
STILL WE RISE:

AFRICAN AMERICANS
AT THE UNIVERSITY
OF CONNECTICUT
SCHOOL OF LAW

By Constance Belton Green '72

UCONN
SCHOOL OF LAW

Prologue

Still I Rise

*Just like moons and like suns,
With the certainty of tides,
Just like hopes springing high,
Still I'll rise. (excerpt)*

Maya Angelou

Still I Rise, a poem by Maya Angelou, inspired the title *Still We Rise, African Americans at the University of Connecticut School of Law*. It is a story based on historical reflections and contemporary perspectives about the challenges and achievements, the courage and the grit, of African American lawyers. Justice Thurgood Marshall noted that African American lawyers have a unique role in American history, not only with respect for the rule of law, but also with respect to a responsibility to the legal system's promise of "equal justice under the law." (J. Clay Smith, *Emancipation*, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993)

Although the primary focus is the period between 1969 and 1979, information is included from before and after that decade. This account is derived from historical documents and alumni and faculty narratives. The information presented in the first person is from my direct personal experience.



Introduction

In the fall of 1969, I was one of six young African Americans to enroll at the University of Connecticut School of Law. We were not the first black students to attend the law school, although I was the first black woman. Until then, in the first 48 years of the law school's existence, seven African American men had graduated. In their class photos, they are isolated in a field of white faces. We six, all arriving that fall at a time when no other black students were enrolled, represented a turning point. We were the vanguard that would establish a lasting and continuous presence for African Americans on campus.

The law school, founded in 1921 as the Hartford College of Law, was established as a night school to supply junior lawyers to Hartford area insurance companies and banks. In 1943, in the face of plummeting enrollment brought on by World War II, it affiliated with the University of Connecticut. By 1954, after years of renewed growth following the war, the University of Connecticut School of Law had outgrown the mansion in Hartford where it had been located since 1940. The American Bar Association was recommending that the university provide more space for a library collection, classrooms and faculty offices. At the same time, the university's administration was looking for ways to shed the label of "agricultural school" historically attached to the main campus in rural eastern Connecticut. Expanding the law school and, a few years later, opening medical and dental schools in Farmington, would give the university flagship graduate schools to assist in its transformation.¹

¹Newmyer, Kent, *Hard Times and Best of Times: The University of Connecticut School of Law at 39 Woodland Street*. University of Connecticut School of Law. Hartford, Connecticut, 2016.

Construction began on a large brick building in West Hartford and in 1964, the University of Connecticut School of Law moved there. Soon afterward, Howard Sacks became dean and began to push forward on two significant fronts. One was to attract law faculty of national reputation, a task complicated by the fact that, according to Professor Colin Tait, there was hardly enough money to pay for the candidates' lunch. The second goal was to increase financial assistance to law students, including support for out-of-state applicants, a priority that would also come to encompass increasing racial diversity.²

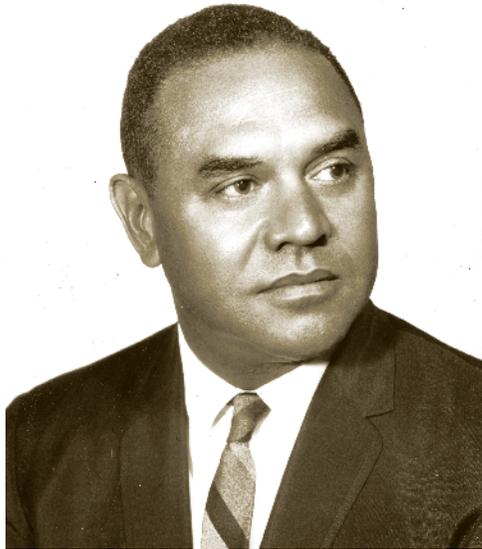


CLASS OF 1937
(Thomas J. Meskill Law Library)

Hesitant Beginnings

In 1969, law schools nationwide were still overwhelmingly segregated and African Americans were vastly underrepresented in the profession of law. For its first five decades, the Hartford College of Law and then the University of Connecticut School of Law graduated only a handful of African Americans. The first, in 1937, was Daniel I. Fletcher, who was working at the Aetna Insurance Co. in Hartford when he enrolled at the Hartford College of Law. He later became a manager for the Hartford Housing Authority and directed a groundbreaking mediation program in the Circuit Court in Hartford. It would be another 12 years before William Graham became, in 1949, the second African American to graduate from the law school, and another 12 years after that before there was a third, Paul Lewis in 1961. Alfred Rogers and E. Eugene Spear followed in 1963, and Thomas West and John Billingslea in 1969.

² *Id.*



WILLIAM GRAHAM, CLASS OF 1949, NOVEMBER 5, 1966
(*Hartford Times Photograph Collection, Hartford History Center, Hartford Public Library*)



PAUL LEWIS, CLASS OF 1961, SEPTEMBER 29, 1961
(*Hartford Times Photograph Collection, Hartford History Center, Hartford Public Library*
Photograph by Morton J. Boardman)



ALFRED ROGERS, CLASS OF 1963,
UNDERGRADUATE ON STORRS
CAMPUS
(*Thomas J. Dodd Research Center*)

The achievements of those pioneers were exemplary. Graham became a Superior Court judge, Lewis opened one of the first African American law firms in the Hartford area, Rogers was a vice president at Northeast Utilities and president of the Greater Hartford Urban League, Spear and West were appointed to the Connecticut Appellate Court, and Billingslea became a captain in the U.S. Army Judge Advocate General's Corps before he turned to acting and pursued a successful career in television and film.

In 1969, no African American woman had attended the University of Connecticut School of Law. Nor did any African American woman practice law in Connecticut, although two prominent black female attorneys had Connecticut ties. Jane Bolin graduated in 1931 from Yale Law School in New Haven, Connecticut, and became the first African American female judge in the United States when she was appointed to the Domestic Relations Court for the City of New York in 1939. Constance Baker Motley was born in New Haven, studied at Columbia Law School and was

an attorney with the NAACP Legal Defense Fund when the U.S. Supreme Court decided the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954. She became, in 1966, the first African American woman in the nation appointed to the federal bench.

According to an analysis by researcher William C. Kidder, there were 2,180 African American lawyers in the United States in 1960, making up 0.76 percent of the profession.³ Connecticut was below that average. According to census data from 1970, there were 32 black lawyers in Connecticut, 0.67 percent of the state's total. Women made up 3.8 percent of the Connecticut bar, and none were African American.

In the 1964-65 academic year, according to Kidder's estimate, about 1.3 percent of law students enrolled in the United States were African American. The American Association of Law Schools had made a modest attempt to address the problem in 1955 when its Committee on Racial Discrimination proposed that "[a]ny law school that actually denied admission to an otherwise qualified

³ Kidder, William C. "The Struggle for Access from Sweatt to Grutter: A History of African American, Latino, and American Indian Law School Admissions, 1950-2000," *Harvard Blackletter Law Journal* 19 (2003): p. 1-42. *HeinOnline*, <https://heinonline.org/HOL/P?h=hein.journals/hblj19&i=13>.



JOHN BILLINGSLEA, CLASS OF 1969
 (Thomas J. Meskill Law Library)

Negro could be dropped from membership in the Association.” That proposal, however, was blocked by some of the southern law schools.⁴ Meaningful integration did not take hold until after a series of legal actions, including U.S. Supreme Court decisions, the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and federal affirmative action policies established in 1965 and strengthened in 1969 by President Lyndon Johnson’s executive orders.

In the spring of 1969 the University of Connecticut School of Law graduated two black men. One was Billingslea, a football standout who grew up in Meriden, Connecticut, and earned his undergraduate degree at the University of Connecticut in Storrs. Billingslea indicated in a 2017 interview that although he didn’t find law school particularly isolating, he did recall that he needed the intervention of a white friend’s father to find housing in the area of the law school. And he took it for granted that his white classmates would not understand his challenges as a black man.

“All my classmates were great guys, but when I told them about my experiences in Connecticut in terms of discrimination, it was—they couldn’t believe it. And I understand. If you don’t grow up this color you don’t know what it’s like,” he said.

In 1968 debate erupted on the UConn Law campus about the absence of black students and faculty. Two white students, John Dziamba ’69 and Robert Farr ’69, asked in a letter to the Joint Student Faculty Relations Committee on September 16, 1968, why there were so few black students at the law school. They pointed out that the only black students (West and Billingslea) would graduate at the end of that academic year and the student body would be all white again unless more black students enrolled. Further, the law school had never had a black faculty member. The only black staff member, Dziamba and Farr noted, was “in the traditional job of custodian.” They urged the law school to work harder to enroll black students, recruit black faculty members and hire more black staff.

The letter was described in an article published in the student newspaper, *The Legal Realist*, on October 16, 1968. Two days later, the newspaper published a lengthy response from Assistant Dean Ronald Sampson, who struggled to explain the failure to recruit black students. The law school had only six black applicants in 1968 and offered admission to three of them, he wrote, but none accepted. He suggested that the reasons included strong competition among law schools for black applicants and UConn Law’s relatively low profile nationally. Also, he wrote, “our location in an upper middle class white community may hold little attraction for the black student reared in the ghetto and probably schooled at a predominately black institution.”

Responding at length in a letter to *The Legal Realist* on December 19, 1968, one law student saw no reason to recruit black students. Suggesting that he spoke for a “non-vocal majority,” Peter D. Campbell ’70 argued that an all-white student body was consistent with the law school’s mission as a state institution. “This is a predominately white country both culturally and socially and Negroes

⁴Leflar, Robert A. “Legal Education: Desegregation in Law Schools.” *American Bar Association Journal*, vol. 43, no. 2, 1957, pp. 145–149. JSTOR, JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/25719902.



PETER LANE, ASSOCIATE DEAN, 1962–1982
(*Thomas J. Meskill Law Library*)

are a minority,” he wrote. “I am not alone in the world when I tell you that I go for days at a time without any contact with Negroes. And do you know, I do not feel bad about that or the fact that I do not have a Negro professor or classmate or associate.” Campbell was correct in one respect—there had been minimal interaction between the law school and the increasingly diverse community in nearby Hartford.

