

## Reflection on Anti-Racism

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Decades before Tupac Shakur rapped, “and we ain’t meant to survive ‘cause it’s a set up/and even though we fed up, we got to keep our head up,” James Baldwin wrote: “You were born where you were born and faced the future that you faced because you were black and for no other reason...you were not expected to aspire to excellence. You were expected to make peace with mediocrity.”

The first time I was accused of plagiarism, I was in the tenth grade. My teacher opened class with a riddle she needed us to help her solve. She told us that she was going to read us something, and she wanted to know if we believed that a tenth grader was capable of writing it. I sat quietly as she read the first page of my book report. After she finished, she admitted that although she had scoured the internet, she had not found the writing hidden on any website. Tentatively, I raise my hand. When she called my name, I rasped, “that’s my paper, and I wrote it.” A classmate I had known since kindergarten laughed. “Oh, Brittany wrote it,” he said. “That makes sense.” The class laughed, and the incident was quickly forgotten. That is until, she passed out our graded book reports. Although my paper had been good enough to accuse me of stealing it, it was not good enough to merit a perfect score. Instead, it was only worth a 99. I could not help but notice that my white, male classmate—who had not been accused of plagiarism—had a big, red 100 on the front of his book report.

When I told my mother, she was livid. At the time, I could not understand why. Looking back, I realize that she had heard what I had not. The real question my teacher had asked was not rather a tenth grader could write so well, but rather a black tenth grader could write so well. Although my grade changed, the question would remain the same and it followed me all through college. Over time I got the impression that my intelligence was expected to be second-rate. Even in spaces where academic excellence was supposed to be fostered, I was not expected to aspire to excellence. I was expected to make peace with mediocrity. A 99 could garner suspicion from my professors, while my white classmates’ 100s were not even worth a batting of the eye.

The first time I was asked to reflect on what anti-racism meant to me, I lied. Here, I will tell the truth. Prior to coming to law school, I had never given it a thought. More specifically, before this trimester, I had never considered it. When I shared this fact with a classmate she was saddened. The truth is that I have spent half of my life trying to figure out how to insulate black people from the harshness of racism. I have often questioned what equality looks like and who would set the standard. My biggest concern has not been stymieing racism, but making sure black people thrive in spite of it. However, I am also acutely aware that the destinies of black and white people are intertwined in this country. What becomes of one, will become of the other. As a future black attorney, my role within the anti-racism movement is to disrupt the assumptions surrounding black intelligence and to create spaces where black people are able to erase any doubts as to whether they are worthy to occupy traditionally white spaces. While the legal system may not be equipped to meet the demands of movement activists, it is my responsibility to help foster the creation of networks of lawyers dedicated to the same goal: Forcing open the doors of a profession that has restrained us for far too long. Although I cannot speak with certainty about how the anti-racist movement will impact black people in the future, I hope that it will produce

a world where black people can begin to be 100% of who they are instead of 99% of who they are expected to be.