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The (Social and Economic Paradigm of Racism and Its Impact on the Educational and Professional Experiences of Seven African-American Attorneys in Oklahoma City

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The Edwin P. McCabe Honors Program

Senior Thesis

“The Social and Economic Paradigm of Racism
and Its Impact on the Educational and
Professional Experiences of Seven
African-American Attorneys
in Oklahoma City

Tynan D. Anderson

May 1996

Langston University
Langston, Oklahoma

**REFERENCE
NOT TO BE TAKEN FROM THIS ROOM**

The Social and Economic Paradigm of Racism and Its Impact on the
Educational and Professional Experiences of Seven African-American
Attorneys in Oklahoma City

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Submitted in partial fulfillment
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E. P. McCabe Honors Program
May 1996

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THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC PARADIGM OF RACISM AND ITS IMPACT ON THE
EDUCATIONAL AND PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCES OF SEVEN AFRICAN-
AMERICAN ATTORNEYS IN OKLAHOMA CITY

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND STUDY

African-Americans have dealt with racism and racial discrimination for many years in America and it has affected every aspect of their lives from education to the work force. The increase in the number of Black professionals has been minimal when compared to the increase in the number of whites and many feel this is due to racial discrimination. The increase in the number of Black attorneys is consistent with this trend. Many of those who choose to enter the field of law do so because of the social and economic impact of racism. They want to help eradicate it through the legal system and they want to achieve financial success.

African-Americans have lived with racism since the time of slavery, and although Blacks have more rights now than in the early part of the nineteenth century, racism still exists and continues to hamper their social and economic growth. Educationally blacks have struggled to obtain adequate education and to attend reputable schools where they can be trained in professional areas. The Brown vs. The Board of Education case (1954) shed light on the fact that the schools that Black students attended were not equal to the schools of white children, and subsequently the quality of education received was also poor.

In integrated schools Black students were mistreated and made to feel like outcasts, which made their pursuit of education more stressful and difficult than that of their white counterparts. For example, Ada Lois Sipuel, the first Black student to attend the University of Oklahoma School of Law, was forced to sit outside of the classroom and listen at the door. She also was told to sit in a roped-off area of the classroom. The Little Rock Nine, the first Black students to attend integrated Little Rock, Arkansas, public schools, were spat upon and harassed daily by teachers and fellow students.

Through the years Blacks have struggled for equality from the right to sit anywhere they chose on a bus to the right to eat in any restaurant. One of the most significant areas of struggle has been equal employment opportunities for Black professionals. The number of Black professionals has increased through the years; however, this increase is minimal when compared to the overall number of professionals in the United States. For example, "the number of Black attorneys has increased by 600% over the past seventeen years...[yet] they only constitute four percent of the total number of lawyers in the United States" (Kirby 47). In 1980 Black lawyers represented only 13,594 of the 501,834 American lawyers and only 2,153 of the 118,700 enrolled law students by 1985. The number of Black lawyers is in short supply; "the word that best describes the state of black judges is dearth," according to Kirby (47). In 1985 the number of Black state and federal court judges was approximately 450 compared to 12,093 whites (Kirby 47).

Many Black lawyers hope to change the trends of social and economic inequality by working from the inside out. Johnny Cochran sees the law as a tool to empower the powerless, and Blacks who have felt powerless for many years choose law to change the

"system" of oppression in the United States. (Randolph 116). Fred McCann, a black Oklahoma City lawyer, says that he entered the field to ensure lifetime financial security for himself. Another Oklahoma City lawyer, Visanio Johnson, chose law because he wanted to help in the civil rights struggle and believed that law was the best way.

This research provides information on lawyers in the Oklahoma City area. It includes reasons for obtaining law degrees and entering the legal profession. It explains the reasons for minority under-representation in law as seen through their eyes. It sheds light on racial discrimination that still exists in law schools, law firms, and courtrooms. One practical outcome of this study is that it can help young Blacks considering law as a career to understand some of the obstacles they may face and some advice for coping with them from people who have traveled the road already.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Blacks have experienced discrimination on all fronts in the United States of America. Since the time of slavery, Blacks have struggled laboriously to improve their status as second class citizens and show that they are competent, intelligent, and productive.

