

4-1-1998

Rainbow Coalition: Students of Color Dinner Recognizes Achievements

UB Law Forum

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.law.buffalo.edu/ub_law_forum

Recommended Citation

UB Law Forum (1998) "Rainbow Coalition: Students of Color Dinner Recognizes Achievements," *UB Law Forum*: Vol. 11 : No. 1 , Article 28.

Available at: https://digitalcommons.law.buffalo.edu/ub_law_forum/vol11/iss1/28

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Alumni Publications at Digital Commons @ University at Buffalo School of Law. It has been accepted for inclusion in UB Law Forum by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ University at Buffalo School of Law. For more information, please contact lawscholar@buffalo.edu.

Sui Mei, a Skadden Fellow at the Asian-American Legal Education Fund, gave the keynote address



UB LAW
FORUM

Spring
1998

PHOTOS BY JOHN HICKEY

Rainbow coalition

Students of Color Dinner recognizes achievements

A wide diversity of voices, a hopeful vision of the future, a ceremonious sending-off of the graduating third-year students: It could only be the annual Students of Color Dinner.

One of the best-attended and most joyous of year-ending events at the Law School, the dinner recognizes the achievements of the graduating seniors and allows them to pass along their "legacy," one on one, to a continuing student in a dramatic candle-lighting ceremony.

The year's dinner, held at the

University Inn & Conference Center, featured a keynote address by Siu Mei, a Skadden Fellow at the Asian-American Legal Education Fund, in New York City. Mei spoke from experience as a young lawyer and a scholar, urging those in attendance to make time as they establish their law careers for public service practice.

Law students, she said, often become increasingly disengaged from the concept of "doing justice" as they proceed through law school. They are taught that there is always another side to the case, causing them to lose the conviction they began school with. They are taught to sever the personal from the professional, to become a logical problem-solver at the expense of human feelings. They are taught a case method that separates moral intuition from legal analysis. "Students can leave school feeling that the law is just a game and they cannot have much impact anyway," Mei said. "This can discourage people from doing public-interest law.

"But the law is not just a game, and each and every one of you is needed. We are in a crisis in terms of access to the legal system. Cuts in funding have made this situation more acute."

Mei reminded her audience that "you don't have to be a full-time public-interest lawyer to help out. You can do pro bono work, and it can be worked into the busiest of schedules. Even fledgling attorneys can engage in legal



Left to right: Gerald E. Whelan '97, Gildardo Michael Garcia '97 and Mercedes R. Lindao '97

service for those who cannot afford it.”

Such service can be as simple as representing a poor client seeking disability benefits. Or, she pointed out, it can involve teaching, lobbying, setting up a not-for-profit corporation for a worthy client.

Why do pro bono work? Mei cited several reasons:

- As a way to acknowledge one’s debts to people of color who pioneered the way, such as Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall.

- To improve the public perception of attorneys: “I say we should shock the public by showing that lawyers are willing to do public-interest work for free.”

“In order for the law to survive, it has to be open to those voices that reflect the diversity of society.”

- To improve one’s legal skills and work in a position of responsibility that private or corporate practice might not otherwise offer.

- And finally, Mei said, as “a tonic for the soul – something deeply and spiritually rewarding.”

Public-interest work, she said, “takes the law from being just a job and moves it toward more of a calling. Helping someone in need feels good, it helps put your own life in perspective, and it makes you appreciate what you have. You can all make a difference.”

Professor Errol E. Meidinger was honored with the Jacob Hyman Award for his longtime commitment to the Law School’s minority students. His acceptance speech looked at the law as a kind of jazz.

“Wynton Marsalis,” he said, “teaches that jazz is the purest form of democracy. There are rules, people have

expectations, but it’s an open-ended set of possibilities. It’s a call-and-response process, and sometimes a whole new tune emerges.

“So it is with a great deal of law. In order for the law to survive, it has to be open to those voices that reflect the diversity of society. In many ways, you are those voices.”

The Students of Color Dinner was jointly sponsored by four student organizations: the Asian-American Law Students Association, the Black Law Students Association, the Latin American Law Students Association and the Native American Law Students Association. ●



Top left: Janette Cortes '99, left, and Tanya Green '99

Above: Professor Errol E. Meidinger

At left: Flora Chan '97, left, and Daniela F. Almeida '97