The issue of *The Legal Realist* that carried Sampson’s explanation of minority student enrollment also contained an irritable response from Assistant Dean Peter Lane to a question about the lack of racial diversity on the law school’s staff. “If you want to criticize me for not having specifically requested a Negro, you can,” the newspaper quoted him as saying. “But that is why I tried to explain the hiring procedure to you in the first place . . . I can only interview people that are sent me by the Personnel Department in Storrs.” The university, he said, had not referred any black applicants to him. When asked about the many black staff members at the university’s School of Social

Work, he replied, “Maybe it’s because of Ray Craddock over there. He’s Assistant to the Dean. Maybe they send him all the Negroes. He’s a Negro.” Craddock replied with equanimity in an article in the December 19, 1968, edition of *The Legal Realist* that recruiting black staff required outreach. “I have found that I must actively seek out and request Black and other minority group individuals if I want them on the staff,” he said.

As the public disagreements continued, Sampson was quietly planning recruitment trips to historically black colleges. During the 1968–69 academic year, he visited Howard University in Washington, D.C.; Morgan State University in Baltimore; Morehouse College and Spelman College in Atlanta; and Hampton Institute (now Hampton University) in Hampton, Virginia. Many of the African American students who enrolled at UConn School of Law between 1969 and 1979 were actively recruited. I was among those who met Sampson at Hampton Institute and heard his offer of a full scholarship, including living expenses, if I was admitted and enrolled. Vanessa Bryant ’78, who went on to become the first black female federal judge in New England, was persuaded by the same offer to enroll in 1975. After learning she had been accepted to Georgetown, Howard and UConn, she said her decision was easy. “It was a very practical decision, UConn offered me a full scholarship,” Bryant said in a 2017 interview. Other black students throughout the decade between 1969 and 1979 have commented on the importance of scholarship funds in making their decision to attend UConn. For example, Maurice Mosley ’75, speaking at a panel discussion at the law school’s annual reunion in 2018, recalled that he had a choice between UConn and Yale law schools, but UConn offered the full scholarship.

In addition to the offer of scholarships, the plan to actively recruit African American students to UConn Law came with a decision to modify admission policies. In 1968 the admissions committee authorized a program to admit a limited number of students who did not meet the law school’s conventional criteria, which had focused solely on the applicant’s score on the Law School Admission Test,

or LSAT. Consideration would also be given to other indications of promise. Scores on the LSAT could be combined with grade point averages to give more emphasis to the academic record. Qualitative factors, including superior recommendations, distinguished graduate work in another field or an unusually compelling personal background were added to the admissions criteria.

The faculty endorsed the policy on November 5, 1969, but only after what was described in the minutes of the meeting as a “tumultuous discussion.” There is no transcript of that discussion or a record of the vote tallies, but the minutes describe two motions, proposed and defeated, to specify that the program would not involve any racial preference. While the special admissions program was intended to diversify the student body, it was not limited to minority applicants. As a 1982 internal study noted, “Some students admitted under the special admission program are not from minority groups (e.g., Black or Spanish-speaking) and some minority students are admitted under the conventional admissions program.” Nevertheless, the program was identified with minority applicants, and it proved over time to be a double-edged sword for the students who sought not only to survive law school but to thrive.



CONSTANCE GREEN, CLASS OF 1972
(*Constance B. Green Private Collection*)

1969: A Turning Point

I came to the University of Connecticut School of Law in 1969 from Virginia. Timothy Rogers '72 was from New Jersey, Harold Thompson '72 was from Ohio, and Milton Thomas '72 was from Stamford, Connecticut. Also entering in 1969, as second-year transfer students, were Kenneth Davis '71 and Ronald Powell '71, who had just completed their first year at Howard University School of Law in Washington, D.C.

Our first task was to find housing. Late in August 1969, my father and I drove from our family home in Portsmouth, Virginia, to find a place for me to live. We had an appointment with Lane, the assistant dean, who gave us a list of rooms and third-floor attic apartments available to rent in the neighborhood surrounding the law school's West Hartford campus. It seemed a safe and convenient solution to my housing needs. My father and I knocked on the door



VANESSA BRYANT, CLASS OF 1978, N.D.
(*Vanessa Bryant Private Collection*)

of one of the first homes on the list. We were curtly told that no room was available. We knocked on the front doors of several other homes on the list. We were told again and again that no room was available or the owners had decided not to rent to a law student. Without saying a word, I had only to look at the knowing disappointment in my father's eyes. That list had not been meant for me.

It was a revelation. I had been an honor student at Hampton Institute and an exchange student at Cornell University. I completed an independent study abroad program in Athens and Thessaloniki,

Greece. I thought I understood how to navigate different environments, including living in a culture different from my own. I eventually found a place to live, on Collins Street in Hartford, more than two miles from the law school. Unfortunately, the tradition of giving a list of rentals in homes to incoming students persisted for many more years, along with the barriers that African American students encountered. Bryant, who arrived to look for housing in 1975, recounted this experience:

“My plan was to rent a room in a house in the neighborhood of the law school. I came to Hartford about a week before law school began, and I obtained the list of rooms to rent from the registrar's office. I proceeded to go to the houses on the list, and 100 percent of the places that I went were unavailable for a variety of reasons. I spent two days doing that, and at the end I arrived at the home of a woman who introduced me to the director of housing for the brand new YWCA in Hartford. I moved into the YWCA, and learned that everyone residing at the YWCA had profound mental illnesses.” Bryant found the situation so intolerable that she called her family and told them she intended to return to Washington and attend Howard University School of Law. But she took her grandmother's response to heart: “Don't you think this is a good time for you to learn how to deal with racism?” She connected with other black law students and found an apartment on Marshall Street in Hartford, near the place I had found on Collins Street six years earlier. Although she was ultimately happy with the apartment she found, Bryant said the housing struggle left a mark. “It was discouraging.”

Once settled into the housing we could find in 1969, we six students faced other barriers and challenges. Each of us had been academically strong as undergraduates but felt pressure to prove to both faculty and other students that we belonged in law school. Davis recalled in a 2017 conversation how low the expectations were for his work compared with the expectations in his previous year at Howard Law. Thomas remembered the African American students being labeled “special admits” or the “others.”

While the special admissions program continued to stir controversy, Dean Sacks was mild in his public comments. He acknowledged that admissions standards had been broadened under the new program, but added that “we expect the overwhelming majority will achieve high enough grades based on normal grading standards to move to the second year.” Behind the scenes, Sacks emerged as a quiet champion who actively supported the recruitment of minority students and the success of every student on campus.

In spite of the rocky start, by the end of the fall 1969 semester, we six students had established an agenda. We decided to recruit more black law students and engage with the Hartford community. A first step was to visit Yale Law School in New Haven, because it had more black law students and an established chapter of BALSAs, the Black American Law Students Association. Yale Law’s first African American graduate had been Edwin Archer Randolph, who earned his degree in 1880 and was licensed to practice in Connecticut. However, he returned to Virginia to set up a law practice in Richmond. George W. Crawford, a 1903 graduate who became the City of New Haven’s corporation counsel, inspired the George W. Crawford Black Bar Association, which was founded in Hartford in 1977. One of the first Crawford Black Bar Association presidents was Bessye W. Bennett ’73. She was also the first African American woman licensed to practice law in Connecticut.

In the fall of 1969, the African American students at UConn School of Law established a BALSAs chapter with Thompson as president and Rogers as vice president. The organization petitioned the university for funds to recruit more black students and to establish a clinic in Hartford. They were awarded \$7,500 to cover travel expenses for out-of-state recruitment and \$1,500 to establish a clinic. “In a flurry that took most students at the law school by surprise, Black students at this and other graduate schools of the University began a campaign shortly before Christmas recess to obtain administration approval for funding Black recruiting,” *The Legal Realist* reported in January 29, 1970. BALSAs members teamed

up with students from the university’s schools of Social Work and Medicine, traveling in pairs to historically black colleges in Maryland; Washington, D.C.; North Carolina; Georgia; and Ohio.

Although BALSAs members were buoyed by the success of their campaign, many white students were ambivalent about recruiting African American students, and some were openly resentful. The article in *The Legal Realist* about the recruiting trips undertaken by BALSAs members stated: “Many students are known to be disgruntled at the apparent ease with which money was obtained by black students for black recruiting when, in their opinion, there is not enough general scholarship aid made available to all students.” A survey taken by *The Legal Realist* and published on March 12, 1970, found that while 71 percent of the students who responded were in favor of recruiting “minority groups,” 53 percent believed recruitment should not focus on African Americans and 64 percent objected to earmarking financial aid for black students. The Student Bar Association minutes from 1972 and 1973 mention several controversies over funding for BALSAs’s student recruitment efforts. After an “extensive and heated debate” on May 8, 1972, the SBA voted to cut \$1,000 from BALSAs’s budget request for recruiting and transfer it to a fund “for other students to use in the recruitment of members of other minority groups.”

Despite the friction, members of BALSAs continued recruiting, and by May 1970, they were also involved in a cooperative campus project. After members of the Ohio National Guard opened fire on a Vietnam War protest at Kent State University on May 4, 1970, killing four students, BALSAs joined the student strikes that were shutting down college campuses across the nation. All UConn Law classes were canceled and students met to strategize. Thompson led BALSAs discussions that focused on the Kent State shootings but also covered protests in black communities and the effects of racial violence, such as the 1963 bombing of a church in Birmingham, Alabama, that killed four black girls. On May 11 and 12, 1970, BALSAs held forums entitled “Racism at UConn Law School.” Shirley Zabel, a visiting law

professor, praised the events in the May 15 edition of *The Liberated Law Student*, a short-lived student publication that focused on the anti-war movement, as having raised “provocative and profound questions” about the law school, legal education, the profession and “the legal process itself.”

