

COMING FULL CIRCLE

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On April 15, 2011, the University of Wisconsin hosted an event that I was regrettably unable to attend, “Honoring Professor James E. Jones, Jr.: A Hastie Fellow Reunion and Workshop.” From a peer standpoint, I missed the opportunity to be with my dear friends Michael Green, Michele Goodwin, Adele Morrison, and Thomas Mitchell. The five of us were in residence at the law school at the same time in the late 1990s, making up the largest single collection of Hasties-in-progress. I also missed the perfect opportunity to thank Jim Jones in person, not just for his fortitude in envisioning and executing the Hastie Program, but for his unapologetic optimism for what lay ahead for legal education.

Professor Jones has never been known to mince words. During my time as a Hastie Fellow, I enjoyed hours upon hours of frank conversation with him in the faculty library. I fed my coffee addiction in procrastination of thesis writing as he delivered his notorious straight talk about the past and future of legal education. Taking great paraphrasing liberty to protect the ears of the innocent reader, I will recount three threads of his wisdom:

- If you don’t see the thing you are looking for in an institution, create it. Don’t let some administrator tell you that it cannot be done. Figure out how to do it, and do it.¹
- It’s harder for people to marginalize you when you are indispensable.
- We do not *always* control the timing of opportunities. When a chance comes around, know that it might be a one-time deal.

I have thought of his lessons several times over the course of my still relatively short career. I can actually hear his voice in my head and it

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1. After recounting this frequent sermon from Professor Jones, I had the chance to review his autobiography, *Hattie’s Boy: The Life and Times of a Transitional Negro*. There, I found his familiar recounting of how the Hastie Fellowship was conceived back in 1973 in response to a perceived lack of “qualified minority candidates” on the supply side. JAMES E. JONES, JR., *HATTIE’S BOY: THE LIFE AND TIMES OF A TRANSITIONAL NEGRO* 790 (2006). Of the Wisconsin philosophy, he recalled: “Wisconsin decided it would make this effort, not to *find* the qualified candidate but to *create* them.” *Id.*

makes me smile. Professor Jones frequently urged me and other Hastie Fellows to take our roles seriously as scholars and teachers in our chosen subfields, but to take more seriously our responsibility to be a full citizen in the heart of the law school building and in the heart of the law school curriculum.² He cautioned us about what committee assignments we should be willing to accept long term.

He frequently reminded me that his vision of full diversity and inclusion in legal education would not be realized if I, for example, taught four Indian law classes and served on a law school diversity committee. He made me promise to ask to teach the first-year property class and to sit on the law school's hiring committee.

A hardcopy reprint of a 1999 *Michigan Journal of Race and Law* article titled "Some Observations on Teaching from the 'Pioneer' Generation" sits on my bookshelf. On the cover, the author, Professor Jim Jones, inscribed the following words to me: "[t]o our Future from the Past." In the article, Professor Jones outlines the three phases of diversity in legal education, the first phase being the initial wave of minority law professors to be hired to tenure-track positions in mainstream law schools.³ The second phase being when minority law professors "invade the core curriculum"⁴ rather than being limited by subject matter expectations, where it is presumed a minority professor would teach civil rights and other special interest courses. His message to my generation of minority law professors was spelled out in classic Jim Jones blunt: "[T]hey must adopt the position that legal education is their house. They are the legitimate occupants, and they are legitimate candidates to be head of household."⁵

When Professor Jones wrote the 1999 article, he suggested that the third phase would begin at some point in the future when "we are no longer considered role players who come off the bench, but part of the starting line-up, the team captains, and the coaches."⁶ In that same year, I recall Professor Jones voicing disappointment that only a few former Hastie Fellows were able to attend a symposium that was held around the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Hastie Fellowship,⁷ which made my missing the 2011 symposium all the more painful for me.

My reason for missing the event has a bittersweet ending. On April 15, 2011, I concluded an on-campus interview as part of a law school

2. James E. Jones, Jr., *Some Observations on Teaching from the "Pioneer" Generation*, 5 MICH. J. RACE & L. 229, 232–35 (1999).

3. *Id.*

4. *Id.* at 235.

5. *Id.* at 237.

6. *Id.*

7. JONES, *supra* note 1, at 775.

dean search. At that time, I was still in my thirties, did not graduate from an elite law school, and had only one year of experience as an interim associate dean under my belt. It was a long-shot opportunity that I could have easily talked myself out of pursuing but for one thing: Professor Jones would have been appalled with such manifestation of self-doubt. I was not the traditional law school dean candidate, and that is exactly the point.

I come full circle to tip my hat to my mentor and dear friend James E. Jones, Jr. I know he forgives me for missing the 2011 reunion. I also know that he smiles knowing that I write this tribute from the law dean's office at the flagship university in his home state of Arkansas. I am here because I was a Hastie Fellow. I am here because of Jim Jones.