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Introduction

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INTRODUCTION TO THE SYMPOSIUM ON THE WORKS IN PROGRESS PRESENTED DURING THE FIRST NATIONAL MEETING OF THE SIX REGIONAL PEOPLE OF COLOR LEGAL SCHOLARSHIP CONFERENCES: MARCH 25-27, 1999

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I began my new career as a law teacher in August 1989. In February 1990, I attended what turned out to be the First Annual Meeting of the Midwestern People of Color Legal Scholarship Conference.¹

Initially, the significance of this meeting was that it introduced me to a greater variety of law professors—different in so many ways, but so accepting of their differences.

All focused on a common interest: the development of our individual scholarly and teaching agendas. Some of those who attended that first meeting already knew each other and were experienced law professors. Others of us were in our first or second year of teaching. Some were on law faculties in the Midwest, several were not. What was clear from that first People of Color (POC) meeting was that there were ties that bound us, and that the group made each individual member stronger and more productive at no-one else's expense. Everyone's questions were welcomed and discussed fully—and in accessible language. Experiences were shared and lofty egos were left outside. This meeting was the very embodiment of the often touted, but

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1. The Midwestern People of Color Legal Scholarship Conference, Inc. was the brain-child of Professor Linda S. Greene who, upon accepting a teaching position at the University of Wisconsin in 1989, began to look for ways to bond with other law professors teaching nearby. Finding no existing institution that would allow her to form relationships with other law professors in the area based on mutual needs and interests, she decided to organize a meeting of the people of color who were teaching at law schools in the Midwestern states. After enlisting the enthusiastic support of Professor Norman Amaker who agreed to host the meeting at his school, Loyola University in Chicago, the two-day meeting was convened on Friday, February 16, 1990.

rarely experienced concept “collegiality.” Then and now, I feel blessed to know the twenty-five or so people who attended that first meeting. They included: Professors Linda Greene (Wisconsin-Madison); Norman Amaker (Loyola-Chicago); Michael Middleton (Missouri-Columbia); Gerald Torres (then at Minnesota, now at Texas); Jim Jones (Wisconsin-Madison); Beverly Moran (then at Cincinnati, now at Wisconsin-Madison)²; Beverly McQueary-Smith (Touro); the late Andrew Haines (who shared the story of his nightmarish experience at William-Mitchell—forever disabusing us all of the fiction that tenure protects us from unfair firings); Yvette Barksdale (John Marshall); and Neil Williams (Loyola-Chicago).

After this first meeting in the Midwest, the news of its success carried across America and assisted in the creation of what has become a total of six regional people of color legal scholarship Conferences since 1990.³ It was during the Second Annual Meeting of Midwestern Region that it adopted its full name—The Midwestern People of Color Legal Scholarship Conference⁴. And every year since then, there has been an orderly transition of power from one planning committee to another—perhaps the best indication of a truly successful endeavor.

A bona fide “movement” requires lateral motion, however. In fact, it is very important to recognize the significance of the contribution made by the second person to embrace an idea, thus giving it real momentum. In the case of what is now the Regional People of Color Legal Scholarship Conferences (POC) “movement,” that lateral motion was provided by Prof. Leslie Espinoza. It was Leslie who organized the first annual meeting of the law professors of color in the Southwest region; thus giving life to the second of the six regional POC Conferences. Leslie also deserves credit for her decision to continue the use of the name—“People of Color Legal Scholarship Conferences”—that has been used by every region, in turn, since—adding only the different geographic reference. As a result of the expansion of the original concept, there are now six regional POC Conferences encompassing every law school in all fifty states.

I remember receiving a phone call from Leslie during which she described her plans to convene a meeting of her colleagues in the southwestern states. Leslie said that it was her intention to emulate the work that had recently been launched by Linda Greene, and through which my name had become known to her. She asked me to describe our philosophy and approach to organizing the Midwestern POC work. I did so, happily.

2. Midwestern region history includes the true story of how Jim Jones was so impressed with Beverly Moran’s formal response to Gerald Torres’ paper about Native American folklore that he recruited her on the spot to come to teach at Wisconsin. There are many similar success stories within every regional Conference.

3. The regional groups are referred to as Conferences. Each year the Conferences have annual meetings, not “conferences.”

