

The theme of this quarter's Voices of Excellence is "a different view," featuring articles from firm members discussing how their unique backgrounds and experiences have shaped their time at Barclay Damon. We hope you enjoy these articles and appreciate gaining a new perspective.

The Uncomfortable Truth: Racism in America

I avoided joining the Diversity Leadership Team. As the Albany office's only African-American employee, I have all manner of objections to being the voice of "the black experience." Not that I haven't had experiences unique to my skin tone; of course I have. Still, I'm not "the authority" on how the black community feels about any issue.



Yolanda Bacote

Last year, the firm hosted a lunch 'n' learn on privilege, featuring a short video where a black woman shared a negative experience at a local grocery store. I identified with everything she shared—sometimes trying to advocate for yourself can make you sound like *that* overly sensitive, angry, and bitter black woman. I could imagine myself in her place, feeling humiliated and mortified, noticing everyone silently watching. She mentioned two elderly white women in line behind her, and I remember thinking they were "mature" enough to have grown up on the other side of the American racial civil rights struggle. In that moment, as each individual remained a quiet spectator, it was impossible to know which side of the fence any one of them lived on. They did not speak up. To that issue, I'll say it's important to not let our silence speak for us—it may not speak well.

I know many people believe race is a non-issue (raise your hand if you've ever said "I don't see color!"). Hoping and wishing that were true, though, while avoiding reality will not cause all the unresolved issues to slip away. I was raised by old-fashioned parents. Taught old-fashioned values. Admonished to maintain a professional demeanor in the workplace. I am 54 years old—I have had enough experience with racism in this country to share stories that will bring heartbreak and tears as well as frustration and anger. And, for some people, if they cannot relate to those experiences and the emotions they conjure up, then, for them, I become *that* angry black woman. And that's where communication stops. (I intentionally skipped discussing the current political climate, Confederate flags, memorial statues, slavery, etc. By the end of any one of those discussions, you may ALL view me as *that* angry black woman. I have opinions, y'all!)

Repeatedly, the news broadcasts videos of unarmed African-Americans shot and killed by police officers in apparently non-threatening situations. One such unfortunate soul was prostrate and cuffed, with officers on top of him. Another was a 12-year-old with a toy gun, and the officer who killed him was only on the scene for mere seconds and never spoke. If you are unaware of the tense racial climate in America, you're not paying attention.

Children raised in monochromatic communities, only seeing individuals of other cultures collecting trash, cleaning pools, or stocking shelves, may grow up with some misconceptions. To me, that word "race" has connotations that may subconsciously invoke feelings of hostility and defensiveness. Also, to me, "race" is a singular, all-inclusive group: the human race. When addressing diversity, more appropriate language may be "heritage" and "culture." These terms are more suggestive of warmth and pride and bring thoughts of food, music, dance—things we enjoy sharing. I know everyone does not agree with my views, and I respect their opinions and their right to have them. I can only speak for myself. (Say it with me, people: I am NOT the voice of the black experience!)

I have a large family. If we shared stories of racism that we have heard, witnessed, or experienced first-hand—from subtle privilege to flat-out bigotry—they would cause anger to burn and tears to fall. I have learned to be careful where I share those stories. There is one way to get beyond our own misconceptions about other cultures, though, and that is to get to know people who look different from us. I never discourage interest—I love to share. Share with me, and let's have a conversation.

I am not full of anger and bitterness. I am full of hope and faith. Oh yeah, and guess who's now on the Diversity Leadership Team?

QUOTE OF THE QUARTER

"If you can learn a simple trick, Scout, you'll get along a lot better with all kinds of folks. You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view, until you climb inside of his skin and walk around in it."

- Atticus Finch, *To Kill a Mockingbird*,
by Harper Lee

Buying a One-Way Ticket: My Experience as a Foreign-Born Attorney

Buying a one-way ticket. Moving to a new place, and starting a new life. You pack your hopes and aspirations and take off, hoping you will not have your dinner alone when you get there. When you first arrive in your new country, it can be tough to obtain things that were easy at home, like seeing a physician when you do not feel well or getting cable in your new apartment, but the excitement of being in a different culture and your desire to succeed in this new environment keep you going.

I am happy to say that my experience in my new country, the United States, has been a positive one. For that, I am extremely grateful to new friends and family I have acquired over the years. Born and raised in Turkey, I was 24 years old when I permanently moved to the United States to study law at Syracuse University. I was excited and nervous. My brother was working in the Albany area, so I stayed there that summer to ease the transition. Thanks to him, during my first couple of months, I didn't have to deal with the cable guys, nor did I have my dinner alone.