And so by the close of the 1969-70 academic year, six black students had established a chapter of BALSAs, had engaged actively and directly in black law student recruitment, and had connected with the campus community. It was a strong foundation for the progress that followed.



BESSYE WARREN BENNETT,
CLASS OF 1973, LEAVING FOR RADCLIFFE
COLLEGE (LEFT), AND AS A HARTFORD
PUBLIC SCHOOL TEACHER
(DR. VERA BENNETT BROWN PRIVATE COLLECTION)

1970 and Beyond: Survive and Thrive

It is difficult to say with certainty the precise number of black students who entered UConn Law in the fall of 1970. Many of the law school’s records in the 1960s and 1970s count the total number of African American students without breaking the numbers down by class year or conflate African Americans with other minority groups. The university’s records indicate that there were 22 minority students attending the law school in 1970. Rogers, who was president of BALSAs in 1971, remembers that about 12 minority students arrived in 1970 and another 10 in 1971.

Among those arriving in 1970 was Bennett. She was a trailblazer, having entered Radcliffe College at the age of 16 after graduating as valedictorian from Yates High School in Houston. In 1958 she graduated with honors and was accepted to Harvard Law School. She

deferred admittance, however, to marry her college sweetheart, John Bennett, a doctoral student in mathematics at Harvard University. They moved to Hartford and Bessye Bennett became a teacher in the Hartford Public School System. She enrolled at UConn Law in 1970 to fulfill her dream of becoming a lawyer, even as she and her husband raised three school-age children. In 1995 she sat for an interview (which also included me and Patricia Lilly Harleston '74) with the Connecticut Law Tribune. Recalling her time at UConn Law, Bennett said there were still so few African American students that they were regarded as a curiosity. But minuscule as it was, the population of black students was growing at a time of other changes on campus. More women were enrolling, anti-war protests were building and students were questioning faculty more sharply. It was almost as if it was too much for the faculty and some students to assimilate, Bennett said, although ultimately she thought “the class coped very well.”

Howard Brown '73, a graduate of Morehouse College in Atlanta who arrived the same year as Bennett, recalled his activism as a first-year law student, including anonymously putting flyers of protest under some professors' office doors. He further recalled being one of the first black students to work with the student newspaper, *The Legal Realist*.

Linda Kelly '76 arrived at the law school as a second-year transfer student from California. Born in North Carolina, she wanted to finish law school on the East Coast. She recalled that a lot of her law school experiences related to the fact that she was an Evening Division student and worked full-time at Hartford National Bank. She later commented, “I don't know if I ever looked to fit in because it wasn't something that happened. You dealt with the cards you were dealt. You dealt with life as you found it, and you made a way to do the best that you could do with the situation.”

On October 26, 1970, BALSAs members teaming up with students from the schools of Medicine and Social Work opened a clinic in the basement of the Warburton Community Church at



LINDA KELLY, CLASS OF 1976, N.D.
(LINDA KELLY PRIVATE COLLECTION)

Flatbush and Brookfield Avenues in the city's Charter Oak section, offering “one stop legal, social and medical services” to Hartford residents. The clinic operated for a year and a half before students concluded that it was too time-consuming to continue.

The law school was just a mile and a half from the Hartford border, but it was a line that separated two communities with vastly different demographic profiles. By 1960, nearly 25,000 African Americans were living in Hartford, about 15 percent of the city's population, and by 1970 there were about 44,000, nearly 28 percent of the city's population. In contrast, the 1960 census reported 229 African Americans in West Hartford, comprising 0.3 percent of the population. By 1970, only 1.3 percent of the population of Hartford County outside the City of Hartford was African American.



PICKETERS IN FRONT OF NOAH WEBSTER SCHOOL,
WEST HARTFORD CT, APRIL 15, 1966
(HARTFORD TIMES PHOTOGRAPH COLLECTION,
HARTFORD HISTORY CENTER, HARTFORD PUBLIC LIBRARY)

As Professor Stacey Close of Eastern Connecticut State University described that period in a 2001 article, members of the growing black community in Hartford began to assert themselves more firmly as the 1960s progressed. Their efforts consisted mainly of peaceful rallies and marches to protest widespread discrimination in housing, education and employment. Decades of patient, non-confrontational strategy had brought some incremental progress, including the establishment of a city Human Rights Commission in 1963, but the pace was slow. As race riots spread across the country in 1967, a relatively minor incident in Hartford's North End blew up. A young black man was arrested, accused of using vulgar language to a waitress

in a black-owned luncheonette. Three days of riots ensued, with a firebombing and damage to both black- and white-owned businesses.⁵

Later that year, the Hartford branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People led a march to protest discrimination in housing. Police stopped the marchers and forced them to disperse before they reached the South End, where about 300 white residents waited to repel what some of them were calling an "invasion." The next night the unrest continued. Police arrested 54 people and fired tear gas into crowds of young African Americans who were throwing rocks and bottles. Among the NAACP leaders working to calm the violence and push for progress was Wilber Smith, a young and energetic activist from Florida who had marched with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. He led movements to open corporate jobs to African Americans, diversify the city's police force and combat housing discrimination. He later became a state senator, then enrolled at UConn School of Law, where he earned his JD in 1986.

After the 1967 protests in Hartford, there were signs of improving race relations. Employment opportunities for African Americans opened up in the public sector and improved in the insurance industry, which was growing so vigorously that Hartford was becoming known as the "insurance capital of the world." Global insurance companies such as Aetna began hiring young African American professionals and recent college graduates from out of state. By 1969 an African American middle class was emerging.⁶

At UConn School of Law, African American students continued to come together for support as they dealt with resistance and cold shoulders on campus. Recalling those times in the Connecticut Law Tribune interview, Harleston said: "There were people that we were friends with that were white. And then there were the others that just did not like you, would not talk to you." She remembered an anonymous flyer full of racial animosity that angered black students, and some white ones. "It was directed at the black students," she said. "The message was 'We were stupid and we were dumb, we were taking money.' It was bad." She and Bennett remembered a professor

⁵Stacey Close, "Fire in the Bones: The NAACP, Civil Rights, and Militancy in Hartford, 1943-67," *Journal of Negro History*, Summer 2001.

⁶*Id.*

who was known for giving all African American students a grade of D. The administration told black students they didn't have to take that professor's class, but Bennett signed up anyway. "I took the course from the guy who gave the D, and I got the D," she said. "[T]here was something in me that said, 'I've got to go and take that guy's class. I've got to sit there and see what it is about him and look him in the eye and just find out what it is that makes him feel I'm such an oddity ... that the rules have to be broken just for me.'"

In 1974, 21 black students signed a petition to the dean's office calling for an investigation into discriminatory grading and other problems, including the lack of black faculty. The petition described a hostile environment for African American students in which "racial slurs are made in the classroom, written on bulletin boards and placed in other visible areas." Roger Brewer '75, an African American student, filed a complaint with the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare about discriminatory grading and faculty hiring at the law school. An investigation followed, conducted by Walter J. Leonard, an administrator from Harvard University. Leonard found support for Brewer's claims of discrimination and recommended changes to subjective grading policies and increased efforts to hire African American faculty members. The Leonard Report suggested that a climate of low expectations affected the performance of the black students.

Mosley recalled a feeling that African American students were inexplicably lagging. He felt that he was failing in his first year, a development that he couldn't reconcile with his prior success as a student at the University of South Carolina and as a public school teacher. But he was determined to become a lawyer and work in his hometown of Waterbury, where there was not a single African American attorney. On the advice of friends, he sought connections with his professors. One of them, Peter Adomeit, who later moved to Western New England College of Law, worked with him twice a week for two hours at a time on his legal writing. "I loved that guy," Mosley said in a 2018 interview. "For a full year he worked with me

and after that full year I knew I could do anything." Still, Mosley left law school feeling bitter. "I hated law school," he said. "I swore that I was never coming back." Over the years, as he established a successful law firm in Waterbury, served five terms in the state legislature and became a Superior Court judge, he developed another perspective on his law school years. "That struggle really prepared me for the rest of my life. When you go through fire, you get good, you get stronger." (Sean Mosley, the son of Maurice Mosley, enrolled at UConn Law in 2017.)

Many law students struggled to succeed, but African American students had the added burden of having to prove that they belonged in an unwelcoming environment. Some didn't make it. Alfred Rogers, the 1963 graduate, remembered that in the early 1960s there were two black students who left UConn Law without finishing their degrees. Billinsglea remembered another African American in the late 1960s who left after one year. No reliable statistics seem to have been kept about minority student admission or attrition. Yet, in 1974, Acting Dean Francis Cady reported to the university's president that, "Of the Black and Spanish-speaking students admitted in 1970 and 1971, 13 were dismissed for scholastic deficiency, but of these 7 were readmitted as probationers or repeaters and all have remained in good scholastic standing."

While feeling the full brunt of racism, black female students also had to contend with sexism. Sometimes it was hard to tell which form of discrimination was at work in a given situation. Bennett recalled an attitude that women were "taking up spaces" at the law school that belonged to men, but she also remembered that some male students were supportive. "There was one situation where for about two weeks in a row no women were called on in class. So finally one of the male students said to the professor, 'There are, you know, people other than men in this class, and we'd like to hear from our female students.' And shouts and applause."

Over the next decade the law school declared a commitment to recruiting minority students but the ratio barely budged. In 1974,

Mosley, then president of BALSAs, called on the administration to take over primary responsibility for minority recruitment from BALSAs. “We don’t have the time or the resources to do an effective job,” he told *The Pocket Part*, another student newspaper, on December 17, 1974. By 1977, 25 of the 650 students at UConn School of Law, or 3.8 percent, were African American. In 1979, 24 of the 608 students enrolled, or 3.9 percent, were African American. Over the next 10 years, growth would continue at a crawl. By 1989, of the 724 students enrolled, 35 or 4.8 percent were African American.

