

# **UCLA**

## **National Black Law Journal**

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Editors' Note

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## EDITORS' NOTE

During the 2013-2014 and 2014-2015 academic years, the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA) Law School was rocked by student protest and outrage. In Fall 2013, a large cohort of students came to school in t-shirts on which were printed a photograph of UCLA Law School faculty member Richard Sanders and the phrase "Team Sanders." Sanders' scholarship vociferously advocates against affirmative action in academic admissions, which he claims harms students of color by admitting them to schools that they are unqualified for. Students of color and White allies attempted to engage classmates in dialogue about why Sanders' research and the Team Sanders shirts were problematic on the class Facebook page, which was the only space for class-wide conversation. Their efforts were met with a hostility that extended beyond social media into the halls of the law school, where event posters for the Critical Race Studies program and the UCLA Black Law Students Association (BLSA) were torn down and thrown away and where a student of color received a hateful letter in her student box that stated, "Stop being a sensitive nigger."

In response to these hostile actions, law students of color and allies, driven forward by BLSA leadership, organized marches, protests, and candle-light vigils on campus; created a Change.org petition demanding change from university administrators; printed t-shirts depicting the number of Black students enrolled in the law school (only 33 out of 1100); and made a video about the feelings of isolation, psychological struggle, and limited opportunities for intellectual dialogue that result when a classroom contains only one or two Black students and few people of color. BLSA's Change.org petition garnered over 1000 signatures. Petition demands included hiring a dean of diversity; creating a legal education opportunity program to help underrepresented students succeed in law school; establishing mandatory faculty training on how to teach diverse students in a culturally competent manner; strengthening the role of student representatives on the admissions committee; and blocking Sanders from teaching first-year law students. BLSA's video went viral, with 79,478 views as of the writing of this Editors' Note. Further, these on-campus conflicts and student activism in response made national news throughout the course of the academic year.

In the summer following the 2013-2014 academic year, race riots went beyond the borders of UCLA Law School to rock the nation as a whole following the police killings of Michael Brown and Eric Garner. Nationwide protests escalated through the 2014-2015 academic year, as more news of police killings of unarmed Black people charged with no crime coupled with news of grand juries failing to indict the police officers responsible for the killings of Michael Brown and Eric Garner shocked the nation. Strengthened by the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement, UCLA's Black law student community continued to organize protests, lectures, know-your-rights campaigns and other events to raise awareness of ongoing race-based structural violence in our neighborhoods and in our law school's hallways. At the end of the fall semester, as the nation was still in flames, UCLA Law Professor Robert Goldstein asked students to argue in favor of bringing criminal charges against Michael Brown's father for inciting the Ferguson riots through his public statements. Goldstein asked students to only prosecute Michael Brown's father, with no option to argue against bringing charges or to argue in his defense. Only after the national media reported on his exam prompt and the resulting student outrage did Goldstein acknowledge that his prompt may have been poorly timed.

The traumatic events of the past two years highlight the crucial importance and timeliness of NBLJ's co-publication of *Creating Wise Classrooms to Empower Diverse Law Students: Lessons in Pedagogy from Transformative Law Professors*. In *Creating Wise Classrooms*, authors Sean Darling-Hammond and Professor Kristen Holmquist address how students of color and other marginalized students disparately experience the law school classroom environment. The article offers practical methods by which law school faculty can better incorporate cultural competence and awareness of diverse student needs and backgrounds into their teaching practices to ensure a safe learning environment for all students.

NBLJ is co-publishing *Creating Wise Classrooms* with the Chicana/o-Latina/o Law Review (CLLR), Berkeley La Raza Law Journal and the Berkeley Journal of African American Law & Policy. Our journals came together to co-publish this article due to our recognition that the issues UCLA Law students have faced over the past two years are not limited to UCLA Law School. We hope our multi-journal collaborative will build community around developing solutions to the myriad

challenges students of color and first generation law students face beyond grades, student debt, and finding employment. This joint-manuscript is the first time in history that these four University of California law journals have united to co-publish an article. We hope this begins an ongoing tradition of collaboration and community between our four journals.

Established in 1971 at UCLA on the heels of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, NBLJ was the first journal in the nation committed to scholarship exploring the intersection of race and the law. NBLJ has, unfortunately, been defunct since 2010 due to a lack of institutional support and the severe enrollment decline of Black students at UCLA Law School in the wake of California's affirmative action ban, Proposition 209. In the spring of 2014, a group of dedicated students, led by Black law student Daniel Sturm, arose out of the ashes of on-campus conflict to resurrect NBLJ.<sup>1</sup> CLLR's editors chose to step up in solidarity to support NBLJ's comeback. CLLR has worked in partnership with NBLJ by sharing its resources and institutional knowledge. This academic year, NBLJ and CLLR have joined our staff and decision-making to move NBLJ forward. The present volume is the product of the union between CLLR and NBLJ during the 2014-2015 academic year. It stands as a testament to the power that comes from building relationships with allies and from rising up as a community.

To launch publication of *Creating Wise Classrooms*, NBLJ and CLLR co-hosted a well-attended panel at UCLA where the authors discussed their findings. Following the student-organized panel, UCLA Law School's Student Affairs Office<sup>2</sup> hosted a workshop for faculty where the authors discussed techniques for how professors can better meet the specific needs of marginalized communities in the law school learning environment.

The issues discussed in this volume, while timely, are not new. They reflect how much further the law and law schools must go to fully address and reform the systemic oppression and exclusion from institutions

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<sup>1</sup> The students that advocated for NBLJ's re-establishment include Daniel Sturm, Nisha Parekh, Shyrisa Dobbins, and Markia Bonner. Sturm, Dobbins, and Bonner approached CLLR's then co-editors-in-chief, Daniel Borca and Arifa Raza, to help with the process of getting NBLJ back into publication.

<sup>2</sup> NBLJ would like to extend a special thank you to Assistant Dean of Student Affairs Tony Tolbert and Associate Dean for Curriculum and Academic Affairs Eileen Scallen for organizing the faculty training with *Creating Wise Classrooms* authors Sean Darling-Hammond and Professor Kristen Holmquist

of power that marginalized communities of color still face in 2015. NBLJ will continue to support scholarship that exposes these issues in the hope that through the transformative power of the law and academia, these historic chains can finally be broken.

In solidarity,

Daniel Sturm

Nisha Parekh

*2014-2015 Co-Editors-in-Chief*

*National Black Law Journal*