For me, diversity did not play a significant role in my life during law school. It was when I entered the workforce that I noticed differences between myself and those around me. It wasn't only my accent that made me unique at work, but my way of handling projects, issues, conflicts—you name it—was slightly different than my colleagues due to my different background, and I was able to use these differences to everyone's benefit.

My Turkish roots undeniably influence the way I practice law. For example, to this day, I still start emails with a quick "howdy" note. In my culture, even if you are asking someone a very simple question, you still first ask how they are doing. I know this is not really necessary in our fast-paced corporate culture, but I like to continue this habit as it provides a way to express my identity. I've also noticed that I tend to be more direct than my American

friends and family, especially when I am faced with an urgent matter. Living in a young nation, Turks always believe that we have quite a lot to catch up on, and time is money. Sometimes I can be too blunt or direct when trying to get things done quickly, but some clients do need to hear the honest truth early on, especially if I am delivering not-so-good news—the only thing worse than a no is a no too late. This is a fun balancing act that I work on mastering every day.



Ekin Senlet

Since I started law school more than a decade ago, increasing diversity has been a hot topic among law firms. Diversity can benefit a firm just as it does a stock portfolio, protecting us from the outsized influence of a single unhedged position and keeping a firm agile so it can take on the next challenge. Diversity is not merely about the country you came from or your skin color, it's also about the different backgrounds, education, and perspectives we bring that can help us solve problems by looking at them from different angles.

For me, there are two levels of diversity, the first being the creation of equal opportunities for diverse individuals to enter and move up in the workforce. But what I really want readers to take away from this essay is the importance of the second level of diversity: an appreciation for the diversity of ideas, backgrounds, and perspectives that different people bring to the table. That kind of diversity helps drive success in business, in law, and even in your stock portfolio. That kind of diversity will enable each of us to learn new things every day and—even without buying a one-way ticket—to go someplace we have never been before.

New Faces Around the Firm

(Through January 1, 2019)

ALBANY

Steve Blow, *Of Counsel*

BOSTON

Patina Campbell, *Legal Office Assistant*

ROCHESTER

Suzanne Allen, *Billing Coordinator*

Sherrie Himes, *Legal Secretary*

Shayne Morrow, *Receptionist*

Alexandra Vasta, *Billing Coordinator*

SYRACUSE

Jackie Gram, *Payroll Analyst*

Morgan Hinckley, *Law Clerk*

Alexandra Locke, *Associate*

Shannon McVay, *Human Resources Assistant*

Alexandra Waterbury, *Digital Marketing Coordinator*

Barclay Damon Summer Associate Program Experience

Barclay Damon is a law firm dedicated to diversity and inclusion. This firm does not simply wish to check boxes. Rather, it wishes to expand its horizons by learning and growing alongside those from all walks of life. One way the firm incorporates this belief is through the Diversity 1L Summer Associate Program. This past summer, I was fortunate enough to take part in the Albany office's first venture with this program.

When I was first offered the position, I was incredibly excited because 1Ls don't typically get firm internships—and if they do, they are rarely paid. However, I was also worried that, as a 1L, I wouldn't get real work because I didn't have the experience to handle it, and I was worried that I might be just a "token" for a firm that only cared about looking good. Thankfully, those fears had no legs to stand on at Barclay Damon.

After being greeted by amazing attorneys and staff who truly wanted to get to know me, I was given meaningful work that allowed me to learn all about what it is like to work in a law firm. I drafted an executive clemency application for a pro bono client, researched and drafted a motion to restore a personal injury claim, attended a deposition, and much more. My experience greatly improved my writing and research abilities and allowed me to work across a wide array of areas, including health care controversies, tort litigation, constitutional law, and commercial litigation. The attorneys gave me work that needed to get done, and they trusted me to help in any way that I could, which made the process meaningful to me because it was real. Doors were also always open when I had questions, which further made me feel comfortable and supported.

Although I deeply believe that Barclay Damon stands apart from the rest for a variety of reasons, there is one aspect

of the Diversity 1L Program that is truly unique: the externship. The firm set up a week-long opportunity for me to visit and work at Global Foundries, a large client whose in-house counsel agreed to show me their world. There, I was able to see what it was like to work in-house at a large company and how that differed from my work at a law firm. The Global Foundries counsel set up tours for me, let me shadow meetings, showed me how to redline a contract, and explained their daily routines. This experience was fantastic because it showed me a different side to practicing law, and I was able to meet even more wonderful attorneys and staff. I was only there for a week, but the legal team made me feel at home and opened their doors to me—metaphorically because most doors were locked and needed access cards to enter and exit.

