It is a tremendous honor to accept this award on behalf of the faculty, students, staff and graduates of Northeastern University School of Law.

There isn’t time to thank everyone here, but I would like to extend special thanks to our graduates who are here, and to Chief Justice Marshall, who among her many accomplishments was the author of the groundbreaking opinion in Goodridge.

Turning to our school: Northeastern, as you know, is a unique law school in many ways.

The original law school at Northeastern was closed in the 1950s and reopened in 1968 during a turbulent time, in the midst of the civil rights movement and the political upheaval of the 1960s and early 1970s – when many of us were committed to advancing civil rights and social justice, as well as to ending the war in Vietnam.

The roots of our law school are rooted in the ethos of those times.

This in part explains the extraordinary commitment to diversity.

What really makes Northeastern different?

First – The early roots led to a very different cultural ethos for a law school. Since the reopening, our law school has been committed to teaching every student about the role of law in advancing the public good. We have talked .. and we have taught … about social justice. We have been committed to building a collaborative environment that celebrates difference. And we are, of course, committed to a model of legal education in which students learn through both practice and theory. Our co-op program – through which we know many of you – is emblematic of these commitments.

In the 1970s, women and African American students flocked to Northeastern, recognizing the difference. In the 1980s, we were possibly the only law school in the country that actually welcomed GBLT students – and faculty.

Note that this isn’t about tolerance. It is about actually welcoming a diverse community.
Second - The commitment to these ideals – the ideals that created this different cultural ethos – resulted in a critical mass of people at Northeastern who were members of groups often marginalized at other law schools.

We often talk about the fact that critical mass is important.

Once it exists, it changes the game. It is axiomatic that people come to where they feel comfortable.

Third – and this is getting more to the nuts and bolts -

We measure outcomes not inputs. How many students of color or other key groups actually come to study with us – not how many apply, or are admitted, or show up at events. Not whether we advertise widely, but whether we succeed in recruiting diverse faculty.

And when candidates choose to go elsewhere, we ask ourselves hard questions about why.

Fourth - because of this cultural ethos, we are willing to look at candidates – both faculty and students – who bring different personal histories to the table. We look for diversity & the ability to succeed, but we don’t measure ability to succeed only by the common measures.

The results speak for themselves – as you have seen:

Over 1/3 students of color.

Over 20% faculty of color.

and well over half the faculty are women.

We have had openly gay faculty since the 1980s.

And we have been welcoming transgender students and supporting them during their transitions since at least the 1990s.
It is not an accident that the first African American law dean in Massachusetts – the legendary David Hall – and the first woman law dean in Massachusetts were at Northeastern.

But – on the other hand – this isn’t about whether there is a member of a previously underrepresented group at the helm. It was a bunch of white guys who were Harvard Law graduates who were committed to justice who laid the foundation at Northeastern in the early 1970s.

It is about world view, commitment, and a willingness to take risks in order to advance the common good.

I am, as you can tell, tremendously proud of the success of Northeastern law school.

As a member of the BBA and the BBA Task Force on Diversity that led to the section on diversity and inclusion, I am also proud and impressed by the commitment of the BBA leadership and membership to strengthening our bar through diversity efforts.

As a profession – we need to diversify. If we don’t, then we are failing.

Thank you, to the BBA and the section for continuing the fight to increase the diversity of our bar…

And thanks to the selection committee for awarding Northeastern this tremendous honor.