4. The suffix, Inc., was added when the planning committee decided to incorporate as a non-profit corporation in 1994.

I told her that the Midwestern People of Color Legal Scholarship Conference had established three primary purposes. First, is our commitment to helping our members to develop publishable legal scholarship; second, to create opportunities for our members to satisfy their dean's desire to spotlight their schools; and third, to secure financial support to pay for the meetings, allowing us to accrue funds taken in as registration fees so that we meet another important objective, namely to create financial independence, in the event that a potential sponsor attached strings to its funding, and we needed money to pay for a meeting.

Leslie, on the other hand, felt that what her colleagues in the southwest needed the most was time together away from an academic setting.

From that time until today, each region has functioned autonomously and has conducted its meetings in the way that have suited its needs best. Yet, at same time, strong traditions have been established and upheld. The glue that binds us across the regions is in this dichotomy. We respect our differences—affording room to conduct our affairs based on autonomous determinations of the needs of our respective regions. We also embrace our collective oneness and have continued to pursue similar goals. And, importantly, one very significant thing has remained the same in all six regions, and has bound us closely: our name.

So it was in 1991, the year of the second annual meeting of the Midwestern People of Color Legal Scholarship Conference; and the first annual meeting of the Southwestern People of Color Legal Scholarship Conference, that really marks the actual creation of a “regional” people of color (POC) “movement.” This was achieved with the vertical motion in the Midwest and the lateral motion from the Midwest region to the Southwest region—keeping the same name and focus on scholarship and collegiality—changing only the geographic reference.

The First National Meeting of the Six Regional People of Color (POC) Legal Scholarship Conferences was the result of a planning process that began in March 1997, during the Eighth Annual Meeting of the Midwestern People of Color Legal Scholarship Conference at The John Marshall Law School, in Chicago, Illinois.

As a result of a discussion during this 1997 meeting⁵ about how we should celebrate the 10th Annual Meeting of the Midwestern Regional POC Conference in 1999, a decision was made to plan a national meeting of all six of the regional Conferences. The decision was approved unanimously by the membership as an appropriate way to honor the, now fully developed, national POC movement.

I was asked to assume responsibility for making this vision a reality. That was how things stood as of March 1997. I spent the next eight months

5. The 1997 meeting of the Midwestern region was the Eighth Annual Meeting and was co-sponsored by The John Marshall Law School and Loyola-Chicago with Yvette Barksdale and Neil Williams sharing the on-site coordinating responsibilities.

contacting people in all six regions who were known and/or rumored to be involved in the POC movement; and who, more importantly, were likely to be willing to help plan the national meeting. The immediate objective was to organize a face-to-face steering committee meeting during the January 1998 annual meeting for the Association of American Law Schools (AALS) in San Francisco, California. Associate Dean Jonathan Sylvester (Golden Gate), offered to host this first steering committee meeting—an offer we gladly accepted—and it took place on January 10, 1998. Also in attendance at that meeting were: Professors Linda Greene (Wisconsin-Madison); Reginald Robinson (Howard); Maggie Chon (Seattle U.); Kimberly Norwood (Washington U.); Lisa Ikamoto (Loyola-L.A.); Norman Amaker (Loyola-Chicago); Leonard Baines (Western New England); Associate Dean Sylvester; and Kent Lollis, Associate Director, Minority Affairs for the Law School Admissions Council (LSAC).

During this first meeting, we confirmed The John Marshall Law School as the site, agreed on the dates, and created the structure for the standing committees.

We also began to talk about program content for the meeting and continued the process of identifying people who were known leaders within their respective regions. We also decided that, in addition to the general chair—who should provide a neutral voice—the new planning committee would consist of two members from each of the six POC regional Conferences. I accepted a nomination to serve as the general chair of the National Steering Committee. Because my school, The John Marshall Law School, was the selected site, I also assumed the duties of the chair of the On-site Committee!

