



## Addressing the Issue of Equality

Post-holiday stress disorder has made me late in getting this column completed. That, or the fear that I cannot compete with all the holiday newsletters you just received. Nothing I write will dazzle you like tales of Aunt Jenny's trip to Duluth and the conundrum of picking the proper shade of eggshell to paint the house. I regret not fighting harder for the rebranding of my column into "Ask Ashleigh," where I could answer your legal questions, and offer fashion tips and dating advice. Yes, I realize I last dated in the pre-Match.com Internet-dating era (thank you Michael Penn and our hairdresser-matchmaker) but I will reserve my right to call on my YLD friends for relevancy in modern dating trends. Email your questions to me and I will keep fighting for frivolity.

### Sometimes You Feel Like a Nut...

Luckily, in February there is inspiration. In addition to celebrating great American presidents like Abraham Lincoln and George Washington, February also plays host to National Pistachio Day. (February is also National Grapefruit Month, but given its interactions with various medications and lack of ties to the legal community, I am staying with pistachios.) One of the oldest flowering nut trees, the pistachio is one of only two nuts mentioned in the Bible. California is the leading producer of pistachios worldwide, growing over 400 million pounds per year. They are my favorite nut, a true accoutrement to any charcuterie selection. So this February 26, take a moment to reflect on the official OCBA presidential nut.

### Diversity and Equality

February is also a time to reflect both on the history of African American achievements and the inequality still troubling us as a country. The end of 2014 was a disturbing time, with what seemed like a continuous barrage of news about unarmed African American men and boys coming into deadly conflict with police. The tragedies were followed by civil unrest when no police officers were indicted, and the senseless, unprovoked killing of two NYPD officers. I know this February it would be easier for me to point to our first African American president, or the legal legacy of greats like Thurgood Marshall, and laud where we have come as a country. But I have reservations about just celebrating past greatness while tiptoeing around the issue of unequal treatment before the law and lack of diversity in those sworn to uphold it.

As a former prosecutor, and an Irish girl with, no surprise, a favorite uncle who was an undercover detective, I sympathize with the rigors of police work. A call to public service, to serve and protect, is a noble thing. I also sympathize with the "us versus them" mentality when, in a city like Ferguson, there are only three African American police officers—a city that is approximately 67% African American has a police force that is 94% white. I have friends of color who have a routine when being pulled over by the police—where they place their hands, when they speak or announce that they are lawyers or doctors,

and which tone they take—patterns of behavior I have never considered as a white woman. What leads to such a feeling of unease and the assumption of confrontation? Martin Luther King, Jr. said, "Law and order exist for the purpose of establishing justice and when they fail in this purpose they become the dangerously structured dams that block the flow of social progress." I do not believe law and order has to actually fail, as the mere perception that they have failed is enough to bring about a dangerous lack of faith in our legal system. The events of Ferguson or New York may seem remote to daily life in Orange County, but if we have a client or co-worker who believes she or he is treated differently under the color of law, it is an issue worth talking about. And it is a conversation that I invite all to participate in.

Rick McNeil approached me in November about launching an initiative to address the lack of diversity amongst the big law firms in Orange County. Anytime there is an opportunity for someone else to devote a large amount of time and resources to a good cause, and I get to take the credit, I am in. So let it be known that I, alone, want to reignite the issue of diversity within the Orange County bar.

The goal is to refocus the goals of the Diversity and Equal Justice Committee by following San Francisco's Glass Ceiling Initiative. In 2001, the San Francisco bar started a task force with the goal of increasing women in leadership positions. It encouraged San Francisco firms and corporations to track and promote women in the ranks. The OCBA will expand on that idea, and ask our local corporations, legal organizations, and law firms to sign a pledge to hire and promote all diverse candidates. I will commit to having the bar lead the way by appointing diverse candidates to committees and task forces, and creating a leadership pipeline that more accurately reflects the community in which we practice.

Diversity matters. While appearing in West Court, my husband noticed a group of Vietnamese taking photographs outside now-retired Judge Nho Nguyen's courtroom. The group was not taking photos in the court, and the judge was not present. They were taking photos of his nameplate, with pride that one of their own was in such an esteemed position in a hallowed hall. This small example of belonging, an affirmation of accessibility and equality, strengthens our legal system and the public's perception of it. I hope we, as a bar, can embrace that kind of hope and not temper our discussion of diversity and its importance to our legal community.

I know some hoped I wouldn't say anything political, but know it comes from a good place in my heart. And yes, next month is Women's History Month.



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