The professional arena has always been one of the areas of great struggle with the least amount of measurable progress. Although the number of black professional and semi-professional workers increased between 1940 and 1980, this increase was minimal, especially when compared to the increase in the number of whites, as Chart 1 (see page 5) shows (Daedalus).

Chart 1

Black Workers in Professional and Semi-Professional Occupations: 1940, 1950, 1960,
1970, 1980_a

	Male	Female	Both
Number of Black Workers			
1940	53,312	65,888	119,200
1950	75,090	104,280	179,370
1960	115,683	178,690	294,373
1970	244,655	388,960	633,615
1980	546,271	770,809	1,317,080
Blacks as a Percentage of All Workers			
1940	2.80%	4.50%	3.60%
1950	2.50	5.30	3.60
1960	0.30	0.80	0.40
1970	3.50	8.30	5.40
1980	4.10	8.60	5.90

(Blacks consistently represented extremely small percentages of professionals and workers as a whole.)

The following chart shows examples of the low numbers of Blacks compared to the number of white entrepreneurs and white collar workers in Selected Trade and Service Industries in 1980 (Daedalus 209).

Chart 2

Industry and Occupation	White	Black
Banking:		
Managerial and Professional	619,538	187,938
Self-Employed	977	8
Technical, Sales, and Administration Support	1,253,429	140,524
Self-Employed	21	
Insurance:		
Managerial and Professional	303,139	15,796
Self-Employed	4,436	112
Technical, Sales, and Administration Support	1,365,483	123,696
Self-Employed	451	5
Other Finance and Real Estate:		
Managerial and Professional	339	19,403
Self-Employed	11,143	205
Technical, Sales, and Administrative Support	1,043,046	40,930
Self-Employed	4,924	48

Industry and Occupation	White	Black
Wholesale Trade:		
Managerial and Professional	704,820	15,137
Self-Employed	23,864	396
Technical, Sales, and Administrative Support	1,856,299	76,716
Self-Employed	38,406	830
Retail Trade:		
Managerial and Professional	1,801,070	76,922
Self-Employed	187,399	6,996
Technical, Sales, and Administrative Support	6,670,705	425,206
Self-Employed	356,871	11,572

(The number of Black professionals is consistently and considerably lower than the number of whites.)

As recently as 1992 the number of blacks in non-agricultural fields was 415,000 as compared to 7,878,000 whites in the same area (Daedalus 210). Gunnar Myrdal published An American Dilemma in 1944 highlighting the underrepresentation of the Negro in business. Although his analysis of the black professional “was done within the context of segregation...[it] showed patterns not essentially different from those that exist today. Except for the substantially diminished presence of clergy and the dramatic increase in the number of black nurses, the changes are insignificant” as the chart 3 indicates (Daedalus 215).

Chart 3

Number of Black Workers [Black Workers as a percentage of All Workers]

Occupation	1940	1950	1960	1970	1980
Teachers	66104	85920	133852	227788	354176
	6.3	7.6	8.0	8.2	9.7
Clergymen	17487	18870	13915	13739	
	12.9	11.4	6.9	6.2	
Musicians and Teachers of Music	9157	9540	9408	6605	
	6.2	5.9	4.8	6.8	
Nurses	7192	15390	35240	66400	94845
	1.9	3.2	5.4	7.8	7.5
Actors, Entertainers, Dancers, and Athletes	2467	3090	2098	3732	55642
	4.6	5.1	4.2	5.0	4.3
Physicians, Surgeons, Dentists, and Veterinarians	5228	5460	7643	8547	
	2.1	2.1	2.3	2.2	

Occupation	1940	1950	1960	1970	1980
College Presidents and Professors	2365	3900	5910	16582	
	3.1	3.1	3.3	3.3	
Lawyers and Judges	1063	1500	2440	3703	14839
	0.6	0.9	1.2	1.3	2.8

Chart three shows clearly that Blacks are extremely under represented in the legal arena, making up only 0.6 percent in 1940 and increasing to a meager 2.8 percent in 1980. The small amount of information on this subject shows that there is apparently little awareness of this lack of representation.