The spring of 1998 was devoted to identifying and securing commitments from two people from each region to serve on the National Steering Committee. We also worked hard to make sure that the committee was diverse. This was a huge task that was accomplished through the cooperation of many people involved in a national search that took place entirely (as did most of the meeting planning), via e-mail. The result was worth the effort. What was the result? A Dream Team—a committee that could almost give committees a good name, that consisted of the following people: General Chair and Site Chair: Prof. Linda R. Crane, Midwest Region,⁶ The John Marshall Law School; Program Chair, Prof. Reginald Leamon Robinson, Mid-Atlantic Region, Howard University; Fundraising Co-Chairs, Prof. Linda Greene, Midwest Region, University of Wisconsin-Madison; Prof. Leonard Baynes, Northeastern Region, who was visiting at American University; Margaret Chon, Western Region, Seattle University; Bryan Fair, Southeastern Region, The University of Alabama; Sheila Foster, Mid-

6. My regional affiliation is the Midwest Region, but we all agreed that it was important for the chair of the Steering Committee to provide a region neutral perspective to the oversight of the planning process and content—a task that I worked scrupulously to accomplish.

Atlantic Region, Rutgers-Camden; Tanya Hernandez, Northeastern Region, St. John's University; Steven Hobbs, Southeastern Region, The University of Alabama; Darren Hutchinson, Southwestern Region, Southern Methodist University; Rogelio Lasso, Midwestern Region, Washburn University; George Martinez, Southwestern Region, Southern Methodist University; Laura Padilla, Western Region, California Western; and Antoinette Sedillo Lopez, Southwestern Region,⁷ University of New Mexico. The new, reconstituted National Steering Committee was in place and ready to begin working during the summer of 1998.

Our primary operating principle, was that all important decisions were to be made only after full disclosure and discussion that allowed input from both of the representatives of each region. Admittedly, this goal may have been ambitious and unrealistic in a less technologically advanced world. But we all felt strongly that this was an important element, if the national meeting was going to be meet our expectations. Success could only be achieved if every aspect of the meeting—programmatically, socially, emotionally, financially—was designed to have meaning for law professors of every color in every region of the country. And that required input that was nationally diverse and national in scope.

One of the first things we did as a committee was to establish a policy that the Steering Committee members would not be allowed to take prominent roles as speakers during the National meeting. We later carved out a very limited exception that allowed committee members to present and/or respond to papers during the works-in-progress sessions, but not during the plenary sessions.

We had all attended meetings where we felt that, as mere attendees, our interests were secondary to those of the planners who inevitably populated all of the important panels. These were not fond memories; and we wanted our meeting to be different. We wanted it to be an uplifting experience for those who attended. We all felt that it was important for the national POC meeting to seek the involvement of, and to focus its attention on, the members of the regional conferences who would respond to our call to come to Chicago—foregoing their regularly scheduled annual regional meeting. We did not want the attendees to play second fiddle to the meeting's planners. Consequently, appearances by Steering Committee members on the formal program were very rare and very brief—occurring only when it made the most sense, or upon special request. As general chair and site chair, I made brief comments to open the proceedings before introducing our host, Robert G. (Gil) Johnston, Dean of the John Marshall Law School, who welcomed the People of Color Conference to John Marshall Law School for the third time and gave the welcoming address. Reggie Robinson made a few opening

7. There were three members from the Southwest Regional POC Conference confirmed as members to the National Steering Committee simultaneously through the combined efforts of various people. All were allowed to remain on the committee after everyone was polled and agreed that we would not make decisions by regional vote, but by majority vote.

comments about the program in his capacity as Chair of the Program Committee. And upon the request of Juan Williams, our Keynote Speaker for the Opening Plenary (Plenary I), Linda Greene was allowed to introduce him. All of this took place during the first twenty minutes of the Thursday evening meeting. I represented the Steering Committee again on Saturday afternoon, during the Closing Plenary (Plenary 5) and led discussions about making a report to the entire body and about various other topics raised by those present in the Town Hall Meeting format.

The name of the national meeting reflected the theme embraced by the national steering committee, "People of Color Speak: Celebrating Our Emerging Voices," and was a unanimous choice. We reached consensus rapidly on the fact that we wanted the meeting to include several plenary sessions. We all also felt strongly that there should be sufficient time devoted to the all-important tradition of helping our colleagues develop their scholarship through work-in-progress sessions. We also wanted the meeting to include wonderful and diverse social events as well as some free time. Our goals were lofty for a two and a half day meeting, but we did it and, judging from the effusive positive feedback from those who attended, we did it very well. Many people said that it was the best meeting they had ever attended.⁸ The only complaint was "sensory overload."