Throughout this time, life for African American law students was both bitter and rewarding. Each student had to find his or her own way of coping, and many described a day-in, day-out struggle punctuated with small successes. Bryant had a daily routine. She would bring a small container of trail mix to a carrel or other quiet space in the law library and study alone until she had finished all her class assignments or until the library closed. She became aware that some law students had formed study groups but didn’t recall ever being invited to join one. Bryant did, however, find support from some faculty members. She recalled taking a class with Sacks, the former dean. “He was known as a difficult grader, a very demanding person, and someone for whom I had a great deal of respect. He was able to bring out the best in me.” She received the top grade in Sacks’ Legal Profession class.

With BALSAs at the center, African American students throughout the 1970s created a supportive community. Marshall Whitley ’73 recalled renting a house in West Hartford with three other law students. It became a gathering place where students socialized, played basketball and studied together. Whitley had been raised in Maryland, and like many black UConn Law students from the South, found Northern racism to be profound but relatively subtle. He said he never heard a racial slur on campus until he ran for president of the Student Bar Association in his third year. “It was an eye-opener on Northern racism,” he said in 2018. Whitley,

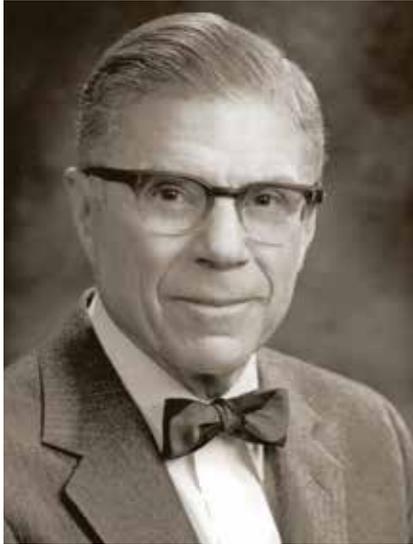


Black Law Students Association meeting,
February 23, 1984
(UConn Photography Laboratory, Office of Public
Relations)

now a retired judge in California, didn’t win that election. In the 1975-76 academic year another African American student, Jon Marc Hannibal, was elected president of the SBA.

Eric Coleman ’77 remembered with fondness the pick-up basketball games and how the drive of black classmates helped him succeed. “There were I think seven students of color in my class,” he wrote in 2018. “We studied together, played basketball together, and socialized together. The main thing was finding a connectedness outside of classes. Some of the social and professional relationships I developed still exist today.” Coleman was also one of the leaders of BALSAs in sponsoring the law school’s first Minority Recruitment Conferences. The conferences, intended to draw minority applicants from the Northeast, included workshops on student life, presentations on financial aid and the curriculum, and panels featuring African American lawyers.

Yet, despite progress on several fronts, African American students still felt themselves to be in a hostile environment at UConn Law.



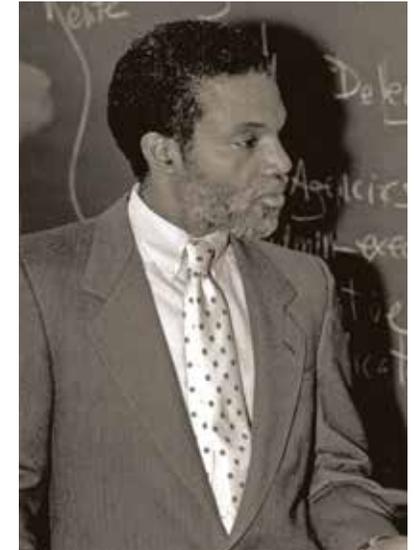
DEAN BLUMBERG, DEAN, 1974-1984;
 PROFESSOR OF LAW, 1974-1989;
 PROFESSOR EMERITUS,
 1989-PRESENT
(Thomas J. Meskill Law Library)

A feeling of difference lingered throughout the 1980s for African American students. Surette Briggs '85 was president of the BLSA chapter—the national organization changed its name in 1983 to the Black Law Students Association—when she described uncomfortable feelings of standing out as a minority student. “You are always different, and you feel that difference,” she said in the Spring 1984 edition of the alumni publication, the Starr Report. By 1989, 20 years after the first community of black students began to form at UConn School of Law, African Americans still made up less than 5 percent of the student body.

Racial stereotypes proved difficult to change and racial friction persisted. Phillip I. Blumberg, who served as dean from 1974 to 1984, reflected a widely held view. “Minority students at this school mostly come from deprived families—not from middle-class families—and they don’t perform as a group like others,” he said in a 2009 interview. Although his statement was not consistent with the family backgrounds of many of the students of color, it did indicate the permeating effects of unintentional racial stereotyping.

Blumberg also hired the first African American faculty member and frequently expressed support for minority recruitment of both students and faculty. He made a point of meeting with black student leaders to hear their concerns, and was fondly mentioned by several of the African American students in recalling their law school days. Bryant remembered her pride when he singled her out to congratulate her on her strong grade point average. “[I]t was very inspiring to me,” she said. Kelly remembered a seminar taken with Blumberg, as did Coleman.

JOHN BRITTAIN, PROFESSOR OF LAW
1977-1999
(THOMAS J. MESKILL LAW LIBRARY)



Faculty

A critical development for African Americans at UConn School of Law came in 1977, with the arrival of the first African American faculty member. John Brittain, a young and accomplished civil rights lawyer then in private practice in San Francisco, was recruited to join the faculty. For Brittain it was a return home. He was born in Norwalk, Connecticut, and had attended Howard University and its law school, where he was surrounded by influential civil rights activists such as Stokely Carmichael and John Lewis. He became active in the anti-war movement and, after he graduated from law school in 1969, spent four years as a civil rights lawyer in Mississippi before entering private practice in San Francisco.

After four years in private practice, he decided to seek a law faculty position. His mentor, Howard Law Professor Herbert O.

Reid, had been urging him to make the move. Reid told Brittain to follow the footsteps of civil rights leader Charles Hamilton Houston, a former dean of Howard Law, “to go into law teaching, with one foot in the law school academia; and also become an active civil rights lawyer, with one foot outside the law school,” as Brittain later described it. Ultimately, that is exactly what he did.

UConn Law sought out Brittain through Sanford Cloud Jr., his best friend and law school classmate, then a state senator in Connecticut and a part-time adjunct faculty member at UConn Law. A widely respected and prominent member of the legal community, locally and nationally, Cloud later became a vice president at Aetna, a partner at Robinson and Cole, president of the Aetna Foundation and president of the National Conference for Community Justice. Blumberg, ever blunt, recalled in the 2009 interview that he had asked Cloud to help with faculty recruitment, telling him: “We’re racist to the core. We don’t have any minority people. You find one for me.” Cloud told Brittain that UConn Law wanted him. “You owe it to your home state of Connecticut to come back home now,” Brittain remembered Cloud saying.

After his arrival at UConn Law, Brittain quickly became an adviser to BALSAs and the mentor many black law students had been waiting for. True to his plan, he continued his work as a civil rights attorney while he was teaching. In 1989 he was a leading member of the legal team that brought the landmark *Sheff v. O’Neill* school desegregation case in Connecticut. In 1996, the Connecticut Supreme Court ordered the state to come up with a plan to integrate public schools. The litigation continued with new settlements in 2002 and 2008 as the plaintiffs sought to enforce compliance. The results have included additional resources for urban school districts and voluntary incentives such as magnet and charter schools to encourage integration. Brittain recalled that the dean at that time of the original lawsuit, Hugh Macgill, came under political pressure to fire Brittain or force him to stop litigating the case because “they said the state of Connecticut shouldn’t be paying a law professor to, in their opinion,

bring trouble against the state regarding the segregation in the school system.” Macgill held firm, and Brittain stayed on the job and on the case.

Gail Hardy ’93 remembered Brittain as an inspiring—and challenging—teacher. “[B]ack then, I remember thinking that he sort of picked on black students,” she said in a 2017 interview, recalling one particularly testy exchange she had with him in class. But she came to appreciate his tough Socratic method of questioning students and his insistence that students prepare thoroughly for class. “That’s Professor Brittain. He’s the person who helped me get here,” she said. Hardy, an Evening Division student who was working full-time as a probation officer during law school, went on to become the first African American state’s attorney in Connecticut.

In 1999, after 22 years on the faculty, Brittain left UConn School of Law to become dean of the Thurgood Marshall School of Law at Texas Southern University. For 12 of those 22 years at UConn Law he was the only African American in a full-time, tenure-track position on the faculty. Over the years, the law school had hired some minority instructors on a part-time basis to serve as adjunct faculty and had brought in a handful of black visiting professors. The 1982 internal report noted that there had been one Hispanic and two black lawyers teaching part-time in 1981, in addition to Brittain. And yet, the report stated, “While there is no feeling on the faculty that one black professor is enough, we have not set as an institutional goal the hiring of additional minority faculty members.” Nevertheless, the second African American hired to the full-time faculty, Paula Bonds, arrived in 1983. She left two years later to litigate voting rights cases with the American Civil Liberties Union, leaving Brittain the sole black full-time professor for another six years.

In 1991, the law school hired two African American women for full-time, tenure-track faculty positions. Robin Barnes, a legal expert on critical race theory, left the faculty in 2014. Willajeanne McLean, an internationally recognized expert on the interface of intellectual property and European law, remains at UConn Law, where she has



PAULA BONDS, ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF
LAW 1983-1985
(THOMAS J. MESKILL LAW LIBRARY)



ROBIN BARNES, PROFESSOR OF LAW
1991-2014
(THOMAS J. MESKILL LAW LIBRARY)

been named a distinguished professor of law and served as the law school's interim dean for the 2012-13 academic year.

Another African American woman, Kaaryn Gustafson, whose research has focused on inequality in the welfare and criminal justice systems, was a member of the full-time faculty from 2004 to 2014. She left to join the faculty of the University of California Irvine School of Law. In 2018, Jamelia Morgan, whose work focuses on prison reform, joined the full-time faculty.

