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## Law School News: A Voice For Justice 3-1-2023

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March 1, 2023

# *Law School News*

## A Voice for Justice

After her TikTok video went viral, Brooklyn Crockton L'22 finds herself working to change the system.

March 1, 2023

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By Janine L. Weisman



BRISTOL, R.I. – Words fail Brooklyn Crockton L'22 halfway through her video account about what she had experienced earlier that morning at a Providence courthouse. Then, the third-year Roger Williams University School of Law student quickly regains her composure and calls out a system that unfairly treats people who look like her.

She never expected her TikTok message to go viral and create such a resounding impact.

Participating in an RWU Law experiential legal clinic at the courthouse that day, Crockton describes the moment a white deputy sheriff pulled her out of a line of attorneys entering a courtroom, where she would be representing a client at a pre-trial hearing on a criminal misdemeanor charge. When the sheriff pulled her aside, he asked her if she was a defendant.

“I have never been so embarrassed in my entire life, like I felt like crying in that moment,” Crockton says in the video recorded at the RWU Providence campus Law School lounge a couple hours after the incident. “And the crazy part about it is you hear stories like this all the time with Black attorneys, but when it happens to you, it is so visceral you don’t even know what to say.”

Within a few hours, her smartphone repeatedly buzzed as other Black professionals working in the legal system and in other fields began sharing their experiences with racism in comments on her video. The next thing Crockton knew, her story made ABC’s “Good Morning America” and other news outlets – giving her the strength and determination to keep using her voice.

She has turned her experience into a teachable moment and raised awareness of a problem that isn’t discussed enough.

“You just don’t hear stories about white lawyers being pulled out of line because people think they’re defendants, but you do hear it with people of color,” said RWU School of Law Dean Gregory W. Bowman. “I have colleagues on the faculty who had that experience.”

RWU Law has been working at the forefront of legal education, advancing changes in curriculum to include a comprehensive exploration of historic racial biases within laws and the legal system. Second-year law students now take a required course – titled “Race & the Foundations of American Law” – to understand how race has shaped the legal system and laws across U.S. history. Introduced as an elective in Spring 2021 and then as a required course later that fall, the law school became among the first nationwide to make this course a part of the core legal curriculum.

It’s also an issue the law school has been working to address in collaboration with the Rhode Island judiciary and bar – and Crockton’s experience renewed those conversations. Bowman said that RWU Law is committed to participating in these ongoing discussions to recognize and better address implicit bias.

“The only way to counter implicit bias effectively is through training and making that implicit bias explicitly understood, so you can take specific steps to counter it,” Bowman said. “That’s what Brooklyn is helping to do through telling her story.”

Before her video had even gone viral, Crockton had already been contacted with support by the law school administration and her professor supervising the clinic. They stayed in regular contact with her throughout her time until graduation – and alumni and people from across the RWU community reached out to her as well.

“I felt a lot of support even on a schoolwide level,” she said. “I was having some of the undergraduate orgs reach out to me as well, which meant a lot.”

## Working for Change

The day before she graduated last May, Crockton received a job offer to be a tax litigation attorney with a Houston law firm. She remains active with the National Black Law Student Association, which is creating a reporting system that allows interns, students, paralegals and attorneys who feel they have been subjected to bias to anonymously report misconduct and initiate a sanctioning process.

“The legal profession is not one that has any room for biases, especially the implicit racial ones,” Crockton said.

She admits she was initially worried her time in the spotlight might hurt her job hunt. Would she be viewed as a whistleblower? But her viral TikTok never even came up during the interview process for her new job. Crockton plans to continue making more videos to pursue positive social change and is open to becoming more involved in activism and civil rights.

“That is really where my heart lies,” she said, “and that is why I got into this profession in the first place.”