

ORGANIZATION NEWS

BLACK AMERICAN LAW STUDENT ASSOCIATION: ALIVE AND (DOING) WELL

IN ITS SHORT organizational life span, BALSAs has had its influence on nearly one generation of law students and indeed, the legal establishment in this country. In the beginning, BALSAs had twenty or so member schools. In just three short years that number now stands at nearly one hundred local and affiliated chapters with a total membership of 3,000 black law students. As with other black organizations, BALSAs is but one organization trying to balance the long unbalanced scales of justice. It is folly to even assume that BALSAs could accomplish that goal alone — what one Black organization can? At some point in an organization's history, the organization must begin to question why it exists, for whom it exists, and what changes are necessary to ensure its future existence. BALSAs has just recently undergone such an analysis. The National Board of BALSAs has set out to expand on the concept of collective leadership: The National Board has decided to expand the scope and activity of the National organization along with the concomitant expansion of the scope and activities of our local chapters. No longer will a Black law student organization sit in its ivory towers and talk about the legal rights and remedies of "those people" without ever knowing what are in fact the concerns of "those people."

There is a new breed of Black law students and, ultimately, Black lawyers coming. They are emerging with the commitment to change and balance the scales of justice. They will effect their goals in all areas, corporate, criminal, civil rights, etc. This new breed of lawyer will view himself as being a Black lawyer.

There is a great deal for us to learn from our older colleagues, for they have experienced a great deal and are experienced practitioners. They are a valuable

resource tool. Just as we can educate them to the idealism of young Black lawyers, so our older colleagues can enlighten us to the practical realities that may mitigate our naive idealism.

As the title of this article appropriately indicates, BALSAs is alive and (doing) well. However, that is not to say that the organization is without problems. Our problems are first, trying to get more Black students into law schools; secondly, trying to maximize our effectiveness and utility to the Black community; thirdly, trying to locate, and I cannot understate this, a continual source of funding for our extensive programs.

BALSAs's concerns are many and varied. However, the organization's primary concerns have centered on the following: Acting as a clearinghouse and national repository and articulator of Black law students' concerns; creating and establishing ways to better enable Black law students and Black lawyers to aid the community from which they came; acting as a catalyst of change in the legal system in order to balance the scales of justice, and sensitize the law and the legal profession to the ever-increasing needs of the black community. BALSAs was created and continues to develop in light of the above mentioned concerns.

BALSAs was a logical outgrowth of the troubled '60's. The period when such advocates of social change and moral regeneration as Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, Stokely Carmichael et al, spoke with fiery eloquence for Black people to assert themselves in the arena of self-determination and blackness. This eloquence was the articulation of the Black communities' collective disgust and despair with this country. Detroit, Newark, Harlem, and Watts stand as living testimonials to that despair.

In the initial stages, BALSAs¹ was a loosely knit organization of twenty or

1. NYU Law Student, A. J. Cooper was the first National Chairman.

so chapters throughout the country. During the period 1969-70,² the organization grew from twenty to one hundred local chapters and solidified its organizational structure.

However, despite the National organization's growing eminence and power on the national scene, it was the local chapters that contributed to the bright image of BALSAs. Indeed, the local chapters and regional offices of BALSAs continue to be crucial in national planning.

As BALSAs moves now into its third year, it is the objective of the new administration to develop a more viable and effective organization, addressing itself to both the legal and extra-legal needs of the community. To that extent, BALSAs is actively engaged in establishing and providing a National Research Institute for those lawyers seeking much needed legal research. The research institute will also offer its services to those community groups in need of valuable legal research. Along the same lines, it is the hope of BALSAs to establish a summer work experience program that will allow Black law students the opportunity to work in their chosen specialties in various parts of the country with a stipend to aid in their subsistence during the summer months. Too often Black law students are turned away from the doors of law firms, Black and white, during the interim months of the summer. This future BALSAs program will afford many Black law students a rewarding and satisfying summer.³

To fulfill our resolutions⁴ on collective leadership, the National Board, at its more recent meeting in Ann Arbor, Michigan, established that the regional directors shall be held accountable to their respective regions. The regional director will provide the necessary leadership to that region and all items of national importance will flow through him to the locals.