Despite their small numbers, African American professors have had a considerable impact on students. Brittain remembered Barnes bringing new ideas to campus. "Robin was very active with BLSA students, and she showed what a difference an African American law professor could have not only with the black law students but also with the white law students," he said. "When Robin arrived as a

professor, she added new energy and new perspectives and was deeply committed."

Interviewed in 2018, Gustafson recalled the challenges faced by African American students during her years at the law school. "I remember there was one week when I was there when I had a white student drop by my office and say, 'I just love this campus. It's a campus where everybody says hello and everybody is so friendly.' The next day I had a black student in my office who said, 'Being on this campus is oppressive. No one will even make eye contact with me when I cross the quad.' And I thought, well, that speaks to something."

McLean said she empathized with black students who feel the weight of being the only, or one of the only, African Americans in a class. "I think that's the downside, not having enough people in each class so that one does not feel singled out," she said in a 2018 interview. She credits BLSA for creating a sense of community—through events, study groups, mentorships and other programs—that has helped African American students succeed. McLean has also served as BLSA faculty advisor.

Both McLean and Gustafson regard the recruitment of black faculty as a challenge. McLean described a self-perpetuating problem: "I think it's harder to recruit when there are few people," McLean said. "You come in, and one wonders, why aren't there more who look like me?" Gustafson remembered the law school making offers that were rejected. "We made job offers to a number of faculty of color, and everybody said, 'I look at the communities, Hartford and West Hartford, and all the surrounding communities, and it looks like my choices are one segregated community or another. I don't see a critical mass of faculty and students at the law school. How is this going to be for me?'" Yet both McLean and Gustafson made strong connections with other faculty members and earned their respect. Gustafson said she still values the support of deans Nell Newton, Jeremy Paul and Timothy Fisher and colleagues such as professors Alexandra Lahav and Peter Siegelman. McLean, a prominent and



KAARYN GUSTAFSON,
PROFESSOR OF LAW, 2004-2014
(THOMAS J. MESKILL LAW LIBRARY)



WILLAJEANNE McLEAN,
PROFESSOR OF LAW, 1991-
(THOMAS J. MESKILL LAW LIBRARY)



BLACK LAW STUDENTS ASSOCIATION, 1992; FRONT, L-R: CORINNE BROWN,
ASTREAD FERRON, DANETTE MOLINA, OWEN McDONALD; BACK, L-R:
HERMAN WOODARD, RAE THIESFIELD, REGINA LONG, JOAN HARRIS, ALVIN
WILSON, DON GREEN, DENISE WARNER, RAMON WILLIAMS-SMITH
(RES SECUNDAE VOLUME 4. THOMAS J. MESKILL LAW LIBRARY)

respected faculty member, also recalled the personal connections she has made. When her sister died, leaving her the only survivor of her nuclear family, Dean Paul collected the names, phone numbers and addresses of faculty and staff in a book and left it on her chair “so that I would know I had a family.”

BLSA Influence

One significant and continuous thread in the story of African Americans at UConn Law is the story of BLSA. The UConn Law chapter has advocated for and supported students for nearly 50 years, with each new class absorbing the organization’s history and mission. Over the years its members have sponsored study groups, social and networking events, academic forums, orientation sessions and a host of other events and activities. Former BLSA President Natalie Braswell ’07 said that during her time at UConn Law, BLSA members often studied together and helped one another, their solidarity stemming from a shared sense of being outsiders. “I would say 99 percent of us were first-generation law students,” she said. “So

we didn't know, like, how to handle this whole Socratic Method? Or how do you note-take effectively?"

Christine Jean-Louis '08 noted that what attracted her to UConn Law after she had been accepted to other law schools was meeting the other black students on campus and meeting Assistant Dean Karen DeMeola, "who really sold me a little bit on the school, and so I decided to come here." Both Braswell and Jean-Louis held leadership positions in BLSA.

For more than a decade, BLSA members at UConn Law took an active role in recruiting minority students, traveling to historically black colleges throughout the South and into the Midwest and sponsoring annual Minority Recruitment Conferences at the law school for potential applicants from the Northeast. They advised the Admissions Committee and reached out to African American applicants. Eventually, BLSA members succeeded in turning much of the responsibility for minority recruitment over to the Admissions Office, where they had long felt it properly belonged. But they also expanded their efforts in a new direction, working to establish a path into the legal profession that reaches back to high school and even middle school. Among these "pipeline" projects is the Summer Law Institute, which continues to this day. High school students from Hartford spend two weeks preparing with law students for a mock trial, with a volunteer judge and jury hearing the case. Keisha Palmer '09 was instrumental in developing the program and securing funding from Robinson & Cole LLP, where she became a partner in 2018.

Although the BLSA chapter was founded by and for African American students, its advocacy and support has extended to all students of color, a need that was especially strong in the chapter's early years, before other minority students formed distinct affinity groups. Alliances with those organizations, as well as with the George W. Crawford Black Bar Association, also continue. BLSA events are intended not only to support students of color but to reach out to the entire campus community, help shape its social conscience and contribute to a welcoming environment for all students. The annual

Night of Inspiration in February, which features prominent speakers addressing themes of race and diversity, has become one of the law school's premiere events.



THE UCONN LAW CAMPUS WAS AT 1800 ASYLUM AVENUE IN WEST HARTFORD, *LEFT*, UNTIL 1984, WHEN IT MOVED TO THE GROUNDS OF THE FORMER HARTFORD SEMINARY IN THE WEST END OF HARTFORD, *RIGHT*.

Change Is a Constant

In 1984, after 20 years at the uninspiring and increasingly crowded West Hartford campus, UConn School of Law returned to Hartford. Blumberg had worked for 10 years to arrange the move to the former grounds of the Hartford Seminary in the city's West End. McLean, arriving in 1991, found "a most beautiful campus." The handsome neo-Gothic stone buildings projected a classical dignity, which was enhanced in 1996 by the opening of an imposing new library, built in the same style with granite from the same quarry as the original buildings. The move brought the law school a few miles closer to the state Capitol, the courts and the corporations where students continue to find opportunities and connections. It also moved the law school from an overwhelmingly white suburb back to a city that was even more diverse than it had been two decades earlier.

After DeMeola '96 became director of admissions in 2000, the law school ended its special admissions program but not its focus on recruiting minority students. Having enrolled under the program herself in 1993, DeMeola had felt that double-edged sword—a stigma that marginalized the students involved. At her suggestion, the law school adopted a more comprehensive approach to all applicants. The Admissions Committee began to consider all qualifying criteria, not just LSAT scores, for everyone. “When you branch out and take a holistic view of admissions, you get a much more diverse class,” DeMeola said in 2017. Meanwhile, the Admissions Office continues its recruiting visits to majority black colleges and outreach to minority student groups at other undergraduate institutions.

DeMeola has marked a turning point herself, serving as director of admissions, dean of students and administrative dean, and teaching as an adjunct professor. She brings a deep commitment to diversity and serves as a seemingly tireless source of compassion and support for students, particularly those who feel marginalized. She has also been an inspiring role model, a gay woman of mixed race who is prominent not only on campus but in the legal community. In 2017-18, she served as president of the Connecticut Bar Association.

Yet there have been setbacks, and the weekend after Martin Luther King Jr. Day in January 2007 brought a big one. About 75 UConn Law students attended an off-campus “Bullets & Bubbly” party tied to denigrating stereotypes of African Americans. Many black students, and some white ones, were appalled by photographs from Facebook of their classmates wearing do-rags, hoodies and necklaces with big medallions, some of them carrying bottles of malt liquor. It brought scathing national media attention to the campus and registered a low point for many of the African American students at UConn School of Law at the time. Gustafson later recalled her distress and that of her students. “It was hard to see,” she said. “It was hard to go into a classroom and know that the students of color were feeling so much pain over that. And it was also hard to go into the classroom knowing how disrespectful so many of my white students

were toward people of color and poor people.”

Jean-Louis and Braswell remembered in a 2017 interview the controversy and the reaction of BLSA. News organizations, including CNN, were looking to the organization for a response, and BLSA members decided it had to be strategic and measured, but forceful. “We were all either going into summer associate positions at prominent firms or had accepted positions at firms,” said Braswell, who was then president of the BLSA chapter. “What we said and what we did to deal with this particular situation was going to be on the record.” BLSA members crafted a public statement and list of demands and presented it to the interim dean, Kurt Strasser, and incoming dean, Jeremy Paul. “We used our lawyering,” said Jean-Louis, who was then secretary of the BLSA chapter. Nineteen members of BLSA signed the document.

“It is important to note that this is not an isolated incident and that some Black students at UConn Law have felt the sting of prejudice in a variety of contexts,” the statement said. It went on to quote the Rules of Professional Conduct regarding a prohibition on racial bias in the representation of clients, and continued to the demands, starting with two familiar ones: stronger efforts to recruit a racially diverse student body and to hire faculty of color. The demands also included diversity training, mandatory community service projects, a pro-bono requirement, and a more diverse set of portraits in the elegant Reading Room, where a ring of white men had looked down for decades on law school events. The impression that those portraits had made on African American students was lasting. Mosley remembered it vividly, more than four decades after his graduation in 1975. “You walked into the law school at this time and all of the pictures on the wall, every picture was Caucasian, every picture, every professor, everything was Caucasian. And it was like, ‘Why are you here?’”

In response to the 2007 statement from BLSA, Strasser and Paul announced events and new classes to foster discussions of racism and referred many of the other demands to a new Diversity

Advisory Committee. A group of students responded by founding a new student newspaper, *Pro Se*, devoted to “making positive changes on our campus.” A new student-run Diversity Committee organized diversity-related events that evolved into Diversity Week, a series of events each spring to encourage and celebrate diversity and inclusion on campus. With funding from Shipman & Goodwin LLP, Diversity Week has grown into a popular tradition that includes panel discussions, social events and a talent showcase.