A preponderance of the information for this study was gathered from practicing Black attorneys and includes their personal experiences and achievements. The results of this study aid in pointing out some possible causes of the under representation of African-Americans in the legal profession. This study provides a partial basis for academic and career decisions of future aspiring attorneys.

Many Afro-American students aspire to launch a legal career according to Calvin E. Bruce in "Making the Case For A Legal Career" (102). Many of them have this dream because of the glamorous image of wealth and fame of attorneys and judges as portrayed on television (Bruce 102). Law is often listed in newspaper and magazine articles as a top

field offering high earnings for Blacks (Hot Jobs 137). The promise of a high salary gives many Blacks hope of a better way of life and financial independence, including four of the seven attorneys interviewed. What these articles often fail to mention is that Black lawyers, in many instances, have to work twice as hard for half the pay of their white contemporaries in order to prove themselves (Bruce 102).

Blacks' progression in the legal field has required a slow, determined struggle. From the early 1950's to the later 1960's many Blacks sought law degrees and were crusaders for the civil rights movement (Clark 97). These Black lawyers championed the laborious effort for civil rights in America's courtrooms. Many of them are still active in the profession, and some are bringing their own firms into the mainstream (Moss 51). The fact is that equal opportunity remains an elusive goal of Blacks, even though some get warmer receptions at major law firms than in the past (King 138).

According to A. Visanio Johnson, a practicing attorney in Oklahoma City, during the late 1960's and 1970's more Blacks than ever before were earning law degrees, and finding employment was hard for these new young lawyers. Johnson recalls that those who found employment could be "counted on the fingers of one's hands (Interview)."

Although the number of lawyers employed with corporations and firms increased through the years, few Blacks have benefitted. For example, in 1989 there were fewer than 160 Blacks among the almost 7,000 associates in New York City's twenty-six largest corporate law firms. In fact, most New York City firms have no Black associates and no Black partners (King 132). This struggle to find employment is consistent with national trends (King 134).

One of the more fortunate Oklahoma lawyers was Opio Toure, now a state representative in Oklahoma City, who reported that he has never been in the position of needing a job. He admits being denied positions, but he was never unemployed. He says that race may have played a significant part in some of the denials (Interview).

Blacks have had to struggle for every gain that has been made in the legal field and they continue to struggle daily because of race (McCann). Black lawyers have had to cope with white dominance in and out of law schools (Taborn 268). The majority of established law firms are owned by white lawyers because when these firms were being organized Blacks were still struggling for basic rights and privileges. Many Black lawyers also have the problem of fighting for clients among people who more readily give their money to firms owned by whites since they have a long-standing reputation (Interview).

African-American attorneys have faced discrimination on a number of levels and they continue to strive for equality in employment and education. Although Blacks have been denied many opportunities, those who do practice law are important to the future of Blacks in the field. This research sheds light on the silent racism felt by some Black attorneys in a profession that is supposed to seek justice for all Americans.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The methods used to gather information on the topic of racism experienced by Black Oklahoma City attorneys were a questionnaire, personal interviews, and research. The interview approach was used to make the subjects feel comfortable in revealing their opinions. The subjects were also encouraged to explore their experiences thoroughly and report information they deemed pertinent to the subject being researched.

The information included in this thesis comes from several sources including questionnaires administered by the researcher, personal interviews with seven lawyers in the Oklahoma City area, and books and magazine articles. The interviews were conducted in the offices of the lawyers and by telephone and lasted from thirty minutes to an hour. The lawyers were encouraged to talk freely concerning their opinions of the treatment they received in school, in courts, and in firms or corporations from clients, peers, teachers, and judges, both white and black.

