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A MEDITATION ON RACE AND THE LAW SCHOOL EXPERIENCE

BY DEPAUL LATINO LAW STUDENT ASSOCIATION*

Journal for Social Justice, thank you for acknowledging that race is a large part of the entire legal system. Thank you for recognizing that the color of a person's skin plays a part in how they are treated, unfortunately, even people devoted to the service of community still consciously or not let the color of a person's skin impact their attitudes towards individuals. Thank you for accepting that simply understanding race, privilege and power structures will not solve all of the problems minorities face; yet, appreciating it is a great place to start. Most importantly, thank you for talking about the importance of bringing these conversations of race into law school settings. Thank you for drawing attention to the lack of these conversations, or better yet, the plain resistance that exists in law schools and in the legal field, overall. And you are correct in pointing out that the existence of this silence indicates that the law systematically enforces structures of power and privilege. Finally, thank you for realizing that we all have the responsibility of understanding the ways race and identity play into law, and the responsibility to make that better.

However, acknowledgment fails to address the privilege that has allowed some attorneys to not face these issues late into practice. Students of color are forced to carefully maneuver juxtaposed, yet intertwined positions; the privilege of attending law school and the oppression of racism in the legal field. We are

* The DePaul College of Law Latino Law Student Association promotes the goals of Latino law students and those of the greater Latino community. It advocates awareness through speakers, forums and education. It offers a support network for students through a variety of programs.

simultaneously fighting to be advocates, and silenced by institutionalized racism in the legal field. Some of us see first hand how the current legal system fails people of color. We bear witness as, in almost every practice of the law, things such as race, identity, class and gender play such a huge part, yet we are taught to ignore these things. We are fighting in a system that we were never meant to be a part of, for people that the system never meant to protect.

Most Latino law students do understand the importance, the weight, and the complexity of race and privilege. Most Latino law students and lawyers are a bit too familiar with how law systematically enforces structures of power and privilege. Yet, it is also complicated for Latino bodies to infiltrate the institutionalized racism, and disparity of power, within the legal field. Latino lawyers are often left with understanding what their clients are going through, understanding the implications of race and identity, and still not being able to dramatically change injustices in the legal system.

To make matters worse, racism is no longer spelled out clearly through Jim Crow laws; now, it hides quietly, under the guise of “color-blindness.” Overt racism is harder to find; instead the legal system is full of “well-intentioned” people that simply don’t understand, or don’t want to understand, the implications of race, our country’s complicated relationships of profiting from inequality and institutionalized racism. Our intentions mean little if we do not stop to understand the ways race and identity play into law, if we do not understand the quiet, subtle faces of discrimination. We must act.

Yes, it is important to understand race and its complexities, because by not doing so lawyers are doing a disservice to their clients. However, more than 88% of attorneys are white and by attorneys writing to their alma mater, the implication presented is that the best way to generate change is through privileged people, understanding race and allowing other privileged people to understand race. However if privilege and power is really to

be dismantled and deconstructed, it is important to also reconstruct who has access to change. While it is important for all attorneys and students to understand how race plays a part in law, it is also important for attorneys of color and students of color to be able to implement more change in the legal field. It is important for attorneys and students of color to have more agency, not only accessing law schools, but also in remedying injustices. It is important for law schools to encourage students of color to become successful advocates and for non-students of color to learn about the complexities of race, gender and privilege in the legal system. Ultimately, all students must learn the importance of listening to their clients, to not judge them and find ways to convert whatever obstacles they face into proof of the endurance and strength they possess.

— *LLSA*

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