Other external changes to the law school landscape help create a more welcoming environment. For example, in 2007 an exhibition of photographs of female judges was added to the Reading Room. The photographs of the female judges, many of them women of color, had an impact on Mosley’s son, Sean Mosley, who enrolled in the Evening Division in 2016. Walking around the Reading Room during his law school orientation, he recognized judges who are his father’s friends, women he had grown up knowing as legal professionals. “To see that is empowering,” he said in a 2018 interview. “My father and his contemporaries didn’t have those people they could relate to.” In April 2019, the law school dedicated four new oil portraits of women, including Bryant and Kelly, to hang on the Reading Room walls.



KAREN DEMEOLOA
ASSISTANT DEAN FOR FINANCE AND
ADMINISTRATION

Epilogue

By Karen DeMeola, Assistant Dean for Finance and Administration

The story of African American and black students at the Law School continues today. Each decade presents both similar and different social and political challenges. Yet, the perseverance, grit and success of our graduates is unquestioned. It’s a constant source of consternation, frustration and incomprehension that many of our black students feel exactly the same today as their predecessors did decades prior. The examination of why this occurs suggests no easy fix. The legacy of the early alumni lives on, but so does the legacy of our school and our profession.

Today BLSA continues to be a source of support and provides a nurturing community for our students. Balancing the personal

experiences of discrimination, both in the classroom and out, were and continue to be challenging. BLSA's voice and its constant presence have made so many of our students feel a sense of comfort and reassurance that the feelings of marginalization were real, that there was support to handle it, and that alumni have persisted. Like many law schools, UConn Law has felt the drop in applications, including the drop in African American students. Yielding a diverse class is a challenge nationally, and in particular for schools like ours. Although the legal field has embraced diversity and inclusion efforts, the lack of African American partners and lawyers generally make it even more difficult to bring in a diverse class. All of this matters. As the national conversation continues through the decades, so too does the conversation on law school campuses. Systems of oppression, implicit bias, economic disparities, and the lack of equality continue to affect our nation and our law school. It is not surprising that many of our challenges remain.

Yet UConn Law has grown and changed. The legacy of BLSA remains, but today BLSA collaborates with admissions and the administration generally. BLSA no longer carries the burden of institutional recruitment. And admissions practices have moved away from "special admissions" toward a more holistic model where all students are encouraged to be authentic and to tell their stories. Although the LSAT and GPA continue to be significant factors in the application process, allowing students to put things in context is important. First-generation status, overcoming obstacles, or fighting socioeconomic or educational barriers became important in creating the narrative for an applicant. Intentionality in hiring faculty and staff have been among the changes in the administrative and academic halls of the school. It is now easy to find champions and allies throughout our campus. However, there are not enough of us in positions of power in the administration and in the faculty; not enough students in our pipeline. We can do better.

In addition to continued efforts to add faculty—our newest is Jamelia Morgan and our constant is Willajeanne McLean—we

also have had a roster of commencement speakers who emphasize our commitment to diversity. This began in 1981 with civil rights leader and law professor Derrick Bell, and has included Judge Leon Higginbotham Jr. of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit; former Michigan Supreme Court Justice Dennis Archer, who was the first African American president of the American Bar Association; Justice Allyson Duncan of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit; and civil rights leader and Congressman John Lewis. In 2007 an exhibition of photographs of female judges was added to the Reading Room, and in 2018 the law school hired a painter to create portraits of four women, including two African Americans. Images on our walls are not enough to tackle the issues brewing in the national political and legal landscape. However, images represent something bigger, an attempt to right the narrative, to recognize the important contributions of alumni and students of color who were and are pioneers even today.

The University of Connecticut School of Law is blessed with a legacy of more than half a century of remarkable African American graduates, student, staff and faculty. Inspired by their stories, the law school community must stay vigilant and work toward greater diversity and inclusivity.

There are no easy answers for how to eliminate injustices or how to increase racial diversity at the law school, but there is no question of giving up.

In standing up for what is right, in deciding that failure is never an option, African American students continue to exemplify courage, as do the faculty and deans who fight for a diverse and inclusive campus. The struggle continues, yet still we rise. ✨

APPENDIX

MINORITY ALUMNI DAY, 1982: FRONT L-R: FRANCISCO PEDRAZA '80, FLORICE ROBERTS '78, PATRICIA LILY '74, EVA THURMAN '77; BACK, L-R: SHERIDAN MOORE '78, HOWARD BROWN '73, ALAN GREEN '74, EVANS JACOBS '77, BRENDA JACKSON '77, WILLIAM WEBB '74, JENNIFER SINCLAIR '76, FRANCISCO BORGES '78.
(*Starr Report Summer 1982. Thomas J. Meskill Law Library*)

FACULTY**John Brittain (1977-1999)**

Distinguished Service Award (1999)

Brittain was the first African American faculty member at the University of Connecticut School of Law. During his 22 years at the law school, he was a lead counsel for the plaintiffs in the landmark school desegregation lawsuit *Sheff v. O'Neill*. He left UConn Law to become dean of the Thurgood Marshall School of Law at Texas Southern University in Houston. In 2018, he was appointed acting dean of the University of the District of Columbia David A. Clarke School of Law.

Paula Bonds (1983-1985)

Bonds was the first female African American faculty member at UConn

School of Law, where she taught torts, civil rights law and family law for two years. She left to work as a staff attorney at the American Civil Liberties Union, litigating voting rights cases. She subsequently pursued a long career as a consultant in leadership and organization development and the general practice of law. She died in 2017.

Willajeane McLean (1991-)

Distinguished Service Award (2013)

McLean joined UConn School of Law as a professor in 1991, bringing expertise in intellectual property law and European law. She served as interim dean of the law school in 2012-13. Before joining the faculty, McLean worked as a trademark lawyer in private practice in New York. Fluent in French, she has been a guest lecturer all over the world.

Robin Barnes (1991-2014)

Barnes joined the faculty of UConn School Law in 1991. Her area of expertise is critical race theory and she also taught Advanced Constitutional Law. Her scholarship in the field of critical race theory and constitutional rights included publications in the Yale University, Columbia University, and Harvard law reviews.

Kaaryn Gustafson (2004-2014)

Gustafson joined UConn Law in 2004, teaching Criminal Procedure, Critical Identity Theory and So-cial Welfare Law. Early in her career she was a public interest fellow at the Women of Color Resource Center, an advocacy organization assisting women of color and marginalized women. She continued her advocacy at UConn School of Law, focusing on the rights of those in poverty. In 2014 she joined the faculty of the University of California, Irvine School of Law, where she is co-director of the school's Center on Law, Equality and Race.

ALUMNI

The University of Connecticut School of Law has a legacy of more than half a century of remarkable African American alumni who are trailblazers and leaders in the profession. We hope, over time, this representative list will be expanded.

Daniel I. Fletcher '37

Fletcher was the first African American graduate of the Hartford College of Law. After earning his law degree, he left Aetna Life Insurance to work as a manager for the Hartford Housing Authority. Throughout his career, he played an important role in Hartford's African American community, serving on many boards and participating in many religious organizations and civic groups. After retiring from the Housing Authority he served as legislative liaison for the state Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities.

The Honorable William Graham '49

Public Service Award (1975)

Graham enrolled at the University of Connecticut School of Law after serving in the U.S. Army. After graduation, he opened a solo law practice, served as a public defender and supported the creation of Legal Aid Services for Hartford County and Neighborhood Legal Services. He also served on the legal staff of the City of Hartford and became the first African American assistant corporation counsel for the city. He was appointed to the Connecticut Superior Court bench in 1972.

Paul Lewis '61

After graduation, Lewis served for four years as assistant corporation counsel for the City of Hartford. He later joined a law practice with Boce Barlow, who became Connecticut's first African American state senator and first African American judge. Lewis played an influential role in the community through his involvement in several organizations, including the NAACP and the Greater Hartford Chamber of Commerce, and as a member of the state's Real Estate Commission.

Alfred Rogers '63

Before attending UConn Law, Rogers made national headlines as an undergraduate at the University of Connecticut. A largely Jewish fraternity accepted him as a pledge and successfully fought its national organization to admit him as the first black member in 1950. He went on to a career in utilities, retiring as regional vice president of Northeast Utilities. He was elected to the Hartford Board of Education in 1965 and served as its first African American chairman. He later served as chief executive officer of the Greater Hartford Urban League.

The Honorable E. Eugene Spear '63

Spear was named a Superior Court judge in 1982, and in 1991 was named chief administrative judge for the civil division of Connecticut's Superior Court. He was nominated to the state's Appellate Court in 1994, the only African American on the court at the time. He previously served as a public defender in Bridgeport and as a member of the Bridgeport Board of Education.

John "Beau" Billingslea '69

A standout athlete in high school and college, Billingslea joined the U.S. Army after graduation from law school and served in Europe with the Judge Advocate General's Corps. He left the Army after six years to pursue a successful acting career in television and films. His film credits include "The Blob" and "Star Trek Into Darkness," and he has also appeared in numerous television series and video games.

The Honorable Thomas G. West '69

West was appointed to the Connecticut Appellate Court in 2002 after serving as a Connecticut Superior Court judge for 18 years. Before his appointment to the bench, he worked for Norwalk-Stamford-Danbury Regional Legal Services; as a solo practitioner; as a partner in the law firm of Ventura, Ventura & West; and as part-time assistant corporation counsel to the City of Danbury.

Kenneth Davis '71

After graduating, Davis established a solo law practice in Stamford, adjacent to the office of his long-time friend, Milton Thomas '72, who also ran a solo law practice. The Law Offices of Ken Davis handled a variety of legal matters, including personal injury cases.

Ronald Powell '71

Powell served as director of the Afro-American Cultural Center at Yale, as an assistant professor of law and public administration at the University of Hartford, and as director of the Afro-American Cultural Center at the University of Connecticut. He also worked for Aetna Life and Casualty and the Office of the State Treasurer, and as co-director of the Connecticut Legislative Internship Program.

