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Professor Emeritus Harold Norris

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PROFESSOR EMERITUS HAROLD NORRIS
A.B., M.A., J.D., D.H.L., LL. D.

As of January of 1996, Harold Norris, after thirty-five years at the Detroit College of Law at Michigan State University ("DCL/MSU"), retired to the quiet life. For us he has been, foremost, a teacher. As such, more than 5,000 students have passed through his classes at DCL/MSU. Randy J. Sauder, '87, State Representative from the 29th District in the Georgia Legislature, puts into words what countless former students feel: "My experiences at Detroit College of Law during the years 1984-1987 were deeply enriched by Professor Norris. His teaching skills, coupled with a tremendous grasp of the issues, greatly impacted my philosophy of the criminal justice system. As a Georgia State Representative I now make decisions of law affecting millions of people that bear his imprint. No greater tribute can be made of another than to perpetuate a mentor's teachings."

As a political being, he was elected a delegate to the Michigan Constitutional Convention of 1961, serving as Vice-Chair of the Declaration of Rights Committee and authoring several sections of the Constitution itself. He is an author and a poet. A civil libertarian and an attorney. He is a "Sunday" photographer, sculptor and painter.

Harold Norris graduated from Central High School in Detroit, Michigan, and it was there that he met his beloved Frances, to whom he was married for forty-seven years until her death in 1990. He is the father of two: Barbara, a teacher, and Victor, a lawyer and a graduate of DCL/MSU.

He received a Bachelor of Arts in 1939 and a Masters in Economics in 1941, both from the University of Michigan. His planned career as a teacher was not yet to be, as he soon entered OCS in the United States Army Air Corps. He graduated from Harvard Business School's program to train Statistical Control Officers, following which he spent almost three years in Britain and France with the Ninth Air Force, Air Transport Command.

Professor Norris attended an accelerated course for veterans at Columbia University in which he could complete his law degree in two calendar years. He graduated in February, 1948, and took the Michigan Bar two months later. He entered private practice in Detroit, working with and representing a variety of labor unions and community groups such as the Greater Detroit Public Tenants Housing Council.

He also became active in the American Civil Liberties Union ("ACLU"), representing several teachers and students who were subpoenaed by the House Un-American Affairs Committee. He has been a member of the Executive Board of the Detroit Chapter of the

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ACLU since 1952, and served as President of the Chapter from 1958-1961. He pressed cases on the one-man, one-vote issue, and was the spokesperson for greater public review of police work and the establishment of an independent review board.

During this period at the ACLU, he met the late Dean Charles H. King, '33, who later asked him to join the faculty of the Detroit College of Law. The request rekindled his old interest in teaching, and he accepted the offer.

In 1961, Professor Norris was elected a delegate to the Michigan Constitutional Convention, representing Detroit. As the ranking Democrat, he served as Vice-Chair of the Committee on the Declaration of Rights, Suffrage and Elections.

The provisions of the Michigan Constitution of 1963 prohibiting racial and religious discrimination were written by Professor Norris. He co-authored the provisions creating a Civil Rights Commission and wrote the provisions creating a right to appeal in a criminal case; a freedom of expression; an expanded right of petition; and a right to fair and just treatment in legislative and executive investigations. He is also responsible for the action of the convention deleting from the constitution the provision denying the defense of First Amendment rights to any person charged with "subversion."

As an author, Professor Norris is productive and varied in his output. *Mr. Justice Murphy and the Bill of Rights*, published in 1965, was his first book. An innovative, *A Casebook of Complete Criminal Trials*, followed. In 1973 he published a three-volume set of *Cases, Materials, and Problems on the Advocacy and Administration of Criminal Justice. Reflections on Law, Lawyers, and the Bill of Rights, a Collection of Writings 1944-1984*, also three volumes, was published in 1984. *Education for Popular Sovereignty Through Implementing the Constitution and the Bill of Rights* was published by Detroit College of Law in 1991, and is a book which Professor Norris calls, "The capstone of my career."

Newsman Bill Moyers says of this last volume, "If it were not for people like Harold Norris, the Bill of Rights would be just still words on antique parchment. In his own life he has demonstrated how one individual can put those rights into action, and in this book he summons every one of us to the front lines of the ceaseless struggle to defend our most precious liberties."

Professor Harold Norris also is recognized as a man who writes excellent poetry. Pulitzer Prize writer Theodore H. White said of his poetry, "How easy it is to say that Harold Norris writes lovely, lilting poetry. But it is poetry infused with an almost forgotten sense of

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love - love of country and of people, love of America's monuments and places, love of its future and heroes. This is a Whitmanesque voice, whose sound has been too long absent from our hearts and our culture."

Most familiar to many alumni and students of the College is "The Liberty Bell," originally from the collection *You Are This Nation*. The poem hangs in the lobby of DCL/MSU as well as in the public lobby of Independence Park's Administration Building in Philadelphia, home of the Liberty Bell. In the poem, Professor Norris asks the reader to listen through the silence of the cracked Liberty Bell to the reverberations behind it which continually resound with the rights of man.

Upon his retirement at the end of the Fall 1995 semester, hundreds of current and former students, friends, associates and admirers gathered to pay tribute to Professor Norris. The things said by some of them are reflective of the man and of his life and teaching:

Honorable Bernard A. Friedman, '68, U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Michigan wrote, "Each day that I practiced law, and now as I sit on the bench, I think of the principles and concepts of law which you instilled in me. You certainly are a champion of not only the Bill of Rights, but of the administration of justice as well."

Theodore Sachs of Sachs, Waldman, O'Hare, Helveston, Hodges & Barnes, P.C., noted, "It is altogether fitting that testimony should be given in behalf of this distinguished civil libertarian, the ever-young and enthusiastic Harold Norris . . . His dedication to the Bill of Rights as a living document is unparalleled. That commitment sees permanent expression, we hope, in provisions of the Michigan Constitution that reflect his service to the Constitutional Convention."

His colleague, Professor C. Nicholas Revelos, stated so warmly what so many were thinking: "You have rendered one of the noblest services that I believe an individual in a free society can provide, that of teacher, scholar, and mentor. In rendering this service, you have measurably affected and influenced the course of events in your State, your city, and your community. I have no doubt that this influence will be felt in future generations, as well, through the many students, now alumni, you have taught during your long relationship with the College.

For its students, you have served as a beacon, both in the classroom and without, in articulating and embodying in the life you have lived, that so cherished philosophy of individual liberties which is enshrined in the Bill of Rights to the Constitution of the United States, even

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during those periods in your lifetime when it may not have been popular or wise to do so. This is an example which all of your students have perceived, and many have adopted as a model for their own lives and careers.”

Professor Donald F. Campbell said, in his letter to Professor Norris, “I think of you as the conscience of DCL. Over the last three decades you have so often reminded me and our faculty colleagues of the need to treat students fairly and with dignity and respect. I well recall the concern you have frequently voiced that students be assured ‘due process’ by the faculty while addressing their problems and concerns. Your voice has not gone unheard. I believe that the law school is a better place today because of your shared wisdom and leadership.”

Patricia J. Boyle, Justice of the Michigan Supreme Court, summed up the contributions of Harold Norris: “So few people live lives that make a difference and inspire others to emulate them. No matter how far we stray from them, they are with us, for like the Chinese wise man they ‘have planted trees under the shade of which they know they will never sit.’ This is the gift to us Harold Norris made of his life.”

This dedication can be but a limited acknowledgement for Professor Norris’ exemplar life. All of his friends, colleagues, and past students wish him well as he luxuriates during a deserved retirement for a life well spent.

Best Wishes from all of us.

Dean David Favre, March 1996