

Conclusion: Towards Racial Justice for Black Iowa 2021

*Adrien K. Wing**

I am delighted to write a brief conclusion to this historic issue of the JOURNAL OF GENDER, RACE & JUSTICE. I remember over 25 years ago when the University of Iowa College of Law was considering whether it should approve a fourth student journal in addition to the IOWA LAW REVIEW, JOURNAL OF CORPORATION LAW, and TRANSNATIONAL LAW & CONTEMPORARY PROBLEMS JOURNAL. Given the relatively small size of the school, one concern was whether there would be enough student interest to sustain a large enough staff to produce a high-quality publication. Faculty, such as myself, and many dynamic and dedicated students assured the administration and faculty that there would be sufficient enthusiasm for the topic of race and gender. Now, a quarter century later, the JOURNAL OF GENDER, RACE & JUSTICE has more than lived up to its bright promise. It has held a number of symposia on fascinating cutting-edge topics, and it has been my privilege to participate in many of those events, including the first symposium.¹ The students on its staff and board have had the opportunity to go beyond the curriculum as they wrote their student notes, selected articles, and edited the pieces to Bluebooked perfection. The additional skills of picking symposium topics, organizing conferences, engaging with the guest speakers

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¹ See generally Adrien K. Wing & Christine A. Willis, *Critical Race Feminism: Black Women and Gangs*, 1 J. GENDER, RACE & JUST. 141 (1997); Adrien Katherine Wing & Laura Weselmann, *Transcending Tradition Notions of Mothering: The Need for Critical Race Feminist Praxis*, 3 J. GENDER, RACE & JUST. 257 (1999); Adrien Katherine Wing, *Examining the Correlation between Disability and Poverty: A Comment from a Critical Race Feminist Perspective – Helping the Joneses to Keep Up!*, 8 J. GENDER, RACE & JUST. 655 (2005); Adrien Katherine Wing, *Conceptualizing Global Substantive Justice in the Age Of Obama*, 13 J. GENDER, RACE & JUST. 705 (2010); Adrien K. Wing, *Introduction to the Symposium: Women in the Revolution: Gender and Social Justice After the Arab Spring*, 18 J. GENDER, RACE & JUST. 341 (2016); Roundtable Discussion, *Women in the Revolution: Gender and Social Justice after the Arab Spring*, 18 J. GENDER, RACE & JUST. 437 (2016), 24 TRANSNAT'L L. & CONTEMP. PROBS. 391 (2015).

and authors, have no doubt been beneficial in the professional lives of the Journal's alumni.

According to the Foreword to this issue, “[t]he Journal of Gender, Race & Justice was founded to challenge our writers, our readers, and ourselves to question who we are and how the law defines us. This challenge embraces the identities of all individuals in order to create new concepts of legal thought.”² When the horrific racial events of summer 2020 occurred, I was very moved when Journal staff told me that they wanted to do a special issue as “[t]he unjustifiable murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and of countless others in this nation’s history . . . reemphasized the need to examine how the law has impacted persons with marginalized identities.”³ The Journal staff knows that it has a special role to play in Iowa because as “the only student-run legal journal in Iowa exclusively focused on feminist inquiry, critical race analysis and legal justice, we have a responsibility to remain steadfast in our commitment to uplift marginalized voices and bring those voices to the forefront of legal scholarship in Iowa.”⁴

I was very impressed when the Journal staff told me that they wanted to go beyond the traditional scholarly voices who usually write law review articles. This issue’s authors include the Black Law Students Association (BLSA), an undergraduate student poet, a community activist, a lawyer, a judge, and a former state legislator. What they all have in common is that they are Iowa-based African Americans, who are committed to achieving racial justice in our state. As part of a very small racial minority in Iowa, every one of them understands the need to work in coalitions to make change happen. Some may only spend law school here, and some have lived in Iowa for a large part or all of their lives. They are all trailblazers.

The brief statement from BLSA indicates that these hard-working students are committed to struggle for justice even during their three-year law school careers. Speaking about this Journal issue, “[t]his project is not a cry for help. It is a call to action.”⁵ In my over thirty years on the Iowa law faculty, I have seen how BLSA students are involved, not only in BLSA, but in other activities, including the student government, journals, moot court, externships, research assistantships, summer jobs, and other organizations.

The BLSA chapter is named for two amazing role models, Alexander G. Clark Jr.’1879 and Sr.’1884, who were the first and second Black graduates of the Iowa Law School in the nineteenth century. Clark Sr. had been the plaintiff in the 1868 Iowa Supreme Court case *Clark v. Board of Directors of*

² *Foreword to Volume 24*, 24 J. GENDER, RACE & JUST. 1 (2021).

³ *Id.*

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ The Alexander G. Clark Chapter of the Black Law Students Association at the University of Iowa, *Dear Reader*, 24 J. GENDER, RACE & JUST. 2 (2021).