Constance Belton Green '72

The first African American woman to graduate from UConn School of Law, Belton Green later earned a doctorate in education from Columbia University. She served as a consultant and government liaison for the Connecticut Department of Education and was the chief diversity officer at Eastern Connecticut State University. Green is a former vice president of the Bloomfield Board of Education and served on the Hartford Democratic Town Committee and the African American Affairs Commission, as well as numerous other boards. She continues to lecture on issues of diversity.

Timothy G. Rogers '72

After graduation, Rogers served as a law clerk in the Civil Rights Division of the U.S. Department of Justice. He subsequently joined the legal department of the American Can Co., rising to the position of assistant general counsel before joining Cadwalader, Wickersham & Taft in its New York City office, where he became a partner. He joined the legal department of Schering-Plough Corp. before becoming chief legal counsel at Kremers Urban Pharmaceuticals.

Milton Thomas '72

After graduating from law school, Thomas served as a public defender in juvenile court before establishing a solo law practice in Stamford. He also served as an education hearing officer for several Connecticut boards of education. He was a member of the Stamford Police Commission and served in many leadership roles, including as president of the Police Commissioners Association of Connecticut.

Harold Lee Thompson '72

After graduation, Thompson was named a fellow in the Reginald Heber Smith Community Lawyer Fellowship Program, working with the Ohio Legal Services Association. He later worked as a hearing officer for the Ohio Industrial Commission, as a special assistant in the office of the Ohio Attorney General and in private practice, specializing in labor and injury law; particularly medical negligence. He also served as vice chair of the Ohio Legal Council of the NAACP.

Bessye Warren Bennett '73

Bennett became, in 1974, the first African American woman licensed to practice law in Connecticut. She was also the first African American woman in Connecticut to be hired to a corporate legal position, serving as an in-house counsel for the Society for Savings in Hartford and later becoming an assistant vice president. In 1985 she opened a solo law practice in Bloomfield. She also served as deputy town counsel for the Town of Bloomfield and was the first African American woman in Connecticut to serve on the board of Connecticut Natural Gas. She was also affiliated with Connecticut Public Television, the Knox Foundation and Hartford College for Women.

Howard B. Brown '73

After graduation, Brown worked for the Hartford Insurance Group, where he rose to the position of associate counsel. He later directed the legal staff at the Connecticut Department of Banking and was appointed commissioner of the department in 1985. In 1992 he was named vice president of public finance for Kidder, Peabody & Co. in New York City, and in 1995 he founded Greystone Community Reinvestment Associates. He has been active in many civic and professional organizations in New York and Connecticut, including the University of Connecticut Law School Foundation.

Maurice "Wilky" Gilmore '73

A high school and college basketball star who was recruited by the NBA, Gilmore attended UConn Law after an injury ended his athletic career. He became a certified public accountant before attending law school. Afterward he worked in private practice in New Canaan, his hometown, and served as a member of its town council.

Mae Russ Haith '73

Russ Haith worked as the managing director of Community Legal Services in Philadelphia and became an international import-export lawyer, amassing an extensive collection of African American artifacts. In 1995, she founded Archives & Images International, which published her book, *An American Family: Gustava's Story*.

Caleb Leroy Nichols '73

Nichols served in the United States Coast Guard Office of the Judge Advocate General after graduation and subsequently taught at Western Connecticut State University and served as its director of affirmative action. He later went into private practice in Erie, Pennsylvania.

The Honorable Marshall Whitley '73

After graduating from UConn School of Law, Whitley earned an LLM in tax law from the Georgetown University Law Center. He worked for the Council of the District of Columbia and the U.S. Department of Justice before entering private practice in San Francisco. He was appointed to the Municipal Court bench in Alameda County, California, in 1993 and to the Superior Court bench in 1999. He has also served as an adjunct law professor and director of the LLM Tax Program at Golden Gate University School of Law.

Alan Green '74

Distinguished Service Award (2009)

Green was the executive director of Hartford's Housing Authority, a founding partner of Green, Wilson & Associates Consulting, executive director of the Community Foundation of New Haven and associate director of the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving. He was also a former chairman of the Connecticut Conference of the United Church of Christ and a former chairman of the Connecticut Humanities Council.

The Honorable Patricia Lilly Harleston '74

Harleston, the first black woman to open a private law practice in Connecticut, also served as an assistant attorney general representing the state Department of Children and Families. She was appointed a judge of the Connecticut Superior Court in 1996. In 2006 Gov. M. Jodi Rell appointed her to the Commission on Judicial Reform.

The Honorable William Webb '74

Webb, a U.S. Air Force veteran of the Vietnam War, has served as an assistant U.S. attorney and a deputy attorney general in Pennsylvania; commissioner of the Federal Equal Opportunity Commission; senior staff counsel for the U.S. House of Representatives Select Committee on Assassinations; chief of the Organized Crime and Drug Enforcement Task

Force for the Office of the U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of North Carolina; deputy secretary and general counsel in the North Carolina Department of Crime Control and Public Safety; and magistrate judge for the Eastern District of North Carolina. In 2014 he joined the Shanahan Law Group as a senior advisor.

Rudolph Arnold '75

After earning his law degree, Arnold worked with the Hartford Legal Aid Society and as counsel for the Hartford Housing Authority. He opened a private law practice in Hartford in 1983. He was elected to the City Council in 1979 and to a two-year term as deputy mayor in 1981. In 1991 he was named chairman of the Society for Savings.

The Honorable Lubbie Harper Jr. '75

Harper worked in private practice in New Haven, Connecticut, for more than 20 years and represented the city's Board of Education before he was appointed to the state Superior Court bench in 1997. In 2005 he was appointed to the State Appellate Court, and in 2011 he was elevated to the state Supreme Court. Justice Harper chairs the Commission on Racial and Ethnic Disparity in the Criminal Justice System.

The Honorable Maurice Mosley '75

Mosley established a law practice in his hometown of Waterbury, Connecticut, served five terms as a state representative in the Connecticut General Assembly, and served as counsel to the Waterbury School Department before he was appointed to the Connecticut Superior Court bench in 2013. He was a public school teacher before he entered law school.

Jon Marc Hannibal '76

Hannibal, the first black president of the Student Bar Association at UConn School of Law, earned a Master of Public Administration degree from the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University after his graduation from UConn School of Law. He works as a special counsel in the New York Department of Civil Service, having previously served in the New York State Office of the Special Prosecutor, Department of Correctional Services, Division of Parole, Department of Probation, Thruway Authority and Office of the State Comptroller.

Linda Kelly '76*Public Service Award (2016)*

Kelly served as president of the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving for 12 years. She was previously senior vice president and general counsel for Shawmut Bank and was Connecticut's deputy banking commissioner. She also served as a commissioner of the Department of Public Utility Control and as president of the University of Connecticut Law School Foundation, in addition to serving on numerous other boards.

The Honorable Johnese White Howard '76

White Howard earned a law degree and a degree in social work from the University of Connecticut before she practiced law in Hartford and worked as an associate professor at the UConn School of Social Work. She subsequently moved her practice to Texas and became an associate judge of the 330th District Court in Dallas.

The Honorable Eric Coleman '77*Public Service Award (2017)*

Coleman served in the Connecticut State Senate for 22 years and in the Connecticut House of Representatives for 11 years. He was the first African American chair of the legislature's Judiciary Committee and held a variety of other leadership positions, including deputy speaker of the House. Coleman was an attorney for Hartford Neighborhood Legal Services, a deputy assistant public defender and an attorney with Aetna. In 2018, he was appointed to the Connecticut Superior Court bench.

Francisco "Frank" L. Borges '78*Distinguished Graduate Award (1990)*

Borges was twice elected state treasurer of Connecticut, a post he left in 1993 to become managing director of General Electric Capital's Financial Guaranty Insurance Co. In 1999 he joined Landmark Partners, a private equity and real estate investment firm, as chairman, chief executive officer and managing partner. He has served on the Hartford City Council, as well as numerous boards, including the Board of Trustees for the Knight Foundation and the Connecticut Public Broadcasting Network. He also served two terms as deputy mayor of the City of Hartford.

The Honorable Vanessa Bryant '78

When Bryant was appointed in 2007 to the U.S. District Court, she became the first African American woman to serve as a federal judge in New England. She had previously served, since 1998, as a judge of the Connecticut Superior Court. Earlier in her legal career, Bryant worked as an associate at Day, Berry & Howard; as legal counsel for Shawmut Bank and Aetna Life and Casualty; as vice president and general counsel for the Connecticut Housing Finance Authority; and as a partner at the law firm Hawkins Delafield & Wood.

The Honorable Curtissa Cofield '78

Cofield was the first African American woman appointed to the Superior Court bench in Connecticut. Before her appointment in 1991, she served in the corporation counsel's office for the City of Hartford and as a supervising assistant state's attorney in Hartford. She also served as chair of the Board of Directors of the Hartford Housing Authority.

The Honorable Sheridan Moore '78

Moore began her legal career with Connecticut Legal Services and then became a public defender. After serving as the first public defender dedicated to representing juveniles, she opened a solo practice in Naugatuck that handled both criminal and civil cases. In 1998 she was appointed to the Connecticut Superior Court bench. She is a former trustee of the University of Connecticut Law School Foundation.

Curtis Tearte '78

Tearte joined IBM in 1979 and rose to senior executive level. Before his retirement in 2013 he was the company's managing director for the State of Georgia. After retirement, he founded Tearte Associates, an investment management and consulting firm, and the Tearte Family Foundation, which supports students with scholarships and training. He has served on the boards of many civic and educational organizations, including the University of Connecticut Law School Foundation.

Randall Pinkston '80*Distinguished Graduate Award (1996)*

Pinkston worked as a television journalist with CBS affiliates in Mississippi,

Connecticut and New York before attending UConn School of Law. After graduating, he worked as a reporter and White House correspondent for CBS News, reporting on the war in Afghanistan, among many other assignments. After 33 years with CBS, he became a correspondent for Al Jazeera America in 2013. He has taught as an adjunct professor at the University of Mississippi's Meek School of Journalism and the City University of New York.