The instrument consisted of impromptu interviewing with a prepared questionnaire. The questionnaire explored the subjects' experiences in law school, whether or not they felt racial discrimination, and in what situations they felt it. It also

asked them to describe their experiences with racism in the courtroom and whether or not they were discriminated against by their superiors and contemporaries. (See Appendix A.)

The researcher hypothesized that the study would reveal a number of experiences with racial discrimination experienced by Black lawyers in Oklahoma City, although law is the arena used by Blacks in their struggle against it. It was also hypothesized that the attorneys would have helpful advice for young Blacks pondering the decision as to whether or not to pursue a legal career. The lawyers, through sharing experiences, would be able to shed light on which schools, predominantly white or black, had been best for them and possibly would provide information on how to excel in the field. One other hypothesis was that Blacks feel pressure to work harder than whites to establish reputations as competent attorneys and to succeed in the legal profession..

This study was limited by the small number of lawyers interviewed (seven). The information provided, however, should be sufficient to establish patterns and aid the reader in reaching conclusions concerning the topic of the research.

The methodology of the study was conceived and conducted as planned by the researcher. The questions were presented and explored and the findings were analyzed.

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS OR PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

The attorneys interviewed in this study range from those in private practice to those in governmental legal service. This range allows for an examination of diverse racial barriers faced by Black attorneys. Although a questionnaire was administered to ensure the inclusion of pertinent information, the interviews were informal and included impromptu questions as well. This encouraged the subjects to elaborate on their personal opinions and experiences, which resulted in more information being provided as well as helpful advice.

The attorneys interviewed were Kwame Mumina, Fred McCann, Judge Susan Bragg, Harry Gatewood, Opio Toure, Guinise Marshall, and A. Visanio Johnson, all practicing attorneys and judges in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Their personal stories follow.

Visanio Johnson

Visanio Johnson has been an attorney in private practice for thirty years. He was motivated during the civil rights movement to enter the profession and was inspired by attorneys such as Thurgood Marshall and activists such as Clara Luper and Martin Luther

King, Jr., to champion the fight in the courtrooms of America.

Mr. Johnson says that although his decision to become a lawyer was an easy one his fight for equality and acceptance in the field was not. He recalls having to prove himself to lawyers and judges who did not respect his ability.

Johnson holds steadfast the belief that the best way to solve racial problems in America is through the law. He says that young Blacks need to be encouraged to enter the field to eradicate racism and to increase the numbers of Black lawyers.

Fred McCann

Fred McCann attended Oklahoma City University School of Law in the early 1970's. His earliest recollection of racial slurs and undertones occurred in his first year at OCU. A professor made remarks that Thurgood Marshall "was not all he was put up to be" and suggested that there was a need for "laws to prohibit interracial dating." McCann protested to the president of the university, and after the issue was brought up to the Board and investigated, the professor was removed from the university faculty.

McCann remembers feeling that "there were instructors who actually worked at ignoring the African American law students." He recalled that in some instances answers of explanations of cases given by Black students were never acceptable. He also recalls that some Black students argued that their grades were low simply because of race.

McCann believes that although law is one profession which Blacks have had an opportunity to engage in, it is still "difficult for them to develop acceptability by peers that you [a black person] were, or had potential of being, as good as anyone in the law school and in the profession." Concerning the bar exam McCann recalls that "Afro-American law

school graduates taking the Oklahoma bar exam were not very successful in passing."

McCann chose to practice law because of "a basic desire to reach a higher level of achievement" and to enable himself to have a lifetime career. He recalls always wanting to be a lawyer. He "knew that as the country developed the need for citizens to understand the law in general [would increase and] that law was going to become more of a focal point in day to day business than it had been in the past."

