

We, the undersigned Georgetown University Law Center Black faculty, condemn the statements reportedly made by one of the school's adjunct professors deriding the capabilities of Black students in her class. Her taped Zoom comments reveal what we see as an underlying, damaging perception of Black law students that is grounded in white supremacist thought. Our classrooms should be intellectual and humane spaces for learning and growth. Every student deserves to be free of pre-set notions of their intellectual capabilities.

The content of the video is now widely-reported. In the taped meeting, the professor recounted how "some" Black students did well in her course but emphasized over and over again that "a lot" were "at the bottom" each year. Racializing student performance casually was in itself unnecessary and recklessly conjured centuries old expectations of Black intellectual capacity and performance. What the professor failed apparently to consider is that, given the makeup of our diverse student body, white students also routinely fall at the bottom of class curves. In singling out Black students, the professor flagrantly and unfairly stigmatized them and in the process both revealed and propagated racial, and overtly white supremacist stereotypes about the intellectual ability of Black students.

The professor's comments also raise serious concerns about whether her own bias may be driving the outcomes she observed in her class. Broad statements as to the intellectual ability of students based on their race reflect more poorly on the speaker than those spoken of. Such beliefs spur behavior that is unlikely to create a fair playing field for all students in the classroom. If you expect Black students to behave poorly, your classroom performance as a professor and your grading can operate to confirm that bias. Your Black students then suffer irreparable harm as they experience the consequences of poor grades driven by racial bias. Such students find it harder to obtain letters of recommendation or pursue opportunities such as law review positions, externships, and ultimately, employment.

From what we understand, the professor's comments also brutally undermine our Black students' freedom to focus on learning. We are deeply concerned that our Black students will (rationally) spend their time worried that their law professors may hold white supremacist viewpoints. Many will preemptively strategize how and in what ways to approach faculty who in fact are employed to educate and promote their well-being. They will worry if their class performance will be assessed through a racialized lens. Responding to anti-Black racism and bias regularly consumes our Black law students' time and energy. It is demoralizing, and it is unfair. They deserve the same opportunities as other students to pursue excellence.

We stand in support of our Black law students. We welcome the investigation of this incident and the professor's past grading practices by the University's Office of Institutional Diversity, Equity & Affirmative Action.

We also look to these moments as an opportunity to not simply ensure accountability, but also to effectuate lasting systemic and institutional growth. We hope that this is a moment of reckoning for the Georgetown Law community.

While reprehensible, the professor's reported statements were not unique even if not typically spoken. The legacy of white supremacy is insidious and can explicitly and implicitly impact and infect some of our most vulnerable spaces and venerable institutions. Any law professor who operates from unspoken white supremacist notions of intellectual ability, whether intentional or not, should aspire to the same rigor and thoughtfulness that they professedly demand of their students. They must examine their own flawed thought patterns and correct them.

Signed:

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