

12-13-2022

Fireside Chat with Dean Cole and Notre Dame Law Student Rachel Schneider

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Recommended Citation

Cole, Marcus and Schneider, Rachel, "Fireside Chat with Dean Cole and Notre Dame Law Student Rachel Schneider" (2022). *2019–Present: G. Marcus Cole*. 44.
<https://scholarship.law.nd.edu/gmcole/44>

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Fireside Chat with Dean Cole and Notre Dame Law Student Rachel Schneider

Dec 13, 2022

Dean G. Marcus Cole and Rachel Schneider '23 share their journeys to Notre Dame Law School, their connection to the Order of St. Thomas More, and the impact your gifts have on Notre Dame Law students.

Transcript – English (auto-generated)

Errors have not been corrected.

0:02

foreign

0:07

hello and welcome to all of you members

0:10

of the order of St Thomas More and the

0:13

dean's leadership Circle I'm Marcus Cole

0:15

dean of Notre Dame law school and I'm

0:17

delighted to be here with a great Notre

0:20

Dame law student Rachel Snyder I chose

0:23

Rachel for this fireside chat because I

0:26

think she exemplifies the things that we

0:28

look for when we're looking for a Notre

0:31

Dame law student what we call a

0:32

different kind of lawyer now in full

0:35

disclosure I've known Rachel for quite a

0:38

while actually before she came to law

0:40

school her father was my son's

0:43

basketball coach in high school in his

0:46

at his high school in San Jose

0:48

California and her father is very

0:51

special to me because I learned a lot

0:54

about leadership from him and a lot

0:55

about what it means to be a Catholic

0:58

professional from him and so Rachel

1:01

first of all welcome and uh

1:04

tell us a little bit about your family

1:06

and why you chose to come to law school

1:09

well thank you for having me I

1:11

had like

1:16

Corey for 30 years taking after his own

1:19

father who was a high school basketball

1:21

coach at Town high in San Marin County

1:25

and so he really exemplifies like this

1:29

Jesuit Spirit of social justice working

1:32

for the poor and working with the poor

1:36

and so for him the law is kind of

1:41

foreign in the way that we know it but

1:43

he's really taught me that everything I

1:46

do needs to be intentionally about

1:48

furthering Justice and intentionally

1:51

about connecting that back to the

1:53

Catholic Social teaching Dignity of

1:55

others Dignity of work and so he's been

1:58

a real inspiration to me in that way

2:00

also

2:01

my mom actually went to law school in

2:05

the 80s but she experienced that as you

2:09

know a Latino woman at a predominantly

2:11

white institution and so she was a

2:13

little more wary when I said that I

2:15

wanted to go to law school because of

2:17

her own experience but she really

2:20

imparted on me that I needed to be sure

2:24

about what I was doing I needed to know

2:26

that I could do it and I needed to be

2:28

doing it for the right reasons and so

2:30

between my mom and my dad they really

2:33

encouraged me to not only go to law

2:36

school but to go for the right reasons

2:38

to help others and to further myself as

2:41

a member of my community back in the Bay

2:43

Area so now you're a third year student

2:46

but before you got here you were a

2:48

really accomplished college student why

2:51

did you choose law in particular and

2:53

then why Notre Dame sure

2:56

um so at Santa Clara University for my

2:58

undergrad I was a sociology major and at

3:01

first I thought that I wanted to go into

3:03

social work

3:05

but I realized the more that I studied

3:07

especially the criminal justice system

3:09

that the most impact and the people with

3:14

the most power are those in the

3:15

prosecuting attorney's offices who get

3:18

the cases first make evaluations and

3:20

ultimately really determine the outcomes

3:22

of cases

3:24

um and so taking that knowledge I went

3:27

and worked for the Alameda County

3:29

District Attorney's Office in Oakland

3:31

California for the conviction review

3:33

unit where we were

3:35

re-looking at cases of felony murder

3:39

even back to the 80s and 70s to see

3:42

whether or not those convictions could

3:44

still hold water under new laws today

3:45

and so those experiences really shaped

3:49

my idea of how the law and especially

3:52

prosecuting attorney's offices can work

3:54

not just for a conviction but for

3:57

justice looking towards the holistic

4:01

circumstances and what's best for the

4:04

individual person and not just what

4:06

could be another tally on you know the

4:09

prosecutor's win belt and so when I

4:12

started looking at law schools I

4:14

unfortunately didn't have a sixth sense

4:17

that covid was coming but I started

4:20

applying and I saw Notre Dame as this

4:24

place where my interest in Justice and

4:28

just Excellence really collided the

4:32

Catholic Mission and the focus on

4:34

Catholic Social teaching

4:36

um really for me spoke to the depth of