Barclay Damon taught me more than I ever expected to learn as a 1L, and I built lasting relationships with many of the attorneys I met. I felt like a part of the team from the start and was given invaluable advice and experiences throughout my internship. I believe that more firms need to learn from Barclay Damon's example in providing this kind of experience—I feel more prepared to not only go into my second year of law school, but my career. The firm went above and beyond to give me an experience that very few will ever get, regardless of background or class year. I had an amazing summer experience as a part of the Barclay Damon family, and I can't wait to come back.

Jennifer is a student at Albany Law School. She will return to the Albany office in summer 2019 as a summer associate.



Jennifer Cruz

2019 Barclay Damon Diversity Partner Committee Members



Sheila Gaddis, Committee Chair
Rochester



David Cost
Albany



Jerry Mackey, At Large
Rochester



Jennifer Leonardi
Buffalo



Bob Heary, At Large
Buffalo



Courtney Merriman
Syracuse



Mark Whitford
Rochester

Office Updates

ALBANY OFFICE

Diversity Potluck

The Albany office held its annual diversity potluck in October, with legal secretary Joanne Zabala winning "Favorite Dish" for her beef bourguignon and attorney Wil Lemon winning "Most Unique Dish" for his Japanese rice balls.



Flannel Friday

The Albany office held its first ever "Flannel Friday" to benefit the Capital City Rescue Mission in November. Attorneys and staff made charitable donations in exchange for being able to wear flannels to the office in the spirit of the fall season.



Equinox Annual Thanksgiving Day Community Dinner

Many thanks to paralegal Jan Smith and her daughter Kailyn; paralegal Kathy McGinn; GLC's Modi Conteh; attorney Melissa Zambri, her wife Gina Moran, and their children, Anthony and Sofia Zambri-Moran; and attorneys Melissa Bennett, Paul Powers, and Daniela Weiss for their great volunteer work helping Equinox sort and organize ingredients for thousands of meals for its annual Thanksgiving Day community dinner.



Community Day: ARC of Rensselaer County Holiday Party



For its 2018 Community Day event, the Albany office helped out at the ARC of Rensselaer County's annual holiday party on November 29, running stations, cleaning up, and dancing along the way!

The ARC assists individuals of all ages who have intellectual or developmental disabilities and their families to meet their needs and goals. Thanks to all attorneys and staff who volunteered!

BUFFALO OFFICE

Diversity Potluck

The Buffalo office held its annual diversity potluck lunch in December, with attorneys Melle Fabian and Mike Ferdman winning Premier Gourmet gift cards for their top-voted dishes: chicken and pork dumplings and eggplant parmesan, respectively.



Project Warm Your Heart

The Buffalo and Clarence offices held their sixth annual mitten, glove, hat, and scarf drive, donating warm winter accessories to the Native American Magnet School #19 and the Compass House, which provides shelter and services to runaway, homeless, and at-risk youth and teens in Buffalo.

Bar Association of Erie County Yuletide Challenge Toy Drive

The Buffalo and Clarence offices supported the Bar Association of Erie County Young Lawyers Committee's annual toy drive, which benefits the Legal Aid Bureau's Attorneys for Children Unit. More than 150 toys were collected for kids involved in abuse and neglect proceedings in Erie County. Thanks to attorney Meghan Dwyer for coordinating the drive!



ROCHESTER OFFICE

WOIS College March



On December 14, Barclay Damon participated in the World of Inquiry School's College March, where high school seniors walk to City Hall to meet with the mayor, mail their college letters of intent, and thank an adult who has supported them in their journey. The College March is a national tradition among expeditionary learning high schools, offering a celebration and reminder that college and post-graduation opportunities are accessible to all with intentional effort and focus. Congratulations to the Class of 2019!

Veterans' Outreach Center Holiday Drive

The Rochester office attorneys and staff joined forces again this year to collect wish-list items for the Veterans' Outreach Center. The center, founded in 1973 by returning Vietnam veterans, offers a comprehensive range of supportive services designed to meet the needs of veterans and their families.



SYRACUSE OFFICE

Disrupting Unconscious Bias in the Legal Profession CLE



Attorney Kayla Arias spoke at the New York State Bar Association and Syracuse University College of Law "Disrupting Unconscious Bias in the Legal Profession" CLE in November, sharing her experience practicing at a large private firm. Great work, Kayla!

Syracuse University College of Law Diversity and Inclusion Presentation

Attorneys Kayla Arias, David Burch, and Courtney Merriman and recruitment coordinator Andrew Johnson and gave a presentation on the firm's diversity and inclusion initiatives to 1L students at Syracuse University College of Law in November, specifically promoting the firm's Diversity 1L Summer Associate Program and Diversity Mentoring Program.



Share the Warmth From Head to Toe

The Syracuse office held a winter hat, glove, and sock drive in December for the Samaritan Center, a local not-for-profit that serves the hungry and those in need in order to promote their welfare, dignity, and self-sufficiency.