

1-1-2015

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Recommended Citation

Haney, Thomas M., "90 Years of African American Diversity" (2015). *Faculty Publications & Other Works*. 558.
<http://lawcommons.luc.edu/facpubs/558>

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90 YEARS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN DIVERSITY

Thomas M. Haney

The Loyola Law School graduation on June 10, 1925 was different from its predecessors. Among the graduates receiving their LLB degrees was Leroy J. Knox, the law school's first African American graduate. Thus 2015 marks the 90th anniversary of this milestone within the law school. (Also receiving their law degrees at that ceremony were the first women graduates; their story will be told in a later issue of *Loyola Law*.)

Loyola's law school had been established in 1908 as an evening law school to bring professional legal education to working men who could not afford to or would not be admitted to established full-time law schools. The appointment of Rev. Frederic Siedenbug, S.J., as the law school's Regent (the active liaison between the university and its professional schools) in 1921 led to a series of changes. He encouraged the administration and faculty to establish a 3-year full-time day division and to standardize the longstanding evening curriculum into a 4-year program. He apparently provided the initiative to expand and diversify the student body as well. Those measures paid off as Knox and the women joined the law student body and persevered to receive their law degrees by 1925.

While African-Americans had been present in Chicago from its start – indeed the first permanent settler who was not Native American was Jean Baptiste Point du Sable, thought to have been Haitian – they constituted a relatively small portion of the city's population until the Great Migration after World War I brought southern African Americans to jobs in Chicago and elsewhere in the north. But there had been African American lawyers in Chicago since 1869, and several Chicago law schools accepted African-American students at any early date.

Like most law school applicants of that era, Knox came to Loyola in September 1923 without an undergraduate degree; he had studied at Northwestern before applying to law school. Loyola required only two years of undergraduate study at that time; it was not until 1935 that a third year of undergraduate work became required.

The number of African American graduates at Loyola stayed very small for some time – only two others received their LLB degrees in the '20s: Austin D. Farrell and Leo H. Simms, both in 1927. In that same year, Edith L. Sampson earned an LLM in Loyola's new graduate law program – the only African American woman to earn her LLM in the history of that program.

The number of African American graduates increased in the 1930s and into the 1940s, despite the Depression. Among the graduates were Timothy W. Adams in 1933; Shelley Luster in 1934; Archie W. Mills, Poindexter A. Orr and Elyseo J. Taylor, all in 1935; Ulysses S. Keys and Edward B. Toles in 1936; Clarice M. Hatcher in 1938, the first African American woman to earn a first law degree at Loyola; and Sylvanus A. Ballard in 1941. At that time, the law school closed for a few years because of the demands of World War II.

To put the small number of African American graduates in perspective, it should be noted that the school as a whole was small in those years, typically graduating only between 35 and 45 students each year. Loyola was the smallest of all the law schools in Chicago for much of its history. In addition, throughout the '30s and into the '40s, the law school pursued a rigorous policy of dismissing students who failed to achieve the required grades to insure that only the truly qualified students would go on to enter the profession.

Records from that era are few, but what we do know is that, in these early decades, African American students seem to have participated in the life of the law school – although,

given their small numbers, probably with some feelings of isolation. Austin Farrell was president of the Day Law Student Council in 1927. In 1936, Ulysses Keys, with a woman classmate, Evelyn McIntyre, won the Brandeis Moot Court Competition, the school's intramural competition; much of the publicity surrounding that victory seemed to focus on a woman being on the winning team, rather than on Keys' race. Sylvanus Ballard graduated 3rd in his class of 25 in 1941.

Many of these early graduates went on to distinguished careers. Edward Toles, for example, served as the president of the Cook County Bar Association (CCBA) and became the first African American bankruptcy judge in Chicago in 1968. Poindexter Orr was also an officer of the CCBA. Keys was an officer of the Chicago branch of the NAACP by the start of World War II and was a prominent lawyer, featuring in news stories concerning civil rights and other civil and criminal litigation in Chicago; he was also said to be a good friend of the author Richard Wright.

When the school reopened in 1946, African Americans were among the new students, many returning from service in the war. Jean Brooks and James T. Horton earned their law degrees in 1948 and Robert H. Holloway and Henry A. Towles in 1949. At no time since then has the law school been without African American students – although seldom if ever in sufficient numbers.

The 1970s brought a dramatic increase in enrollment at Loyola and other law schools. At the same time, students were actively protesting perceived injustices in society. At the law school, African American students, led by Stephen H. Pugh ('73), established a chapter of the Black American Law Students Association (BALSA, later renamed BLSA) and urged the administration to increase its efforts to attract minority students to Loyola. The dean and faculty

were sympathetic to their suggestions, but limited funding from the university and inadequate physical facilities hampered the achievement of those goals at that time.

A significant milestone was achieved in 1976 when the law school hired its first full-time African American faculty member, Norman C. Amaker. Amaker had already distinguished himself as a civil rights lawyer with the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, where he represented parties, including his friend and colleague Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., in state and federal courts. Amaker, who taught at Loyola until his sudden death in 2000, became a legend at the law school not only for his background of civil rights litigation and the books and articles he authored, but primarily for his dedication to mentoring and assisting law students of every background.

The year after Amaker joined the law school faculty, another milestone was made when Adaku S. Nzeribe, a Nigerian woman, was admitted to the law school with advanced standing. Ms. Nzeribe, who received her JD in 1979, was the first law student from Africa – the first of what later became a significant number of students from Africa and from the wider African diaspora who have joined the law school for its JD and several graduate law programs. That outreach culminated in the hiring of Professor James Thuo Gathii, from Kenya, as the law school's Wing-Tat Lee Chair in International Law in 2012.

Amaker was instrumental in establishing the law school's annual Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Lecture in 1986. That lecture series brought a wide variety of speakers to the law school, including then State Senator Barack Obama in 1999. In 2001-02, an annual award named for Amaker was established for presentation at the King Lecture, with the first recipient being Professor Neil Williams of the full-time faculty.

In 1992-93, BLSA established an award to recognize and honor an African American graduate of the law school, to be presented each year at the organization's annual alumni dinner. The first award, named after Donald L. Hollowell ('51), a prominent civil rights lawyer and the first regional director of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) in Georgia, was presented to David H. Coar ('69), a judge of the U.S. District Court in Chicago. (In recent years, the Amaker award has also been presented at the BLSA alumni dinner.)

While African American students participate in all student activities – publications, inter-school and intra-school competitions, co-curricular organizations, and the like – they also participate in inter-school competitions open only to BLSA members: the Thurgood Marshall Mock Trial Competition and the Frederick Douglass Moot Court Competition. During the current school year, Loyola's BLSA teams were both winners in their regional competitions and went on to compete in the national rounds.

After 90 years, African American alumni and students remain an integral part of Loyola, and their desire for the law school to continue to recruit, enroll, retain and graduate other African American candidates continues unabated – a sentiment shared by all members of the Loyola Law School community.

(An edited version of this article was published in the Spring 2015 issue of Loyola Law, the law alumni magazine of the School of Law of Loyola University Chicago.)