His advice concerning the courtroom is for young lawyers to consider the judge and the opposing lawyer when planning an approach. He said that he had personal experience trying cases before judges or against lawyers who were racist. He stresses above all that Black attorneys really need to "know their stuff."

McCann suggests that Black lawyers ask themselves the following questions when facing racial situations:

Is this going to keep me from my appointed task?

Is it going to get me frustrated to the point that I cannot understand the facts or communicate them to a jury?

The answers to these questions should always be "No," and he says one must remember that some people are racist out of ignorance and fear and that this can be overcome.

McCann does not overlook the fact that many Blacks are racist also and that some would rather go to a white lawyer than a Black one. He attributes this to the fact that "If someone does not feel good about themselves they will not feel good about you." Finally, he advises that successful black professionals not work in a state of paranoia over whether or not someone is being racist; instead "they work in spite of it."

Guinise Marshall

Guinise Marshall is an attorney in general private practice. She chose the field of law because it was a family tradition. Her father and grandfather were lawyers.

Miss Marshall attended the Thurgood Marshall School of Law at Southern University in Louisiana. She was clearly in the racial majority because 50 percent of the students at the time of her enrollment were Black. Thirty percent were Hispanic and approximately 20 percent were white.

Marshall earned her undergraduate degree at a predominantly white school. She says that attending a predominantly Black law school was beneficial because she did not face a lot of the challenges of racism that plague Black students at predominantly white schools. She recalls that her professors took a special interest in preparing students for the intangibles that lawyers face, including racism.

Marshall remarked that "the legal profession is dominated by white males and a Black person has to work very hard to succeed in it, but it can be done."

Judge Susan Bragg

Judge Bragg attended law school at the University of Oklahoma in Norman, Oklahoma. She is currently a juvenile court judge in Oklahoma City.

Judge Bragg believes that clients do not care which law school a lawyer graduates from, but that large firms prefer graduates of prestigious schools. She suggests that if a lawyer wants to increase his/her chances of earning high salaries or getting a "big time job ... [he/she should not] go to school in Oklahoma."

Upon graduating from law school Bragg began her job search while studying for

the bar exam. She obtained employment as a law clerk, which helped her prepare for the exam. She advises future attorneys to get an intern's license and intern while in school because this will help them with bar exam preparation.

Judge Bragg has been a judge for nearly eight years. When questioned about whether not racism exists in the courtroom she says, "Always. It is a given." She believes that racism can be dealt with as long as a Black attorney is well prepared and does his/her job well.

Bragg has felt discrimination twofold in the legal field because she is a woman and because she is Black. She thinks that the profession is chauvinistic. She also believes that she overcame discrimination because she knew her job and made it her point to be prepared more than many other attorneys. For these reasons she feels that her sex and race did not play a role in the decisions she received in court.

Kwame Mumina

Kwame Mumina also attended the Oklahoma City University School of Law. He is currently an attorney with Hall, Estill, Hardwick, Gable, Golden, and Nelson. His areas of specialty are commercial law, litigation, business and company restructuring, and contracts. Mumina practices law because he believes he is "well suited for the profession" and he has "always been interested in dealing with people's problems."

Mumina does not recall experiencing any overt racism in law school although he was clearly in the minority. There were only ten to twelve Black law students. He states that there were occasions, however, in which covert or subtle racism that a Black person might notice was evident.

He remembers that in the courtroom he was well received and that ninety-nine percent of his clients were white. He could not think of a situation where race "affected the outcome of a case." In fact, he says that his only experience with racism came at the hands of a potential Black client who refused to be represented by him although the members of his firm had assured the client that Mumina was the best lawyer with the firm in the area in which the client needed assistance. A spokesman for the client advised the firm after some discussion that he had not come to that firm to be represented by a Black attorney.

Harry Gatewood

Harry Gatewood attended Howard University School of Law and graduated in 1979. He currently practices civil law for the state of Oklahoma.