The National Board is composed of the following persons: Walter Stone, Case-Western Reserve University; Lennox Hinds, Rutgers; William Clifton, UCLA; Harold Fields, Miami; Art Mar-

tin, Georgetown; Herbert Singleton, Catholic University; Mike McLaurin, Connecticut; Shelton Godley, Texas Southern; Charles Bussey, St. Louis; John Walker, NYU; as well as myself, Robert Pickett, Michigan.

As National Chairman, it is my belief that with help from all segments of the Black community, BALSAs will continue to strive, grow and prosper. The Black community and the Black legal establishment, have a vested interest in maintaining the viability and effectiveness of the National Black Law Student Association. My fellow law students, brothers and sisters, you can rest assured that you have a National organization speaking to your needs and acting in your interest. We are to be your eyes and ears on the national level.

Yes, my friends, BALSAs is alive and (doing) well!

ROBERT PICKETT

NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF BLACK LAWYERS

IN DECEMBER of 1968, a small group of black lawyers gathered in Capahosic, Virginia to discuss the plight of black people in America and the way black lawyers could use their skills to deal with this plight. From this meeting, plans were made for a national meeting of black lawyers and law students. In May of 1969, several hundred black lawyers and law students gathered in Chicago to launch a new organization — the National Conference of Black Lawyers (NCBL). The feeling of those present at the Chicago meeting was that there existed an especial need for an activist black legal organization. In January of 1970, NCBL opened its permanent National Office in New York City and its first full time National Director, Haywood Burns, assumed his duties under the National co-chairmanship of Robert L. Carter and Floyd B. McKissick.

2. Under National Chairmanship of J. Otis Cochran.

3. If there are any questions, contact National Office, Univ of Michigan, Legal Research Ann Arbor, Michigan.

4. 1971 Convention, April 11, 1971.

In addition to having a nationwide membership of black lawyers, NCBL and Black American Law Students (BALSA) have affiliated. The organization carries on a program of litigation, including affirmative suits on community issues and defense of unpopular clients. It monitors governmental activity that affects the black community including judicial appointments and the work of the legislative, executive, judicial and administrative branches of government. It services the black bar through operating a lawyer referral service, job placement center and a continuing legal education program. It also deals with problems of law school admissions, curriculum reform and discrimination at the bar.

Since opening its National Office in January, 1970, NCBL has been deeply involved in legal matters of vital concern to the black community:

- Federal court challenge to the binding and gagging of Black Panther Party Chairman Bobby Seale during the Chicago trial.
- Successful defense of Cornell University Black Students charged in the 1969 occupation of Willard Straight Hall.
- Challenge to ruling of a New York Supreme Court Justice jailing and discontinuing indefinitely pre-trial hearings in the New York Panther 21 case.
- Won the release from Federal Prison of a Michigan civil rights activist wrongfully convicted and sentenced to five years for a Selective Service violation.
- Testified before Senate Judicial Committee in opposition to the nomination of Judge G. Harrold Carswell to the U.S. Supreme Court.
- Successfully defended \$100,000 slander action against a black law student who called a white policeman a white racist.
- Successfully blocked legal attempts to stop the Revolutionary Peoples Constitutional Convention from being held in Philadelphia September, 1970.
- Served as legal advisor and resource for the Congress of African Peoples.

The major present involvement is in the case of Angela Davis. New York NCBL member Margaret Burnham served as co-counsel in the extradition proceedings. In a case argued by the National Director Haywood Burns, NCBL

succeeded in obtaining a federal court injunction for Miss Davis against unfair prison treatment in the New York Women's House of Detention. Through arrangements worked out by NCBL, Miss Davis chose NCBL attorney Howard Moore of Atlanta, Georgia as her chief defense counsel. This is a step which many regard as highly significant for the black bar and the black community in the light of the desire of black activist lawyers to be chosen as representatives of black radical clients.