4:40

Education that I could get at Notre Dame

4:42

as opposed to other institutions and so

4:45

when I got in I was just really thrilled

4:48

and I haven't regretted it since well I

4:50

was delighted to hear that you had

4:51

gotten into Notre Dame and chosen the

4:54

Compton Notre Dame now you came during

4:57

the covert year

4:59

covid hit the whole country largely

5:03

around March of 2020 so right around

5:06

when you were hearing about law school

5:07

and then during the summer of 2020

5:10

Father John Jenkins made the

5:12

determination that Notre Dame no matter

5:15

what was going to be in person and so

5:18

you knew at some point that you were

5:20

going to come to campus where you were

5:23

you had a risk of exposure to covid

5:26

what was that like

5:28

um I I guess in a word scary

5:31

um it when I was applying to law schools

5:34

there was you know the uncertainty of

5:37

covid and then when I was getting the

5:39

acceptances we were really right in the

5:41

middle of the peak exposure that first

5:44

real wave of covid

5:46

um where we saw just so Much Death

5:50

um and so at that point I was actually

5:52

still working at the Alameda County DA's

5:54

office and doing post-conviction work

5:57

meant that people were writing to us for

5:59

compassionate release so we were really

6:02

in the thick of it and

6:05

it kind of in tandem with that we are

6:07

also going through really the protests

6:09

of of George Floyd's murder

6:12

um and really a racial Reckoning in the

6:14

U.S and so

6:15

that decision really came down to okay

6:18

am I really going to go halfway across

6:21

the country in the middle of a global

6:23

pandemic in the middle of a real

6:26

overhaul in the criminal justice system

6:28

to step back from my role in that and

6:32

you know really kind of almost be

6:34

selfish for three years and do my legal

6:37

education

6:38

and so that was very hard for me and

6:42

ultimately I it came down to well what

6:45

else am I going to do during a global

6:46

pandemic like why not take this

6:49

opportunity when there is so much

6:50

discussion going on when we're really

6:53

having interesting conversations to dive

6:56

more deeply further myself and really

6:59

enter a new community

7:01

and so with even the risk of exposure I

7:04

felt like this was a place that was

7:07

taking precautions despite coming back

7:10

to campus and I was just excited to make

7:14

a new community especially in a place

7:16

like Notre Dame so um you uh you came to

7:20

law school with a purpose in 2020 and

7:24

you were committed to studying criminal

7:27

law and while you're here there are all

7:30

kinds of Temptations to do all kinds of

7:32

other law but you seem to have kept your

7:36

focus on on criminal laws is what why

7:39

why do you suppose that is

7:42

um I I mean I did come in really with a

7:44

strong intention I've never really

7:47

wanted to do anything but work in the

7:49

public interest and I think that does go

7:51

back to my dad he's always just so

7:55

giving of himself

7:57

and I've never as much as the temptation

8:01

to make a lot of money in big law is

8:05

um I I can't divorce myself really from

8:07

that ultimate purpose of like Seeking

8:09

Justice for people in my community

8:13

um and so it's been really nice to be

8:15

supported here especially through the

8:18

exoneration Justice Clinic

8:20

Professor Gurulay Adjunct professor like

8:23

Elliot Slosser who really encouraged us

8:26

to not only do the work of the clinic

8:29

but are really encouraging and modeling

8:32

of the different ways that we can go

8:34

into public interest make a difference

8:36

and still

8:38

you know Nick living essentially

8:41

um and so as public interest is starting

8:44

to grow more and more at Notre Dame it's

8:46

been really helpful in sort of keeping

8:50

that path and I myself being the former

8:54

president of the public interest law

8:55

Forum I've really been able to see my

8:58

fellow classmates really go through that

8:59

same journey of trying to decide you

9:02

know do I continue to go into public

9:04

interest like you know my heart or my

9:06

conscience has been calling me or you

9:10

know do I go to Big Lot and so that's a

9:13

really tough decision and so I found a

9:15

lot of like pleasure in trying to help

9:17

other people try to discern their own

9:20

paths and so the more that Notre Dame

9:23

grows towards public interest I think

9:25

the easier that is going to be for

9:28

students when they're no longer fearful

9:30

of the economic consequences or worried

9:34

about kind of like the image of going

9:36

into big law and are instead encouraged

9:39

and fostered into these public interest

9:41

jobs so you mentioned the exoneration

9:44

Justice clinic and it's our newest

9:47

clinic and I I would love for you to

9:50

just describe it and explain your

9:52

experience there for those of our order

9:56

