such as Martin Luther King and wish we had more of them. I wish more of our musicians and athletes would use their influence for good and feel that anyone born Black in this country should use a portion of their skills and talent to helping those less fortunate. With regards to the rappers, I have some difficulty with their art. The exploitation of Black women and their bodies are aspects of that, and I do not like it, regardless of whether some see that as a part of their art.

RG: Looking back at the pandemic and where we are today; do you see more and more cases being solved via Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and other online options?

CC: I have not physically gone to my office since the pandemic started. I have found that Zoom

has worked extremely well. I have done trials, mediations, conferences (as a presenter) all via Zoom with a great deal of effectiveness. 2020 was one of my best years professionally in life. These technologies are great and are saving lawyer and party travel times among other advantages. During mediation, both sides are working and being more effective with their time and energies. As a result, I cannot see people backing away from it.

RG: What was your opinion of the recent storming of the Capitol? As an ex-judge and current justice, it would be interesting to see how you would rule on that incident, and on the individuals.

CC: Being raised the daughter of a cop, and a judge for 30 years, I am a believer in the judicial system, despite its problems and flaws. Now, can it be fairer to Black folk and people of color? Absolutely. With respect to this particular incident, I cannot see

it as anything other than an orchestrated attack on the institutions of government by people not interested in justice and equality — it was like a coup. I felt it was outrageous and pleased to see the cases against the participants are proceeding. I feel those involved need to be fully prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law. Look at the level of armament that was brought out at the George Floyd protests compared to what the level of response was at the Capitol. Had those same people storming the Capitol been Black or Brown, we would have seen many more deaths at the hands of law enforcement and would have had blood on the steps of the Capitol. ■

Robert Gagnier is a licensed agent-intermediary with US Soccer and continues to freelance when time permits.