

Inside Yale Law School, Season Two, Episode 3

James Forman Jr.

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This is Inside Yale Law School, the podcast series designed to give you a peek inside to the scholars, the thinkers, the teachers, and the game changers of Yale Law School. I'm Heather Gerken, the Dean, here to open a little window into the world of this remarkable place.

We always tell our students, you cannot do everything, but you can do one thing, And then you can do a second thing. And then you can do a third thing. And if you do all of that, you will look back at your life and think, I've really made-- I've had an impact.

I am thrilled to have here with me James Forman, Jr., the J. Skelly Wright Professor of Law at Yale Law School. James, thank you so much for being here.

Absolutely.

We have a lot to talk about, but I think I want to start with your book, which won the Pulitzer Prize and was just lauded everywhere. It was one of the most important pieces, I think, that has been written in the criminal justice space in the last number of years. I wonder if you could talk a little bit about what the book says, why you decided to enter into this debate, how you think about it now, looking back a few years later.

Absolutely. I mean, I wrote the book I think for the same reason a lot of us write, which is that there's a thing out there that we see in the world that we don't understand exactly, and we want to figure out. And so then, the first thing you go is-- and you assume someone else has figured it out, and you just haven't encountered it. But then when you realize no one has, that's your invitation to write.

So for me, the thing that I was wrestling with was the fact that I was a public defender in Washington, DC, representing first kids in juvenile court and then adults. And I was in the midst of this very punitive system, this system that was locking up so many of my clients, that was treating them and their family members so harshly. And I had become a public defender because I viewed it as the civil rights work of my generation. My parents were in the original Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s, in the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee.

And I viewed myself as carrying on this racial justice civil rights work. So I became a public defender, but I'm in Washington, DC, and this harsh system that I'm fighting every day I see is being run in many ways by other African-American actors. There are Black judges and Black prosecutors, and a majority Black police force, and a Black police chief, and a Black head prosecutor. Eric Holder was the chief prosecutor at the time I was a public defender.

And the city, Washington, was doing with its system the same thing in many ways that the rest of the country was doing. And that was a shocking-- I don't know, but it was disturbing to me. And I wanted to try

to figure out what was going on. How could it be that in a majority Black community with some semblance of control of the criminal justice system, we were re-enacting mass incarceration in the same way that the rest of the country was? How could that be? So that's what the book is about.

And it's called Locking Up Our Own, just for those of you who should go out and buy a copy of this immediately. And it's in conversation with a lot of people who had written before. And in many ways, it complicates that conversation. I am torn between saying, it makes it cheerier or less cheery. I think less cheery actually, but I wonder if you could just say a little bit about-- set the stage for it. The New Jim Crow is out there. There was a bunch of work on it, and then you changed the debate with your book.

Well, so yes. When I say I did this work because I wanted to be a civil rights lawyer, and I saw it as racial justice work, even though I became a public defender before some of these big works that we're going to talk about came out, they came out over the years, and they just reinforced in some ways my original rationale. They reinforced the idea. They told the story of the idea, of how this system came to be. And at bottom, the explanation, when you pare it all down, is racism, is indifference towards the plight of Black people, a refusal to see Black humanity. Fundamentally, that's the argument of *The New Jim Crow*. That's the argument of Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me*. That's the argument of Bryan Stevenson, *Just Mercy*. And I think that those books are correct. It is absolutely the case that you cannot understand how we became the world's largest jailer with so many brutal and punitive prisons without understanding the history of racism in this country.

That is right, but it's not the whole story. And that's where *Locking Up Our Own* comes in because *Locking Up Our Own* is asking this question like, well, if that were the whole story, then you would see in a city like Washington, DC, massive resistance. Right, you'd see a city that was trying with every shred of authority that it could muster to resist this racist onslaught.

But that's not what we were doing, and so that is, then, for me the more complicated question. That's why I do think it complicates the narrative. And so I was tasked, I think, with a very challenging project, which was to write a book that takes as correct many of my academic and personal heroes, but also then tries to point out things that maybe they didn't see, but does so in a friendly, collaborative kind of way.

Well, I mean, if anything, it shows just how powerful structural racism is. I mean, when you go back in the book, these systems that seem small at the time end up having these unbelievably powerful consequences down the line, which makes it, I think, even harder to imagine how do you unravel it once those decisions have been made.