Muscatine,⁶ which led to the desegregation of Iowa public schools⁷ one hundred years before *Brown v. Board of Education*.⁸ As lawyers, many former BLSA members have maintained and expanded their involvement in bar and community organizations across the country,⁹ and I have no doubt that the Clarks would be extremely proud.

The next contribution to the issue is a wonderful poem *Lying by Omission* by University of Iowa undergraduate Ala Mohamed.¹⁰ Her words speak truth to power and highlight the pain and struggle of Blacks in America who demand to be heard. She calls out white supremacy and revisionist history and demands education on Black history as well as an end to the silencing of African Americans. The poem's opening is very powerful.

It's called lying by omission,
 That detail left out as gossip fills your ears,
 That small section about Blacks being the first colonists,
 That small picture about the brutality of slavery,
 That small description about why the past is being hidden.
 Why are you trying to hide it?
 Tell me, can anybody in here tell me why forgetting about
 the past is a cure.¹¹

Her words are especially prescient as the Iowa legislature is trying to forbid the teaching on all levels of the New York Times Pulitzer prize-winning publication: the 1619 project.¹² Attempts at the omission of such critical

⁶ See generally *Clark v. Board of Directors of Muscatine*, 24 Iowa 266 (1868). For a 150th anniversary discussion of the importance of this case, see generally *Clark v. Board of School Directors: Reflections after 150 Years*, 67 DRAKE L. REV. 169 (2019) (collecting works from various authors on the significance of the *Clark v. Board of School Directors of Muscatine* decision).

⁷ See *Alexander Clark Fights for Equal Rights*, IOWA PATHWAYS, [https://perma.cc/Q2GJ-W4VU] (last visited May 5, 2021).

⁸ See generally *Brown v. Board of Education*, 347 U.S. 483 (1954).

⁹ For example, see Black History Month speaker Leslie D. Davis (Iowa Law Class of 1995), who spoke on “Count it all Joy: Purpose, Perseverance, and Power” on February 16, 2021. See @Namwolf, TWITTER (Feb. 15, 2021, 2:49 PM), [https://perma.cc/N44Q-Y3DJ]. Leslie is Chief Executive Officer of the National Association of Woman and Minority-Owned Law Firms (NAMWOLF). *Id.*

¹⁰ Ala Mohamed, *Lying by Omission*, 24 J. GENDER, RACE & JUST. 3 (2021).

¹¹ *Id.*

¹² See Nikole Hannah-Jones, *The Idea of America*, in 1619 Project, NYTIMES MAG. (Aug. 2019), [https://perma.cc/X4MQ-ULFY]; see also Erin Murphy, *Iowa Republicans Advance Bill to Ban '1619 Project' in School Curriculum*, GAZETTE (Feb. 9, 2021), [https://perma.cc/9JFE-QTWH].

history are especially poignant for Iowans as the lead author of the 1619 project is Waterloo, Iowa native Nikole Hannah-Jones.¹³

Ala's interests extend beyond the U.S. racial situation as she majors in Enterprise Leadership and Chinese. Her family is from the Sudan and she wears modest Islamic dress.¹⁴ She was one of the very early members of Iowa City-based Iowa Freedom Riders (IFR), a group affiliated with the broader Black Lives Matters movement. She is the Social Media Head, Housing Committee Liaison, and IFR Representative Student at the University of Iowa.

When I was a child, my family was very active in the 1960s Civil Rights movement. As a Princeton college student in the 1970s, I was involved in the same efforts, as well as the South African anti-apartheid movement. I wrote protest poetry too.¹⁵ I do not know Ala's future career plans, but I hope that she has not ruled out the law. She might find it as rewarding as I have for people who have both U.S. and global justice interests and commitments.

The next article is *One Journey Toward Racial Justice: The Power of Me, the Power of We* by Lori A. Young.¹⁶ The author is an African American Des Moines, Iowa native who is a web writer and project manager for Just Voices Iowa. Her article details how, as a mother and grandmother, she became an activist later in life to channel her rage at the racial profiling and murders of Black men and boys by police. She joined the local Iowa Citizens for Community Improvement (ICCI) group, an organization founded in 1975, now with over 4,000 members across the state. Working in coalition, Lori details the long process to get better data on disproportionate policing and the efforts involved in helping create an ordinance that the Des Moines City Council eventually passed to partially address biased policing. Even though victories are partial, she continues to push for reform and encourages others to do the same in their communities.

Cierra D. Newman, an Iowa Law School alum, wrote *The Value of the Black Vote: How Iowa's Saga of Suppression & Racial Iniquity Rippled from 1868 to 2020*.¹⁷ She highlights the iniquity in Iowa's carceral system and how it continues to permanently prevent Black men from utilizing their right to vote. The lifetime ban had a personal impact as her father had been incarcerated and could not vote. This article was written as a reflection of an opinion piece

¹³ Hannah-Jones, *supra* note 12.