St Thomas More members who've uh who've

9:58

never heard of it sure

10:00

um so the exoneration Justice clinic or

10:02

the ejc is one of the clinics on campus

10:06

that works to free people who have been

10:09

wrongfully convicted of crimes and so it

10:13

was actually a big part of why I chose

10:15

to come to Notre Dame in your letter in

10:17

the wake of George Floyd. You

10:19

specifically elevated the clinic into a

10:22

full clinic status after being an

10:24

externship and so really to me it was

10:27

the culmination of what I can do with my

10:30

own experience in post-conviction

10:32

criminal law and furthering you know the

10:36

ideals of racial justice and fighting

10:38

for criminal justice reform as a whole

10:40

and so the clinic here takes on various

10:44

clients mostly from Elkhart, Indiana, who

10:48

have been wrongfully convicted of murder

10:50

robbery sexual assault and we work to

10:55

find evidence of their innocence and

10:58

also then litigate those cases in court

11:00

to try and free them and so it's just

11:03

been an incredible experience definitely

11:06

my favorite at Notre Dame because it's

11:08

something meaningful and tangible that I

11:11

get to do every day instead of thinking

11:13

through hypotheticals in class I

11:16

actually get to go meet my clients do

11:19

investigation in the communities around

11:20

Notre Dame and so it's something that

11:23

has really changed the impact of or the

11:26

trajectory of my life in that it's

11:29

really hard for me to imagine a life

11:30

after law school without doing some kind

11:33

of Innocence work or working towards the

11:36

goals of at least preventing wrongful

11:38

conviction

11:40

and so I've just really really loved

11:43

my experience with the ejc so let's say

11:46

you mentioned life after law school so

11:49

you're a third year law student now what

11:53

are your plans what are your hopes and

11:55

how do you see your future sure sure

11:57

well I've accepted a job actually back

11:59

with the Alameda County District

12:00

Attorney's office to be a deputy D.A

12:02

there no congratulations thank you I'm

12:04

really I'm really excited Oakland is

12:07

just an incredible place to be

12:09

they have just so many

12:13

like novel issues and so it's really a

12:16

place where I think I can make a big

12:19

difference and they're also starting to

12:22

look towards you know more

12:23

post-conviction wrongful conviction

12:25

litigation they already have the

12:28

conviction review unit and so I'm hoping

12:31

that by going there I can prevent

12:33

wrongful conviction on the front end

12:35

knowing all of the factors and

12:37

contributors to our wrongful conviction

12:39

that I now know from the ejc and in the

12:43

future I really do hope that I can

12:45

contribute some conviction Integrity

12:47

work to the office and you know

12:50

hopefully I can stay there for a long

12:52

time and make my place do you have any

12:54

interest in defense work at all

12:57

um

12:57

I really I've thought about Defense work

13:00

and I I did think about Defense work

13:01

coming into school but I especially

13:04

working with the ejc

13:07

we fundamentally we get there too late

13:09

right our clients have all been

13:12

convicted some for 19 20 years already

13:15

and so as rewarding as it is to do the

13:18

investigation and litigation now if

13:21

there could have been someone with an

13:24

eye towards Justice and I toward

13:26

wrongful conviction in the counties

13:28

where they've been wrongfully convicted

13:30

like Elkhart on the front end to have

13:33

stopped this Injustice from really

13:35

happening then some of our clients would

13:38

have Decades of their lives back and so

13:41

for me as as much as I would love to

13:43

continue to do Defense work I just think

13:46

that there's a way that I can prevent

13:49

Injustice from happening before it

13:51

really takes hold well I I love to hear

13:53

that from you because one of the things

13:55

that's difficult to convey to to others

13:59

is that our exoneration Justice clinic

14:01

isn't just trying to train defense

14:04

lawyers but ethical lawyers of all types

14:06

and and that that you can have a real

14:09

impact on people's lives by by

14:12

performing your work ethically and

14:16

that's what I think a Notre Dame lawyer

14:18

is is all about and that's why I'm so

14:20

glad that you're here and and uh and

14:23

joining us

14:24

um so you've had a leadership position

14:25

with regard to public interest work

14:29

um what do you what do you think we can

14:31

do at Notre Dame to promote public

14:33

interest work more at the law school

14:35

sure I think one of the biggest

14:39

disparities between big law and public

14:41

interest is really of course always

14:43

going to be the salary after law school

14:45

and so that temptation to take you know

14:48

a two hundred thousand dollar starting

14:49

salary and almost immediately pay off

