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### Letters to the Readers

Members of the Editorial Board

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## LETTERS TO THE READERS

The Journal for Social Justice is an outlet for legal scholars, practitioners, advocates and organizers, and students to reflect on critical social justice issues. As Editor-in-Chief my goal, brought to fruition by the tireless work of our Editorial Board and Staffers, is to offer the Journal as a platform for contemporary issues written by those best positioned to inform us. We at the Journal had the honor of working with authors for this issue who reflect a passionate dedication to social justice.

What makes the social justice issues current and relevant in a way never before seen is the near constant historic and unprecedented moments of 2020, and now, 2021. The trail of events during these years is unlike anything we have witnessed before: a global pandemic and healthcare crisis disparately impacting people of color, political and racial division, mass protests, unchecked police brutality against the Black community, global climate change, and the rejection of science—and the list goes on. It seems that every day a new national crisis takes place. Only one week into the new year of 2021, we watched an attempted coup by white supremacists at the U.S. Capitol. If the experiences described by historically targeted and affected communities were not enough to convince the country of the dire consequences of unchecked white supremacy, the events of January 6, 2021 highlighted this truth with an exclamation point.

In sum, there is nearly no subject or facet of life left untouched by today's social justice issues. Therefore, the Journal for Social Justice serves a purpose of great imperative: to provide a platform for voices seldom offered a megaphone, and to promote voices that come from and serve the communities being written about. Personal experience and investment provide the Journal and its readers with solution-oriented and thought-provoking perspectives essential to addressing issues of social justice with an intersectional and multidimensional toolkit. In other words, our purpose is to support those doing the work.

I graciously thank our authors, editorial board, staffers, and advisors for their work during this challenging time; I look forward to continuing to collaborate with others to promote social justice, energized by a renewed commitment to creating a more just society. I also thank our readers and all those who use the Journal to promote discourse, community, and progress.



Brielle Berndtson  
Editor-in-Chief, 2020-2021

**Avneet Chawla**

Article Selection Editor, 2020-2021

For law students, pursuing social justice and public interest law is generally viewed as differing from the norm of a traditional, big law career. Social justice lawyering is often the opposite of what law schools emphasize. In *A Letter to a Law Student Interested in Social Justice*, William P. Quigley describes that “justice is a counter-cultural value in our legal profession,” meaning that this area of law can be a frustrating, uphill battle, for folks who want to dedicate their careers to advocating for marginalized groups.<sup>1</sup> Quigley further describes that social justice is often diluted, and that student idealism is deteriorated by the status quo.<sup>2</sup>

At the Journal for Social Justice, we recognize that legal writing can be dominated by that same status quo. Academic jargon and extensive scholarly credentials, which, although important, can make potentially useful information much less accessible to all. Since our role as advocates is to amplify the voices of marginalized individuals and groups, our aim in selecting articles for publication is to reduce this gap between verbose academic writing and clear, understandable language.

Additionally, though oral advocacy brings to mind images of dramatic courtroom victories, written advocacy cannot be overlooked. Written advocacy is how we preserve stories and follow the evolution of the law as it relates to societal values. As social justice advocates, client-centered stories are of utmost importance. To effectively represent someone, we must amplify our client’s voice, and not speak over them, as their lived experience is more insightful than any written doctrine. We view the subject matter of our articles to be equally important as their accessibility, as well as the lived experience, identity, and perspective of the writer. The “who” is just important as “what,” and non-traditional works are welcomed alongside traditional law review articles.

In considering the role of a social justice law journal, I am constantly reminded of an overarching theme: that law does not equal morality. The consequences of anti-minority rhetoric, discrimination, nationalism, and abuse of power are long-lasting. In light of the impassioned fight for human rights in 2020 and 2021, I remember Nazi Germany, when Jewish books and literature were burned because they were viewed as anti-German. I remember Punjab, India, in 1984, when Sikh literature was looted and burned because it was viewed as anti-Indian. I think of book banning which still happens in schools and libraries in the U.S. to this day. I

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<sup>1</sup> William P. Quigley, *Letter to a Law Student Interested in Social Justice*, 1 DEPAUL J. FOR SOC. JUST. 7, 10 (2007).

<sup>2</sup> *Id.* at 9.

draw inspiration from the power of movements like Black Lives Matter, seeing international support in demanding an end to state violence and racial discrimination at the hands of police. I remember my roots with the Indian Farmers' Protests, demanding an end to crushing corporate greed and corrupt state action.

Destroying entire cultures too often stems from deep-rooted hatred and discrimination, and to continue the fight for social justice with this in mind is no easy task. But we can never forget the importance of written advocacy in this call to action. It is our sincere hope that this issue of the Journal for Social Justice and subsequent publications help to preserve and make accessible the social justice topics facing our world each day.

**Patrisia Vekima**

Symposium Editor, 2020-2021

One of the many lessons that 2020 has reaffirmed is that our society is much further behind than the agenda pushed in the lesson plans of our country's primary and secondary education systems. How many of us remember learning the generic Civil Rights crash course? In case you forgot it, here is a quick summary: "First, there was slavery. Then, Lincoln freed the slaves. Next, there was segregation. After that, there was integration. Now, we are all treated equally!" Did educators and textbooks lie on purpose or was this a genuine belief of those who were unhindered by social disparities?

One would think that the generations of law school graduates and educators who have taken part in the American Legal System would be able to resolve some of the greatest issues of humanity. Unfortunately, some of the most devastating social injustices have been further exacerbated by individuals who have walked the stages of law graduate ceremonies around the country; hence, the racial impact from the War on Crime and War on Drugs "initiatives".

As law students, we have taken classes that teach us the current application of laws. However, it is becoming clearer that the most effective social advocacy requires us to push beyond what we are taught — it requires us to critique and strive to change the unjust systems that are currently in place. The uncomfortable part of this is acknowledging that being a lawyer or a lawyer-in-training is not a default qualification for knowing what is best for underrepresented groups and individuals.

The Journal for Social Justice's Winter 2021 publication includes essays and articles that examine issues in our country and legal system through unpopular, critical lenses. You may recognize the names of colleagues, peers, and other trailblazers who have gone far beyond the bare minimum to expose issues and effect change in our broken system. I hope you find that this publication pushes the envelope of complacency.