¹⁴ See Emma McClatchey, *Wearing Your Identity: Ala Mohamed and Jocelyn Pai*, LITTLE VILLAGE (Apr. 3, 2018), [<https://perma.cc/3ZYB-HW8U>].

¹⁵ See examples of my protest poetry in Adrien Katherine Wing, *Brief Reflections Towards a Multiplicative Theory and Praxis of Being*, 6 BERKELEY WOMEN'S L.J. 181, 192 (1990).

¹⁶ See Lori A. Young, *One Journey Toward Racial Justice: The Power of Me, the Power of We*, 24 J. GENDER, RACE & JUST. 5 (2021).

¹⁷ See Cierra Newman, *The Value of the Black Vote: How Iowa's Saga of Suppression & Racial Iniquity Rippled From 1868 to 2020*, 24 J. GENDER, RACE & JUST. 11 (2021).

published before the felon voting ban was lifted in 2020.¹⁸ Cierra was one of my former students and did an externship working for Senator Charles Grassley who was head of the Senate Judiciary Committee during the Justice Kavanaugh hearings. I have no doubt that the experience may be very helpful one day if she decides to run for office herself.

The Hon. Romonda D. Belcher wrote *Young, Gifted, and Black: Why it Matters*.¹⁹ She is a Drake Law graduate, who was the first Black female judge in Iowa, and has lived here for almost thirty years. She was named as a District Associate Judge in 2010. I remember how excited I was when her appointment was publicized. Prior to becoming a judge, she was an Assistant Polk County Attorney for 15 years. The judge presides over Polk County's therapeutic, peer-based Family Treatment Court, and provides judicial training on trauma. She serves on various committees to improve Iowa's juvenile and criminal justice systems. She uses her power and privilege to bring compassion and trauma training to the criminal justice system to help keep families together and provide defendants struggling with addiction with treatment opportunities. She recognizes that her "presence matters by encouraging some other young, gifted, and Black child who sees a reflection of herself in someone in a position dominated by white males. She may never know she can aspire to become a judge if she never sees someone who looks like her in that position."²⁰ I would be delighted to see Judge Belcher be appointed to the appellate bench in the near future.

Former Iowa State Assembly Representative Wayne Ford wrote the final article, *The History and Accomplishments of the Iowa Minority Impact Statement*.²¹ He was an Iowa state legislator from 1996-2017 and was only the tenth Black legislator in history. In 2008, he was the inspiration and driving force behind Iowa's first-in-the-nation Minority Impact Statement law, which has since been copied in several other states. The article details the process involved in passing such legislation and has multiple tips for states considering designing effective laws in this regard. Originally from Washington, D.C., Wayne played football for and graduated from Drake University, and he decided to make Iowa his permanent home. In 2018, he received the Honorary PhD of Humane Letters from his alma mater. For over thirty years, he channeled his activism as the founder and Executive Director of Urban Dreams. I first became a great admirer of his work helping the underserved Black community in Des Moines. I truly hope that Minority Impact Statements will catch on in many more states in the years to come, and I was delighted to learn that

¹⁸ See Cierra Newman, *In Iowa, Before 1868, My Forefathers Could Not Vote; 150 Years Later, Neither Can My Father*, DES MOINES REG. (Mar. 7, 2020, 3:59 AM), [<https://perma.cc/5Y6D-233L>].

¹⁹ See Hon. Romonda D. Belcher, *Young, Gifted, and Black: Why it Matters*, 24 J. GENDER, RACE & JUST. 17 (2021).

²⁰ *Id.* at 20.

²¹ See Wayne Ford, *The History and Accomplishments of the Iowa Minority Impact Statement*, 24 J. GENDER, RACE & JUST. 23 (2021).

Wayne remains involved even though he has retired from the legislature and Urban Dreams.

In conclusion, the JOURNAL OF GENDER, RACE & JUSTICE is to be commended for this important issue. I hope that they will be a role model for other law journals across the country to go beyond traditional authors and formats to embrace the real world that needs assistance in obtaining justice—a world beyond footnotes and Bluebooking. I look forward to the staff continuing to engage the state in which we live. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the JOURNAL has not been able to have live symposia. When we approach the time for a new normal, I hope that we can honor these path-breaking authors at the Boyd Law Building and give them the acknowledgment that they so richly deserve as heroes and sheroes. They have each been deeply dedicated to struggle throughout their short or long lives on personal and professional levels. They have exhibited inspirational excellence and resilience. I am sure that the JOURNAL OF GENDER, RACE & JUSTICE founders would be pleased, and perhaps, some of them can join us.