

JIM JONES: A TEACHER, A MENTOR, AND AN INSPIRATION TO LAW STUDENTS

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Professor James E. Jones, Jr. was the first African American member of the faculty at the University of Wisconsin. Jim¹ joined the faculty in 1968 at the age of forty-four, after a highly successful career as a lawyer in the United States Department of Labor, because he wanted to teach. Earlier he had been promoted to the highest status (or “grade”) possible for a government lawyer who was not a political appointee. He had served both as Director of the Office of Labor Management Policy and as Associate Solicitor for Labor Relations and Civil Rights, and he was the primary author of the federal government’s first effort to require affirmative action employment practices for building contractors doing business with the federal government (called the “Philadelphia Plan”).² Jim possessed a great deal of information and experience that he wanted to share in the classroom.

And Professor Jones’s life story had taught him how important education could be to the future he hopes for. Jim was born in 1924 in Little Rock, Arkansas, in the midst of racial segregation to a family of little means. He supported himself through college, with a healthy assist from the G.I. Bill, and, after graduating from Lincoln University,³ he became the first African American to earn a master’s degree in industrial relations from the University of Illinois.⁴ Two years later, having received a prestigious John Hays Whitney fellowship, awarded annually to only fifty African Americans pursuing graduate or professional education anywhere in the country, Jim came to the University of

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1. Current and former students, who have written the other contributions to this Tribute, always use “Professor Jones” when writing or speaking to or about the subject of this Tribute. I have known Jim for forty-five years as a colleague and friend. Although I too have benefitted from his teaching and mentoring, it is most natural for me to call him Jim, as I will frequently do in this Tribute. Obviously, no disrespect is intended.

2. JAMES E. JONES, JR., *HATTIE’S BOY: THE LIFE AND TIMES OF A TRANSITIONAL NEGRO* 383–426 (2006) (discussing Jim’s experiences in holding a management position in the United States Department of Labor). *Hattie’s Boy* is Jim’s autobiography.

3. Lincoln University is a historically black university located in Jefferson City, Missouri. At the time the University of Arkansas system did not have any college open to African Americans. *See id.* at 63–76. Jim’s college education was interrupted by four years of service in the United States Navy during World War II.

4. *Id.* at 77–83, 137–47, 155–81.

Wisconsin Law School, graduating in 1956,⁵ and then joined the Department of Labor. Education enabled Jim's social mobility and allowed him to become a highly successful and accomplished lawyer. And it was education that Jim still believes is the best vehicle for persons to achieve their potential, especially persons without social capital acquired at birth.

At the law school, Jim created a new course in employment discrimination law and regularly taught Labor Law.⁶ He also immediately made his mark as a leader throughout the university in establishing institutional policy. Shortly after his arrival, Jim was appointed to a committee to set affirmative action policy for the entire university system,⁷ and those policies are still mostly in force. He became a faculty member of the university's Athletic Board, where he served for seventeen years and carved out a special niche by insisting that we prepare our student athletes for life after competitive sports.⁸ Here at the law school he spearheaded the creation of the Hastie Fellowship Program to provide graduate law degrees for aspiring law teachers.⁹ The other contributors to this Tribute to Professor Jones are mostly graduates of that program.

Professor Jones also took a great interest in the law school's Legal Education Opportunities (LEO) Program, started in the year in which he joined the faculty (1968) and designed to recruit members of historically disadvantaged minority groups to become law students.¹⁰ Though Jim has always been a guiding presence for this program, he has never served as an administrator for the program, nor even on the faculty-student committee that sets various policies. Jim has always wanted the entire faculty to take ownership of the LEO Program (as it has) and not for it to be the special project of the law school's only African American professor, as Jim was for many years.

5. For Jim's account of his law school years, see *id.* at 219–47. Jim was one of the first African Americans to graduate from Wisconsin and had few African American classmates. The law school did not initiate active recruitment of diversity students until 1968, when the Legal Education Opportunities Program was started. *Legal Education Opportunities Program*, U. WIS. L. SCH., <http://law.wisc.edu/leo/> (last visited Mar. 21, 2013).