To pay for the cost of the meeting we decided to ask the deans of all of the law schools for donations. We based this decision on the fact that they had previously paid for the meetings dating back to the very beginning of the People of Color movement. We also presented a proposal to the Law School Admission Council (LSAC), through Kent Lollis, Associate Director for Minority Affairs for the LSAC, asking for financial support.

At different times, Professors Linda Greene, Len Baynes and Rogelio Lasso all served as chairs and/or co-chairs of the fundraising committee. These combined efforts resulted in approximately \$80,000 in actual funds received from law school deans and the LSAC! This figure does not include amounts spent to pay for their faculty members to attend the meeting. It also does not include in-kind contributions.⁹ In addition to the donations from our fundraising efforts, each registrant paid a registration fee of \$175.¹⁰

8. One particularly meaningful compliment came from someone who said that the National POC meeting was the first time they had ever attended a conference (small c) where they never heard a single grumble nor complaint nor criticism from anyone during the sessions or during the free time. High praise indeed from a group of law professors.

9. In-kind contributions were donated primarily by the schools where our Steering Committee members were located and occurred in connection with their committee responsibilities and included the cost of things such as conference calls, postage, long distance phone calls, computer services, stationery and copying costs. For example, as the host of the meeting, and because the meeting was one of its Centennial Celebration academic Programs, John Marshall incurred all of the above costs and more—paying for the design, printing and mailing of the brochure, hundreds of hours of work by secretaries and its Conferences Services Department and the Public Relations Office, photography, and a lavish opening night reception—complete with champagne—with a Taste of Chicago theme!

10. This fee was waived in some cases upon request due to hardship.

Because of the fundraising efforts we were able to pay for the entire meeting and then some. As of Fall 1999, all net proceeds are going to be divided equally among the six regional people of color legal scholarship conferences. After we make these disbursements we will have met the most important objective of the national meeting—to support the continued development of the work of the Regional Conferences—in the most meaningful, and tangible way possible.¹¹ To encourage each region to develop an internal organizational structure, the Steering Committee, by agreement, has attached only one string to the disbursement. The region must formalize its structure at least slightly—enough to allow it to open a bank account that has a federal tax identification number into which the check can be deposited.

Another very important task identified early in the planning process was the need to select a fine student edited law journal to publish the proceedings of the national POC meeting. Professor Laura Padilla (California Western), assumed the primary responsibility for completing this task. Following a lengthy set of discussions, the Steering Committee agreed that since the program was divided into two natural parts: 1) the plenary sessions and 2) the works in progress sessions, that two separate symposia were appropriate. The plenary sessions were designed and executed according to a vision shared by the Steering Committee. However, the works in progress sessions were very different. There was no common theme to any of the papers and including them in the same publication containing the plenary presentations was not only unnecessary, but potentially a little schizophrenic.

We decided to accept Laura's recommendation to place the plenary proceedings with the *Boston College Third World Law Journal*; and to publish the completed works in progress in the *California Western Law Review*.

I. THE DEANS OF COLOR MEETING

One of the most exciting developments during the eighteen month planning period came in the form of a request from one of the deans after he received the letter announcing the meeting and asking for money. Shortly after sending the letter, I received a phone call from Dean Leroy Pernell, at Northern Illinois University College of Law. He wanted to make a pledge at the highest level of giving.¹² He also wanted to know whether our steering committee might consider allowing him to invite the deans of color to gather for a meeting to take place during the POC meeting.

11. We will have helped each region do what Linda Greene stated early on as her primary objective when she created the prototype in the Midwest: "to work toward positive financial independence through emancipatory politics." Linda Sheryl Green, Assoc. Vice-Chancellor for Academic Affairs, University of Wisconsin-Madison.

12. Several Deans of Color made pledges at the highest level of giving (\$1,500 or more). They are: Dean Leroy Pernell (Northern Illinois); Dean Gregory Williams (Ohio State); Dean Daniel Rodriguez (San Diego); and Dean Alice Bullock (Howard) who gave the highest amount at \$2,500. Thanks again.