14:52

loans versus trying to work in

14:55

communities that desperately need public

14:57

interest help but can never afford to

14:59

pay that kind of money to a you know a

15:02

first-year post bar graduate is huge and

15:06

so I think

15:08

kind of helping with those financial

15:11

worries is really important so that

15:14

probably could look like a loan

15:16

forgiveness programs that are more

15:19

expansive

15:20

scholarships and fellowships for

15:23

students who want to come to Notre Dame

15:24

law specifically to work in the public

15:27

interests and the various sectors

15:30

because we've you know we've been

15:31

talking about public interest just

15:33

because you know almost as like a

15:35

monolith but there are just so many

15:37

branches that look completely different

15:39

you have the criminal justice-minded

15:42

people like me you also have people who

15:44

are really interested in Immigration and

15:46

housing law

15:47

and so kind of not just taking public

15:50

interest as a monolith but focusing

15:52

encouraging fostering and financially

15:55

supporting each individual sector of the

15:59

public interest to make sure that we are

16:01

really training the kind of ethical

16:04

lawyers that Notre Dame wants and

16:06

supporting them to go into communities

16:08

where they're most needed it's fantastic

16:10

and it's actually a perfect segue into

16:12

talking about the order of St Thomas

16:13

More as everyone knows Thomas Moore is

16:16

my hero and the Order of St Thomas More

16:20

is important to Notre Dame law school

16:22

because it provides the financial

16:24

resources for students to be able to to

16:27

pursue

16:29

their their heart and their goals

16:33

especially with regard to public

16:34

interest work and it makes it possible

16:38

for us to provide financial aid loan

16:41

repayment assistance

16:42

and our our fellowship programs that

16:46

allow

16:48

um uh support for students who graduate

16:51

and then go into doing public interest

16:54

work so I'm glad you mentioned it and

16:57

I'm I'm hopeful hopeful that our

17:00

audience will hear the message and and

17:03

recognize the ways in which they can

17:05

actually help

17:06

pursue the mission the other thing I

17:09

love about watching you grow as a as a

17:12

law student during your time here was

17:14

the way in which your faith

17:16

was reflected in everything you did in

17:19

your leadership positions can you say a

17:20

little bit more about what your faith

17:21

has meant to you in law school sure

17:24

so I grew up Catholic and and

17:27

specifically you know with Bellarmine

17:29

and going to Santa Clara University I

17:31

grew up more in the in the Jesuit

17:33

tradition of the Catholic faith and so

17:35

really for me

17:37

um kind of going back to those Catholic

17:39

Social teaching tenets of just Dignity

17:42

of work the Dignity of others

17:45

respect for the environment stewardship

17:48

of the community has really grounded me

17:51

in times when you kind of lose sight

17:54

when you're knee-deep in business

17:57

associations about well you know why

17:59

does this matter why am I you know

18:01

subjecting myself to writing a 60-page

18:04

outline and so really going back and

18:07

focusing on why am I here you know why

18:10

have I been called to do this work has

18:13

been really grounding for me

18:15

um and so I've often found actually

18:18

going to The Grotto and lighting a

18:21

candle and thinking about you know

18:22

really what will my life after Law

18:25

School look like why am I doing this who

18:27

am I doing this for

18:29

and so really find using my faith more

18:33

as like a grounding tool of reminding

18:36

myself my purpose even when

18:38

things get cloudy or stressful or really

18:41

hard as law school has the slight

18:43

tendency to be sometimes yeah I can

18:46

imagine well um I'd like to close our

18:49

conversation if I can with a prayer

18:53

if you if you don't mind I'd like to

18:55

pray for you I'd like to pray for your

18:57

family and pray for Notre Dame law

19:00

school so if you'll join me and then the

19:02

father son Holy Spirit

19:04

Lord God our Father in Heaven King and

19:06

master of the universe thank you Lord

19:09

for bringing Rachel to Notre Dame and

19:11

for allowing her to share her story with

19:13

us Lord we ask that you bless her and

19:15

bless her family and the lives that they

19:18

all touch where we ask that you fill her

19:21

with your Holy Spirit and with the

19:23

wisdom power knowledge

19:25

understanding and Grace that can only

19:27

come from your Holy Spirit and send her

19:30

out into the world to be a force for

19:32

good

19:33

we ask this in Jesus name amen

19:36

thank you thank you so much for joining

19:38

me and I'm really grateful that you're

19:40

here and grateful that you were able to

19:42

share your story with our audience thank

19:45

you so much