6. James E. Jones, Jr., *LL.M. Programs as a Route to Teaching: The Hastie Program at Wisconsin*, 10 ST. LOUIS U. PUB. L. REV. 257, 262 (1991) (explaining that Professor Jones “developed teaching materials for an entire course in employment discrimination law”). Jim also regularly taught graduate seminars in the university's Industrial Relations Research Institute.

7. JONES, *supra* note 2, at 525–28.

8. *Id.* at 565–80.

9. *Id.* at 717.

10. *Legal Education Opportunities Program*, *supra* note 5.

But the lack of formal involvement in the LEO Program has not restrained Professor Jones from taking an interest in the education and lives of our LEO students.¹¹ To the contrary Jim took special interest in a great number of LEO students, talking to them for hours in his office and even approaching them in the halls to ask how things were going and to offer advice. Professor Jones has never gone easy on these students; his affection for them has been a “tough love.” He has demanded that they work to their abilities and that after graduation they “give back” by becoming successful in whatever career they chose. In my experience former students remember these interactions with Professor Jones more poignantly than their experiences in his classroom. And they appreciate the advice he has given, the demands he has made of them, and the personal example he has set for them by living up to the demanding standards he advocates for others.

I have gathered a few quotes from former students which reflect their experiences with Professor Jones. As somebody who has long been involved in the administration of our LEO Program, and who maintains contact with many LEO graduates, I can assure you that these quotes are representative of many more that I could have collected.¹²

Celia Jackson (class of 1980) recently completed a term as a member of Wisconsin Governor Jim Doyle’s cabinet, serving as Secretary of Regulation and Licensing. She writes:

[Professor Jones] challenged us all in ways that made us uncomfortable but it enabled us to realize our capacity to do more. For me, he was like a grandfather, tough on the exterior, but gentle on the inside, always finding ways to help you discover your own power.

Danae Davis (class of 1980) was until recently a member of the University of Wisconsin Board of Regents. After a successful career as a lawyer, she now heads a nongovernmental organization in Milwaukee working with teenage girls. She writes:

Professor Jim Jones epitomizes excellence. He expected your best (and) always gave you his best. . . . Professor Jones inspired me to be my best, especially when it comes to academics and being a leader in this community utilizing the skills I began to gain while in Law School.

11. Though I write here mostly about Jim’s involvement with LEO students, he also took a considerable interest in the lives of other students as well, especially ones interested in specializing in labor law. Jim loved to teach.

12. I solicited only four persons for comments, each of whom provided a statement that I could use.

Cory Nettles (class of 1996) is a partner in one of Wisconsin's largest law firms. He also was a member of Governor Doyle's cabinet, serving as his first Secretary of Commerce, and is managing director of a private equity fund. He writes:

Though I never took a class with [Professor Jones], I was 'taught' by him in the halls and elevators of the Law School, and over countless hours in his office where he regularly held court with me and many others. As a father figure, friend, and role model, he set a high bar of excellence towards which I still strive in my personal and professional life. He was unabashed and unapologetic about the need for minority attorneys to work twice as hard and be twice as good. And who could argue with his approach? It obviously had worked so very well for him and for many whom he had trained.

Eric Jackson (class of 1993) was president of student government while a law student and now is a partner in a D.C. law firm dealing with complex business transactions and litigation. He writes:

Although I was initially intimidated by him, I came to appreciate it when Professor Jones would tightly grab my arm and pull me to the side to share some wisdom about how to succeed as a student and an attorney. . . . Professor Jones demonstrated tough love towards me and my fellow students because he wanted us to be excellent in all of our endeavors. I am forever grateful for the lessons he instilled in me.

I have emphasized in this Tribute Professor Jones's role as a teacher and role model for students. I would be remiss if I did not mention that Jim's teaching role extended to his colleagues, like me. Jim has talked to us in the halls or offices as well, and has offered us advice, sometimes in a stern manner, but always with the aim of making us better and more effective people. Because of his many experiences, Jim has so much to teach us, including and especially about what it means and has meant to be an African American working in the law. Like the students quoted above, I too have learned much from these encounters, and I am grateful for it.