We were already planning to invite six present or former deans of color to participate in a plenary session on Saturday morning called “Deans of Color Speak,” but this would be something else. Dean Pernell actually wanted to create a new organization for deans of color—something he said had never been done before. The Steering Committee’s support for the request was enthusiastic and unanimous. One of our members, Professor Antoinette Sedillo Lopez, volunteered to act as a liaison between our committee and Dean Pernell, who would plan the deans’ meeting. Several deans of color met in New Orleans (Dean Gregory Williams of Ohio State was the host) to plan their first national meeting. And on Saturday, March 27, 1999 yet another historic meeting took place when more than a dozen deans¹³ of color attended their first private business meeting at the same time that the six regional conferences each held private annual business meetings.

II. SPECIAL ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Since I am speaking for the National Steering Committee, I would be remiss for failing to issue very special “thank you’s” to some very special people for their help: Associate Dean John Sylvester (Golden Gate) for hosting our first in-person steering committee meeting in San Francisco in January 1998; Professors Leslie Espinoza (Boston College) and Antoinette Sedillo Lopez (New Mexico) for hosting our second in-person steering committee meeting in her hotel suite in New Orleans in January 1999; Associate Dean Peter Alexander (Penn State), and Professors Dennis Greene (Oregon) and Cynthia Hawkins-Leon (Syracuse) who were drafted to bring their unique talents to the task of accomplishing our vision of the program; and last but not least, three very fearless and tireless JMLS staffers—Mrs. Diane Gordon, faculty secretary; Ms. Michele Graham, Public Relations Assistant;¹⁴ and the incomparable Mr. Gary Watson, Director of Conferences Planning. Thank you. Thanks also to Georgette Reynolds, President of JMLS Black Law Students Association (BLSA). Georgette organized a

13. Later it was suggested and agreed to that the associate deans of color would be invited to attend this meeting as well.

14. We received the following placements for the National Meeting:

Chicago Lawyer magazine, May 1999 issue, feature article with photo; Chicago Lawyer magazine, May 1999 issue, second photo in different article; Shadow Broadcast, radio interview; The National Law Journal, April 19 issue, feature article with photo; Chicago Daily Law Bulletin, February 26 issue, article; Chicago Daily Law Bulletin, May 20 issue, front-page photo; New Voice of New York, March 25 issue, article; Up & Coming, March 1 to 7 issue, article; Up & Coming, April 19 to 25 issue, event photos; Near West Gazette, March 4, column mention.

We received the following media inquiries:

The Wall Street Journal; Time; The Today Show; WBBM-TV Chicago Affiliate Channel 2; BET Weekend Magazine.

After submitting our press kit to Today’s Chicago Woman, the publication nominated me for its annual poll of “100 Women Making a Difference,” which was published in its July 1999 issue.

group of students from all of the students of color organizations including BLSA, the Hispanic Law Students association (HLSA), and the Asian-Pacific Islands Law Student Association (APLSA), to provide many hands that were needed to help us in various ways during the entire meeting. Thank you all.

III. CLOSING

On a couple of occasions during the meeting I reminded everyone of what separates our “POC movement” from others to which we belong. One such occasion was during the Saturday evening LSAC-sponsored talk by Dr. Richard Adams, Director of Test Development for the LSAT. At that talk, some disagreement sparked that threatened to become disagreeable.

Namely, one of the most important characteristics of the POC “movement” is that we encourage different voices to speak up regardless of the views they reflect. The POC Conferences provide a safe place for all law professors of color, not just those some of us happen to agree with. We do not insist that everyone shares the same views and we welcome the opportunity to hear all of our colleagues’ voices. Some of us are “liberal,” some “conservative,” some are worldly, others are less so, some are angry, some content. What is important is that all of us are in a safe place when we meet.

As scholars of color we are all people of color, but we have many and diverse opinions and voices. For more than any other reason, the purpose of the national meeting of the six regional people of color legal scholarship conferences was to promote the development of those voices through publishable scholarship. The articles that appear in this symposium issue reveal our commitment to refraining from insisting that we should speak with one tongue.

Finally, I would like to thank the *California Western Law Review* for publishing our words. “Thank you.”