NCBL's plans for the immediate future are to continue to follow vigorously a program of using black legal skills in the service of the black community and to solicit as wide participation as possible from black lawyers and law students throughout the country.

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF CONCERNED LAW STUDENTS

THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION of Concerned Law Students is a newly formed organization dedicated to the task of supporting and expanding the educational careers of minority law students. The ultimate objective of the NACLs is to work for the betterment of all minority people through educational means. Its members feel that, as minority people, they all share one common goal, and that is to rise above prejudice and economic depression. They believe that this goal can become more of a reality if the ones who are already in law school begin to meet the commitment of returning to the community and educating their people.

The NACLs is vitally concerned with the recruitment of more minority students into the legal profession. Its members travel to various schools throughout the country, presenting a series of lectures designed to interest young people in the field of law. Afterward, they work closely with those students who show an interest by counseling them as to essential preparation courses, familiarizing them with the LSAT, helping them through the actual application process, and providing them with financial assistance.

Once the NACLS succeeds in getting the students into school, they continue to work with them in programs of community involvement. Its members feel that law students should get involved in community affairs while they are still in school. They feel that they can play a very important role in such community concerns as welfare rights, racial discrimination, housing, voting, etc.

The members of the National Association of Concerned Law Students are predominantly minority law students of all races. However, the organization stands ready to welcome any law student who expresses a willingness and dedication to work toward the betterment of minority people and their community. Anyone interested in joining the NACLS, or in getting into law school, should contact the executive director, Clifford Rogers, P. O. Box 2190, Trenton, New Jersey 08608.

JUDICIAL COUNCIL OF THE NATIONAL BAR ASSOCIATION

IN AUGUST OF 1971 over half of the nation's 269 Black judges met in Atlanta to found what is now the Judicial Council of the National Bar Association. The catalyst for their action was a profound concern for the present inability of the nation's legal system to meet the needs of this society. Recognizing that the problems of racism, classism, and institutional stagnation have seriously undermined the quality of justice in America, they determined that the time has come for them, as Black men of the law, to take the lead in redirecting and revitalizing the judicial process.

The Council was organized with the realization that only in unity is there strength. The past few decades have witnessed a rapid increase in the number of Blacks within the judiciary. Although this number is still grossly disproportionate as compared with the general Black population, it is now great enough to allow them to assume a role of power and

influence. These Black judges believe that respect for racial variation comes not through the disappearance of differences, but by a retention of racial distinctiveness. They feel that the modified judicial ethnic that has been forged in the crucible of the Black experience has given them a unique capacity to restate the law, redefine justice, and to present views from a different perspective. They are convinced that no true progress can be made in improving the quality of justice in America without this Black input and cooperation.

The goals of the Council are definite. Basically, they want to make the white-dominated judiciary more responsive to the needs of Blacks and of the poor. Specifically, they are addressing themselves to the problems of racism and class bias within the judicial and law enforcement processes. They want to improve the public's confidence in the courts and in the determination of the judiciary to understand and fashion effective remedies for the legitimate grievances of the deprived and the depressed. They want to develop and improve the judicial system in order to eradicate case backloads and to facilitate the interrelationships between police, courts, and corrections. Above all, they intend to increase Black representation throughout the entire judiciary, with a special emphasis upon the federal bench.

The leadership of the Council is as dynamic as its program. Its main officers are Judge George W. Crockett of Detroit, Judge Joseph Howard of Baltimore, Judge James L. Watson of New York, and Judge William S. Thompson of Washington, D.C. These men, together with an eighteen man executive board, have embarked upon a concentrated program designed to begin the implementation of the goals of the Council. Drastic action rather than reticent action is their chosen course, and they are unreservedly committed to the task of building a broader basis for judgment and in expanding the visions of what a just society should be.