



A Living **LEGEND**

“Don’t fight back. Fight forward.” —Ola in *Ted Lasso*

IT IS NOT OFTEN, IF EVER, ONE GETS TO MEET A LIVING LEGEND. I consider myself blessed for not only being able to meet one, but also honored to be able to recognize him for his contribution to the legal profession and society in general.

Judge L. Clifford Davis is a 70-year member of the State Bar of Texas. What makes him a living legend is how he chose to practice law during those 70 years. Judge Davis graduated from Philander Smith College in 1945 with a bachelor’s degree in business administration and received his juris doctor degree from Howard University in 1949. After earning his law degree, Judge Davis returned to his home state of Arkansas and passed the bar, setting up a law practice in Pine Bluff.

In 1952, Judge Davis moved to Waco to teach at Paul Quinn College and then passed the Texas bar and opened one of the first Black-owned law practices in the state in Fort Worth. Judge Davis assisted attorney Thurgood Marshall, of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, on the 1954 case that became *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*, the landmark U.S. Supreme Court case that ruled that state laws establishing racial segregation in public schools are unconstitutional. Judge Davis then spearheaded the quest for school integration in Texas, filing federal lawsuits that resulted in the integration of the public schools in Fort Worth and Mansfield. Judge Davis saw an injustice and fought forward. He fought forward for equal rights. He fought forward for justice.

In 1977, he helped organize the Fort Worth Black Bar Association, which is now known as the L. Clifford Davis Legal Association. In 1983, Gov. Mark White appointed him judge of Tarrant County District Criminal Court No. 2, where he served until 1988. Following that, he served as visiting district judge and senior district judge until 2004.

In more recent years, Judge Davis has stayed busy, in part, through pro bono work and service to the community—fighting forward for the public good. “I have a little saying,” he said in a 2009 profile for the Texas Bar Blog. “Never stop because it’s hard to get started.”

At the State Bar Board of Directors meeting in September in Fort Worth, I had the honor of recognizing Judge Davis along with retired teacher and community activist Opal Lee, the “grandmother of Juneteenth.” Judge Davis was recognized for his long and consequential career, for his outstanding efforts on behalf of the rights of Texans, and his unwavering commitment to the legal profession and the rule of law. Upon receiving his resolution, Judge Davis talked about “civil responsibility.”

“We have been talking about civil rights for years—and we need to continue to talk about that—but we need to talk about civil responsibility,” he said. “That is, we the people of the United States have a civil responsibility, individually and collectively, to treat all inhabitants with decency, respect, and integrity without regard to their race, their culture, their educational level, their sexual orientation, their religious or nonreligious affiliation, their political association, their economic status, their education level, or any other socioeconomic factor, and to advocate and practice freedom, justice, liberty, equal opportunity, safety, health, and the general welfare of the general population for all.”

Spoken like a true living legend. One who knows what it means to fight forward.

CINDY TISDALE

President, 2023-2024

State Bar of Texas