Gatewood recalls that his experiences at a Black law school were beneficial. He saw Black people "from all over prepare and persevere," which inspired him. He said that Black law schools have a built-in system of mentoring and support.

During his second year at Howard, the Alan Bakke decision on the issue of reverse discrimination was rendered. Gatewood believes

the real issue was the argument that opportunity for educational advancement should not be provided on the basis of race. When you think about it law doesn't always follow logic. This country is backward when it comes to the matter of race as a victim's remedy being judicially declared to be a wrong inflicted on the perpetrator.

In this case the victim's remedy is affirmative action for those previously subjected to Jim

Crow laws. Gatewood states that "the powerless have no power to oppress the powerful ... [and therefore] reverse discrimination arguments are illogical and absurd."

Concerning the bar exam Gatewood states that it is reflective of the same "phenomenon as college entrance exams in terms of the difficulty experienced by Black test-takers" and that these exams are culturally biased. Also, Mr. Gatewood points out that the percentage of Black professionals is not reflective of the number of blacks in the population. He does not suggest that the numbers should be directly proportional but states that "we don't even have a fraction of it." This is evidence of the longstanding effects of discrimination and racism, which he says "is a reality."

Gatewood stresses the fact that Blacks in the legal profession still have a long way to go and suggests that they remember the following words inscribed on the walls of the justice department in Washington D.C.: "Unless justice exists in the hearts of men it will not be found in the courts of law."

ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

BY QUESTION

Questions were analyzed according to the number of attorneys responding a certain way as well as according to social and economic implications. The findings are discussed briefly following each question.

Why did you choose to practice law?

Three of the seven lawyers chose law for social reasons. They desired to have an impact on society and to help Blacks. Two lawyers chose law for economic reasons because law is one field where Blacks who have entered the field have had a measure of

financial success. Fred McCann said he wanted to ensure himself a lifetime career. Two lawyers cited both social and economic reasons.

Did you attend a predominantly Black or white law school?

Only two of the seven lawyers attended predominantly Black law schools, and both stated that they felt they were better for Black attorneys in terms of preparation and inspiration. The remaining five attorneys said they were clearly in the minority in their respective law schools.

What type of law do you practice?

One interviewee is a juvenile court judge, one an Oklahoma State Representative, three are in private practice, one is a shareholder in a large firm, and one is a city attorney.

Did you face racial discrimination in law school?

Three of the four attorneys said they did not face racial discrimination. Four responded “yes.” Of the three who did not, two attended predominantly Black law schools.

Did you face racial discrimination in the courtroom?

Five out of seven responded “yes.” Two said “no.”

Have you felt pressure to outperform whites to be successful?

All seven interviewees responded with a resounding “yes”. McCann says it is difficult for Blacks to develop acceptance as competent attorneys. Gatewood supported this, saying that “there is a glass ceiling in place for Blacks making it necessary for them to work harder than their white contemporaries.” Mumina stated that “Blacks definitely have to work harder, especially in a society where a stigma is placed on Blacks and professional

Blacks specifically. Blacks start out in a hole where we are viewed with skepticism if not negativism and have to do more just to be perceived as equal with whites.”

Has racism hampered your career growth?

All responses were “no.” Everyone interviewed stated that although Blacks have to work twice as hard as whites, determination can help anyone overcome. Fred McCann says that Black professionals do not work in a state of paranoia over racism; instead “they work in spite of it.”

Would you recommend law as a career for young Blacks?

Everyone responded with a definite “yes.”

Are Blacks under-represented in this field?

All interviewees said “yes.”

What can be done about under-representation of Blacks in law?

The consensus of the interview responses find a solution in encouraging young Blacks to enter the profession. They said that young blacks should be exposed to the law early in their development and shown the positive impact they can have on society through the law.

Did racism inspire or discourage your pursuit of a legal career?