Alphonso E. Tindall Jr. '81

Distinguished Graduate Award (2005)

Tindall began his career as an attorney in private practice at Hawkins Delafeld & Wood, where he became the firm's first African American partner. He subsequently worked at Edwards Angell Palmer & Dodge, Nixon Peabody, Greenberg Traurig, and Squire Patton Boggs. In 2015 he joined Schiff Hardin in New York City as a partner practicing in the area of public and project finance.

Henri Alexandre '82

Alexandre was named Hartford's corporation counsel in 2015. He worked previously as a legal director at the state Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection, as an assistant attorney general and as an attorney in private practice with the Crumbie Law Group. Alexandre also served on the Board of Directors of the Connecticut Haitian American Organization.

Azekah "Zeke" Jennings '83

After graduating from UConn Law, Jennings returned to St. Thomas in the U.S. Virgin Islands and became a federal prosecutor in the office of the U.S. Attorney. After 20 years in the U.S. Attorney's office, he became a senior conciliation specialist in the Boston office of the U.S. Department of Justice's Community Relations Service. He was sent to New York after the death of Sean Bell; to Sanford, Fla., following the shooting of Trayvon Martin; and to Ferguson, Missouri, after the shooting of Michael Brown.

Sandra Kee Borges '84

Kee Borges joined Hartford's Office of Corporation Counsel after her graduation from UConn Law. At various times, she served as city manager, deputy corporation counsel, corporation counsel and chief operating officer

for the City of Hartford. She also practiced privately with Kee Borges & Silvestri and taught public policy as an adjunct professor at Trinity College.

Theresa Hopkins-Staton '84

Hopkins-Staton has worked in a variety of legal roles for EverSource, formerly Northeast Utilities, and its former subsidiary, Connecticut Light & Power. In 2012 she was appointed director of the utility's regulatory affairs in Connecticut. She also has served as vice chair of the Connecticut Board of Education and chair of the United Way of Connecticut and the Greater Hartford Urban League. She also was the president of the African American Alumni Council at the University of Connecticut from 2000 to 2006.

Sarette Briggs Williams '85

Briggs Williams began her legal career as a solo practitioner in Norwich in 1997. In 2004 she was named an associate general counsel at United HealthCare in Hartford, where her responsibilities include acting as state regulatory affairs liaison.

The Honorable John Sparks '86

In 2016 the U.S. Senate confirmed Sparks as a judge of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Armed Forces. He had previously served as the commissioner to the court's chief judge, as principal deputy general counsel of the U.S. Navy, special assistant to the secretary of agriculture, deputy legal adviser for the National Security Council, and military assistant to the general counsel at the Department of the Navy. He retired from the U.S. Marine Corps in 1998.

Wilber Smith '86

Smith was a civil rights leader in Hartford and had served five terms in the Connecticut State Senate before he enrolled at UConn School of Law. In the 1960s and 1970s, he was at the forefront of efforts to open corporate jobs to African Americans, diversify the city's police force and combat housing discrimination. He led the NAACP's national prison program, its Connecticut chapter and its Greater Hartford chapter.

Joan Bishop Jenkins Stewart '88

Stewart had a long career in government and nonprofit posts in New

Haven, Connecticut, where she was active with multiple civic and service organizations. She served as the city's deputy chief administrative officer and director of labor relations and worked with the United Way of New Haven, Dixwell Legal Rights, New Haven Volunteers, New Haven Legal Assistance and Children in Placement. She held appointments to several state agency boards, including the Ethics Commission and State Elections Enforcement Commission.

Tregenza Roach '89

Before law school Roach had worked as a reporter and editor in St. Thomas. After graduation, he returned to the U.S. Virgin Islands and worked as an attorney in private practice and with the territorial Department of Education, the Office of the Governor's Legal Counsel, the Office of the U.S. Attorney, and the Territorial Court of the Virgin Islands. In 2012, Roach was elected a senator in the legislature of the U.S. Virgin Islands. He has also taught humanities and constitutional law courses as an adjunct professor at the University of the Virgin Islands.

Nadine E. Francis West '89

West worked for Aetna and for the mayor's office in Hartford after graduation from UConn Law before joining the MetroHartford Alliance, a coalition of business and economic development organizations. She became the Alliance's vice president and chief administrative officer. In 2014 she became the senior vice president, chief administrative officer and corporate secretary at Protein Sciences. She serves on the Diversity Advisory Committee at UConn School of Law.

Ernie R. Walker '90

Walker is a founding partner in Walker, Feigenbaum and Cantarella. He was previously a commissioner of the Connecticut Workers' Compensation Commission, which he continues to serve as a mediator, and an assistant attorney general at the Office of the Connecticut Attorney General. He has served on the boards of Catholic Family Services and Community Partners in Action.

James E. Venable Jr. '92

Venable, a member of the HR Advantage Group in Denver, spent most of

his career working as an executive in labor and employment law for large corporations. He began his career with Day, Berry & Howard in Boston and subsequently served as vice president of human resources at Comcast, senior director for labor relations for Walmart's East Division, and director of employment and regulatory law for Stop & Shop.

Gail Hardy '93

In 2007 Hardy was appointed state's attorney for the Judicial District of Hartford, becoming the first African American state's attorney in Connecticut. Before law school, she worked as a child support investigator and probation officer. She continued working as a probation officer while she was an Evening Division student at UConn School of Law. After graduation, she worked as a public defender before becoming a prosecutor in 1996.

Cheryl Sharp '93

Sharp began her legal career as a law clerk at the Connecticut Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities, and was appointed its deputy director in 2014. She has developed legal outreach programs, including the Kids Court Essay Competition and the Kids Speak program at UConn School of Law, which familiarizes children with human rights and civil rights issues.

Carolle Andrews '96

Andrews is the chief administrative officer at UConn Health, the university's medical center in Farmington. Before becoming a top executive at the medical center, she worked for the Connecticut Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities and as a commissioner on the Connecticut Freedom of Information Commission.

Karen DeMeola '96

After graduating from UConn School of Law, DeMeola worked as a civil rights attorney for an East Hartford firm that focused on police brutality cases, as well as employment and housing discrimination. She returned to the law school as director of admissions and was later named assistant dean for enrollment and students. In 2018, DeMeola became the assistant dean for finance, administration and enrollment. In 2017, she was elected president of the Connecticut Bar Association and in 2018 was named Attorney of the Year.

Lea Green '99

After law school, Green worked in corporate law and the arts in New York City. She was art advisory service manager at Citibank, special projects director at the Studio Museum in Harlem, and vice president of corporate strategies at Christie's International. She served as chair of the Contemporary Friends group of the Studio Museum in Harlem and was a member of the Board of Directors of ArtTable. Green, the daughter of Constance Belton Green '72 and Alan E. Green '74, was the first African American second-generation legacy graduate at UConn School Law.

Peter Wilson '00

Wilson is the diversity and inclusion officer for Proskauer, an international law firm with headquarters in New York City. Before joining the firm, he was director of diversity and legal recruiting at Day Pitney in Hartford, where he began his career as an associate. He speaks frequently on diversity issues and has served as chair of the Tri-State Diversity Council and as vice president of the Association of Law Firm Diversity Professionals.

Ndidi Moses '05

Moses is an assistant U.S. attorney and civil rights coordinator for the U.S. Attorney's Office in New Haven, Connecticut. Earlier in her career she clerked for Judge Thomas Bishop of the Connecticut Appellate Court and worked for the Hartford law firm Robinson & Cole. She has been chair of the Connecticut Judicial Selection Commission, president-elect of the Connecticut Bar Association, and president of the George W. Crawford Black Bar Association. She has taught as an adjunct professor at UConn School of Law and served as a board member of the Connecticut Women's Education and Legal Fund and the Connecticut Appleseed Foundation.

Natalie Braswell '07

After graduation from UConn School of Law, Braswell joined Updike, Kelly & Spellacy in Hartford as an associate. In 2011, she became general counsel and assistant comptroller in the Connecticut Office of the State Comptroller. She has served as vice president of the George W. Crawford Black Bar Association. Braswell also serves on the Diversity Advisory Committee for UConn School of Law.

Lahny Silva '07

After graduating from UConn School of Law, Silva worked as an attorney for Greater Hartford Legal Aid and earned an LLM from the University of Wisconsin Law School, where she was the William H. Hastie Fellow. In 2011, she joined the faculty of the Indiana University Robert H. McKinney School of Law, where she teaches Criminal Law and Criminal Procedure.

Christine Jean-Louis '08

Jean-Louis is an assistant attorney general in the Connecticut Office of the Attorney General. She was previously an associate at Wiggin and Dana and a law clerk for both Judge Alvin W. Thompson of the U.S. District Court for the District of Connecticut and Justice Lubbie Harper Jr. '75, who was then serving on the Connecticut Appellate Court. She joined the board of the University of Connecticut Law School Alumni Association in 2012 and served as its president in 2017-18. She also served as president of the George W. Crawford Black Bar Association from 2010-11.

Keisha Palmer '09

Palmer worked for the Hartford Federal Credit Union before law school and afterward joined Robinson & Cole, working with the firm's Public Finance Group in its Hartford office. She was named a partner in 2018. In 2008, when she was a third-year law student, Palmer founded the Summer Law Institute, a mock trial program for Hartford high school students at UConn School of Law. In 2017 she was appointed to the Board of Directors of the Connecticut Retirement Security Authority.

Rebecca Kelly-Golfman '12

After graduation from UConn School of Law, Kelly-Golfman worked as associate counsel with the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law in Washington, D.C. She has taught with the Marshall Brennan Constitutional Literacy Project as an adjunct professor at American University Washington College of Law and at Wagner College in New York City, where she now works as a diversity, equity and inclusion facilitator. She is a second-generation UConn Law legacy student, the daughter of Rudolph P. Arnold '75 and Linda J. Kelly '76.

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