

I will never forget the day my father went missing. It was the eve of Father's Day. My mother and I knew something was wrong when we returned to a home that was far too quiet. We were accustomed to him greeting us at the door with his huge smile, eager to talk to us about our respective days. This day, he was nowhere to be found. It was unusual for him to disappear without notice. We searched for hours until my mother decided to go to the police station for help. Once we arrived, we received the answers we were searching for, but certainly not the ones we were expecting. We learned that my father was arrested earlier that day and was charged with intent to commit a hate crime and two counts of criminal threats. Since my mother could not afford bail, we accepted the unnerving reality that he would have to remain in a jail cell until his trial.

As I matured, I reflected on this transformative experience and found myself trying to make sense of this tragedy. At the age of ten, I witnessed the structural and systemic ills of the American judicial process. My father was wrongfully arrested and charged for a crime that he did not commit. The prosecution worked tirelessly to label him as the "82<sup>nd</sup> Street Monster," a gross mischaracterization of the man I knew as "daddy". Although we did not have the financial means to hire legal representation, my father still received adequate legal counsel. His saving grace? A pro bono attorney named Mr. Hicks who fought tirelessly to ensure that my dad came home.

My father remained in jail for two months until his trial commenced. I sat in the back of the courtroom week after week, observing the room full of people rallying around the guilt or innocence of my father. I watched my hero escorted in and out of the courtroom in handcuffs with his head forced forward, forbidden from turning around. Mr. Hicks and his team worked relentlessly on my father's behalf. After ninety-two days, he was acquitted on all charges.

Mr. Hicks' advocacy prevented my dad from becoming a statistic; another Black man ensnared in the criminal justice system like numerous others in my family and in my community. Despite the emotional trauma I experienced, it was his actions that changed my outlook on this unfortunate situation. Mr. Hicks' advocacy inspired me to pursue a similar career in law so that I could be in a position to have the same impact as he had on my life. From this, I found my way to Political Science and African-American Studies where I cultivated the skills necessary to advocate for the communities of which I am passionate about. I learned how the inner workings of institutional racism and historical disenfranchisement operate, which helped me understand my own

experiences as a young black woman in a classroom, at Emory University, and in America. I learned how to navigate these spaces by applying to leadership positions in organizations that worked to change the status quo by holding my university accountable for the needs of all students.

Through my on-campus leadership, I realized a historical truth that persists today—it is the advocacy of those who fight against individual, systemic, and structural oppression that catalyzes meaningful change. This led me to join Emory's Commission on Racial and Social Justice under which I had the opportunity to work with administrative officials to enact institutional change for underrepresented communities on campus. Although I was one student in one seat at a very large table, I did not allow that to limit my desired influence. For example, in response to concern for identity safe spaces, I collaborated with other student leaders to craft a sustainable plan for LatinX and Black student spaces to ensure their longevity for years to follow. This plan led to a university-wide social justice retreat in which Black and Brown student groups collaborated with faculty and staff members to identify group-specific issues and conceivable solutions. I continued to build off the efforts of the students that preceded me to shape a better environment for those to follow, creating an atmosphere where all students feel heard and represented for years to come.

It is my ambition to learn the law and my commitment to equitable social justice efforts that assures me that I have made the right decision in pursuing law school. I am prepared to use prior and forthcoming knowledge to enact equitable, institutional change. I have learned that advocacy has the power to alter the trajectories of people's lives and to reshape the narrative of their experiences. As a legal advocate, I will use my knowledge of the law to fight on behalf of those who fall prey to inequality, injustice, and oppression, just as Mr. Hicks fought for my father.

As the first individual in my immediate family to pursue a law degree, I will continue to build off of my previous experiences, always striving to rise to the occasion to be an example for those like myself. I am committed to giving back because of the environment that produced me. A legal profession will grant me access to knowledge of the law which I will use to serve those who are often overlooked and underserved. I am passionate about not only making an impact but also about representing those who typically do not have access to adequate legal counsel for various reasons and helping those otherwise incapable of knowing their rights or how the law is supposed to serve them. I am determined to leave every space better than it was when I entered,

constantly reminding myself of how far I have come. I figure if I could impact one individual's life through legal advocacy, it could cause a ripple effect, one that could potentially help a child somewhere experiencing a struggle similar to my own to overcome their situation and grow up wanting to help others do the same, similar to my experience as a child. Upon graduation from law school, I hope to be working in the civil with a non-profit that provides access to justice to lower-income, minority communities. Another option that I am exploring is working in a corporate firm while dedicating my time to pro bono efforts and volunteering with non-profit organizations. In my career as an attorney, I aim to work in one of these two sectors, but outside of my career, I plan to diligently work with minority communities in America to bridge the gap of knowledge of the law, the criminal justice system, and individual's privileges and rights as American citizens. I also plan to create a program with a local elementary school in a low-income community that brings in working professionals into the school to talk about their careers and conduct activities that focus on higher education, career paths, and community involvement on a bi-weekly basis. In this day and age, Americans have learned that representation matters for the youth, and that consistently seeing and interacting with accomplished adults that look like them can have a positive effect on their psyche, perception of self, and outlook on the future. In my career as an attorney, I plan to work diligently within the practice area I choose in law school. While I am not completely set on a specific practice or sector of the law, due to my personal experiences as a young Black woman in America, I am certain that my duty to the world as a black lawyer extends outside of my official career. This is why I want to use my profession to spread my knowledge of the law, be an advocate for minority groups, and fight for institutional and systemic change for the betterment of the underserved and less fortunate.