Four of the seven attorneys say that racism inspired their pursuits. The remaining three say that it did not affect their pursuits one way or the other. Kwame Mumina said that the prevalence of racism presented a challenge that law helped him to meet head on. Johnson stated that he was inspired by the civil rights movement and he knew he could make a difference in the courtroom.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Blacks have consistently represented small percentages of professionals in the United States. The number of black lawyers has increased over the past five decades, yet they continue to be consistently lower proportionately than the number of whites. According to Algenita Scott Davis, President of the National Bar Association, “There are an estimated 20,000 to 22, 000 African-American lawyers in the U.S. ... if we [Blacks] were just given a fair shot we would be in more corporations, yet our [America’s] largest firms do not have fair numbers. The largest firms have one or two [Blacks]...out of some 400 plus attorneys” (“A Crusade for Equality in Law Schools and Firms” 54).

From 1985 to 1990 the nation’s largest and most prestigious firms experienced unprecedented growth; however, few Blacks have reaped the benefit of this growth. In fact, a majority of New York City firms have few Black attorneys and no Black partners (King 132). Black lawyers do get a slightly warmer reception at “old-line law firms...[and] while the blacks-need-not-apply signs [of a few decades ago] have been removed, equal opportunity still remains an elusive goal for many [young black lawyers]” (King 132).

The attorneys interviewed for this research were all clear about the fact that racism

continues to exist in the legal profession. They are just as clear about the fact that racism can be overcome through hard work and determination.

The two female attorneys were certain about the existence of sex discrimination in the legal profession. Female attorneys discussed the male domination of the field and said that they had to overcome chauvinism as well as racism. Judge Susan Bragg says that “the legal profession is completely chauvinistic” and that she “felt discrimination twofold” because she is a woman and because she is Black.

All of the attorneys agree to the lucrativeness of the field for those Blacks who are willing to work hard. They concur that young Blacks should be encouraged to enter the legal profession as a means of financial security and a way to help eliminate social injustices which have plagued Blacks through the years.

One discovery of this research is that Black attorneys sometimes experience racial discrimination from Black clients. Kwame Mumina reported that his only brush with racial discrimination during his career came at the hands of a Black potential client who refused to be represented by him although his colleagues in the firm assured the client that he was the best qualified person to handle the case. The client replied, “We did not come here to be represented by a Black lawyer” (Interview). According to Richard T. White of Lewis, White, & Clay, “There are some Blacks ... who believe that the water is colder in the glass poured by the white guys” (Branch 52). Fred McCann attributes this anomaly to the fact that “a [Black] person will not feel comfortable with ... [a Black person] if they do not feel comfortable with themselves” (Interview).

“Racism imbues the character of the United States” according to Morgan Freeman,

who played Joe Clark, the unorthodox principal of Eastside High School, in the movie Lean On Me. This statement is apparently true today according to the responses given in 1996 by seven Oklahoma City attorneys. The Black professional continues to struggle with the longstanding effects of racism, which include under-representation, inequality, and sometimes having to work twice as hard as white professionals for half the pay. All attorneys interviewed for this research report an awareness of racism and its prevalence in every facet of Afro-American life.

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APPENDIX A

1. Why did you choose to practice law?
2. Where did you attend law school?
3. What type of law do you practice?
4. Did you face racial discrimination in law school?
5. What instances of this do you recall?
6. Did you face racial discrimination in the courtroom?
7. What instances of this do you recall?
8. Have you felt pressure to out-perform whites to be successful?
9. Has racism hampered your career growth?
10. In what ways?
11. How did you deal with this?
12. Would you recommend law as a career for young blacks?
13. Are blacks under-represented in this field?
14. If so, what can be done about this?
15. Did racism inspire or discourage your pursuit of a legal career?

Vita

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Candidate for the Degree of
Bachelor of Science

and

Completion of
E.P. McCabe Honors Program

Thesis: "The Social and Economic Paradigm of Racism and its Impact on the Educational and Professional Experiences of Seven African-American Attorneys in Oklahoma City."

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