

If You Could Only See (the Future You've Made Possible for Me)

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I dedicate this letter to those alumni, faculty, and students who allow me to be here today. I dedicate it to those who came before me who made it possible for me to thrive in this environment and those who will come after me who will hopefully love this law school just as much as I do, if not more. My desire is that you feel a deep sense of pride and belonging every time you walk into these classrooms.

As we commemorate this 50th Anniversary, I think about the first Black students who applied and enrolled at the School of Law—especially the eight trailblazers who, in 1969, had the courage to attend this school, and the three of those eight students who graduated three years later in 1972. How would they feel if you could see me and the other Black students today? Have we let them down? Are we doing enough? Are they proud of what we have accomplished because of them?

To those individuals, I ask, if you could only see me, would it make it all worth it? Would you do it again? As your legacy, I can only hope so. It is an honor to continue the path you have paved before me. When I think about you, I am simultaneously filled with an immense sense of sadness and a strong sense of pride. You fought battles so that we didn't have to, faced consistent bigotry, racism, and other external forces that tried to not only cause you to fail, but to make you think that you were destined to. The challenges you faced were mental as well as physical. Your very presence in this school created a change. 50 years later, because of the path you paved, I am not faced with the same hatred and questioning you dealt with.

However, we Black students still face both internal and external challenges that contribute to the belief that we do not belong here. 50 years later, despite how far we have come, many Black students still feel that they are destined to fail through no fault of their own. In essence, while the physical battles are starting to dissipate, the mental battles remain as strong as ever.

If you could see us now, would you be proud? Or would you take note of how far we have to go? Did you think about any of us when you made history? Are you proud of our accomplishments or concerned about the challenges we still face? Does it bother you that even 50 years later I still have to think about how my singular successes and failures can drastically change the opportunities for future Black law students? As a current Black student, that is constantly in the back of my mind. Because just as I am your legacy, walking a similar path, I am creating a legacy for future Black law students.

I am proud of all that has been accomplished in these last 50 years. When you began your law student careers, the eight of you were the only Black students in the law school. Today, I walk the halls amongst over 40 Black law students with all different opinions, personalities, and dreams. We exist and thrive in this environment because you paved the way for us to be here. During my time as a student, I have had Black professors, Black mentors, and even a Black SBA President. Throughout my time here, I served as President of the Black Law Student Association, a Senator in the Student Bar Association, Law Student Ambassador, and several other leadership positions in one of the top law schools in the country. All of this is possible because you took the first step in a long journey towards equality and inclusion at the University. The future you have made possible for me, to graduate from the University of

Alabama School of Law, is one that my ancestors never even dreamed of, but I will be achieving in a few short weeks.

So, I say thank you. Thank you to those who paved the way. And thank you to those who served as allies to the first Black students and to those who continue to do so for Black students today. It is important to remember that change is not passive it is active. Acceptance and inclusion are not just ideas for discussion, they are ideals that require actions. I call on each of you who are here today and ask that as you go forward, that you don't simply remember how far we've come, but also consider how far we have to go. I thank each of our alumni for paving the way, and I hope that we continue to push forward. But still I ask, if you could see me now...would you see yourself? Would you see the progress we have made? Or would you see the work that still needs to be done?

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