



Civil Rights Law Section
WASHINGTON STATE BAR ASSOCIATION

January 17, 2020

The danger of our own political moment is not that Americans will again descend into a bloody conflagration. It is that the fundamental rights of marginalized people will again become bargaining chips political leaders trade for an empty reconciliation.

Adam Sewer

Dear Civil Rights Law Section Members,

As the celebration of MLK Jr. approaches, where to even begin? Those on this list-serve are “woke” enough to know that we live and work within a white supremacist culture: one that values “quantity over quality, either/or thinking, a sense of urgency, individualism, perfectionism, defensiveness, paternalism, worship of unlimited growth, and avoidance of discomfort.”* Nowhere is this seen more visibly than the legal sector. Whiteness has been/is the standard. Our institutions fail to reflect the wealth of diversity and genius of all people:

- Congress: 90% white
- Governors: 96% white
- Top Military Advisors: 100% white
- People who decide which music is produced: 95% white
- People who decide which books we read: 90% white
- People who decide which news is covered: 85% white
- President and Vice President: 100% white
- People who decide which TV shows we see: 93% white
- Teachers: 83% white
- Full-Time College professors: 84% white*

As your Executive Committee engages in its work in 2020, we are more aware today that race-conscious remedies and even racial equity trainings are under attack as being “too political”. But like a dog chasing its own tail, these attacks only further illuminate white supremacist characteristics of “avoiding discomfort” and “defensiveness.”

Your Executive Committee is walking our talk this year. Today we are building community by welcoming law students and high school students of color to our table at the annual KCBA Dr.

MLK Jr Luncheon. Last week, we funded and participated in a racial equity training with JustLead Washington as part of our annual retreat. We learned that carrying Dr. Martin Luther King Jr's (and Toni Morrison and James Baldwin's) legacy demands that we take the time to see one another in our full humanity, with all of our complex social identities that do not fit either/or thinking.

Depending on where we are at any given moment, we hold a sense of agency or we are targeted. Building community and honest relationships (with all of our imperfections!) is itself a radical act and an antidote to white supremacy.

White supremacy dehumanizes all people, either by oppression or by illusion. But if we study history - during the first Reconstruction when Harriett Tubman is freeing slaves – we see a scattering of individual people making individual choices, thinking for themselves against the status quo, people of diverse ancestry, people of color and white people working together, knowing when it was their turn to lead, to follow, to listen, to speak. Knowing their unique place along the underground railroad.

Another Reconstruction is upon us. All us members of the Civil Rights Law Section work and live in today's version of the underground railroad. Welcome!

We thank you for your own leadership and contribution to human rights and civil rights. We thank you for your membership and we look forward to meeting in-person this year!

Your Chair,
Molly Peach Matter

*The quotes and statistics are from **Decolonizing Wealth: indigenous wisdom to heal divides and restore balance** by Edgar Villanueva. Stats are nationwide from 2017.

Resources/articles/podcasts to stay woke:

- [An enslaved man was crucial to the Lewis and Clark expedition's success](#). Clark refused to free him afterward By Hannah Natanson
- [Civility is overrated: The gravest danger to American democracy isn't an excess of vitriol—it's the false promise of civility](#)
- [The World is Our Field of Practice](#), Reverend angel Kyodo Williams
- Emergent Strategy by adrienne maree brown
- Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination by Toni Morrison