

A TRIBUTE TO THE ORACLE OF ANN ARBOR

*Guy-Uriel E. Charles**

I consulted Dores McCree every time I had a significant decision to make. When a group of us were thinking about starting the journal that later became the *Michigan Journal of Race & Law*, we consulted Mrs. McCree. When I found out that my wife and I were going to have our first child and we were not sure how we were going to pay the bills, we consulted Mrs. McCree. When a member of the faculty treated one of us as if we did not belong at the Law School, we consulted Mrs. McCree. When some faculty treated us with dignity, we rejoiced with Mrs. McCree. She was our oracle, though not at all opaque, like the famous Greek one. "Children," Mrs. McCree would often start—that was her appellation for us—and then would proceed to bless us with her wisdom.

We needed Mrs. McCree. Many, though not by any means all, of us who looked to her for guidance and wisdom were matriculating through an institution where our presence was deeply contested. Affirmations of belonging were lacking, to put it mildly. Strangely enough, perhaps, we understood Mrs. McCree's position as the institution's official recognition that it was failing students of color at some level. Mrs. McCree, like a superwoman, was responsible for rectifying the failure.

They asked her to be our grandmother and it worked. She reminded us that we were smart and that this was as much our institution as anyone else's. She knew who was dating whom (and who should not be dating). She knew who was struggling academically and she was not afraid to give a swift kick in the pants. Her trademark smile was easily converted into a sneer when she felt a reprimand was necessary. That woman was very sweet, but she was not a fool. And she seemed to have the ear of every notable person at the University.

It was obvious to her that we should start a journal and so we did. She provided the guidance that made the endeavor successful. She advised us on speakers for our first symposium and was willing to lend her name to entice them to come to Ann Arbor. Though she was not a lawyer, she was often quick to remind us of this fact, she was brilliant and thus understood well the legal academic enterprise. Among those of us who founded the *Journal*, seven or eight of us are now legal academics. Mrs. McCree's guidance played a large part in our career paths.

I continue to pass on to others what Mrs. McCree said to me when I told her that we were about to have a baby and were not sure how we

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were going to take care of this new child. "There is no bad time to have a child," she said, "it will work out just fine." And work out it did.

I will miss Dores McCree. I know that I will no longer receive a holiday card from her. I know that I cannot expect to see her face when I return to Ann Arbor. I know that there are generations of students at Michigan who will no longer have the benefit of her wisdom.

But I will endeavor to carry out Mrs. McCree's spirit. I am grateful that I knew her and am a better person as a result. She was the oracle of Ann Arbor, but also my grandmother and my friend.