No, and I think that's right, and I think that's an important point you make about the power of structural racism because the way that I initially presented it, I said, well, OK, so racism is the explanation, and this complicates the narrative. And that's both yes and no, right? Because this is where you-- this is the point of your question where you say, is it more or less cheery?

Because in one sense, one way to read the book is that structural racism is so deep, it is so profound, it has influenced our institutions and our patterns of thinking so thoroughly that even Black people end up participating and joining in the same system and making a similar set of decisions. So in that sense, it's

not a story that's counter to the racism explanation, but it's a story that shows exactly how powerful racism is when we see it as structural as opposed to the story of individual animus.

So I started a pre-read, as you know, with our students because I wanted-- because we're such a deeply intellectual place and this is a place about ideas, I wanted everyone to have a shared book when they came into the law school that they could talk about. And so we've read Danielle Allen, we've read Brian Stevenson, and we've read your book several times.

And it's interesting, James, because I feel like the conversation that we have about the book and the conversation that the students have about the book changes every year. And I wonder now, sort of looking back, how you're thinking about the questions that you wrote about four or five years ago at this point.

Yeah. That's a great question, and you're right. And to me, one of the many wonderful things about teaching is that because our students change every year, we are constantly confronted with the insights and the challenges and the new patterns of thinking of a new generation. And that, I think really does-- and it's hard to do. It's hard to challenge yourself, right?

Once you're in your 40s, once you're in your 50s, you have kind of a way of thinking. And there's a tendency to say-- to stick with it. And our students-- sometimes in ways that we find frustrating, but at the end of the day, fundamentally, I think in ways we find invigorating-- are constantly presenting us with a new way of thinking. So I think probably, to me, the biggest change-- there's probably two big changes that I've seen over the past five years.

One is that some of the things that I was arguing have now become part of the conversation, such that our students are like, oh, yeah, of course. Of course. Yeah, of course, of course, of course having majority—

So obvious, Professor Forman.

--having a majority Black police force isn't going to do anything, right? Our students today, they know that. They've seen what happens in Memphis. They've seen stories from Atlanta. They've seen Washington, DC and Detroit. They've seen Black police officers do some of the same things that, again, when they're tasked, when they're given an assignment, when they're told to fight the war on drugs, they've seen them fight it in really abusive ways.

And our students are like, of course it's not about the race of the officer. It's about the structure and the job that they're given. And so in that sense, I'm not the only one working in this space, but I feel like I and other people that have pursued this argument have in some way changed the conversation so that students now-- when something happens in Memphis, you know, reporters will say, well, this has been documented in *Locking Up Our Own*, and we kind of know this. So that's changed the conversation, I think, for our students.

And the other thing where I think is not-- you can't point to the book as a basis for this-- is the rise of the abolitionism, in our students' thinking, abolition is an idea that's-- within the criminal justice space, it's been out at least since the 1970s. But it's been newly kind of invigorated, I would say, in the last three or

four years with our students. And you know, abolitionism means different things to different students at different times.

But I think fundamentally where I think our students are at a different place than I was at when I was in law school is, their critique of the system is so fundamental that they're willing to say and willing to ask the question, do we just need to destroy this system entirely and rebuild from the ground up? Is it beyond reform? Is it beyond change? You all have been working-- they would say to me and to Tracy Meares and to others-- you all have been trying to get this system to change for your whole professional lives. Maybe it just needs to be demolished.

And I think that provocation is, in some ways for me, the most interesting set of questions that our students are bringing in. And there are ways in which they challenge me in reading the book. And they say, you know, you never ask that question. There's no point in your book where you say that. And they're right. I don't because I wasn't even really aware of this body of thought at the time I was writing.

So I know the book has taken you in lots of different places intellectually, also lots of different places just physically. You've been on the road talking about this to all kinds of different people, and I know a new book has grown out of it. I wonder if you could just say a word about that.

Yeah, absolutely. And you're right about being on the road. So when the book came out, I started-- initially, it was a traditional book tour, and then as the book got some more attention, it really became a sort of weekly, every Thursday-- this is how I got on my calendar so that I could be there for my family. Every Thursday, I gave a talk somewhere.

And it was at bookstores. It was in prisons. It was in universities. It was in community libraries. It was to nonprofits that are doing criminal justice reform. And at every talk, almost the first or second, but certainly by the third question, somebody said, this problem you're describing is so terrible. What can we do? Or what can I do-- which is my favorite form of the question-- to try to make a difference?

And although talks are draining, travel is draining, the thing that I love about them is kind of what we were talking about with our students. It's what I love about teaching, which is, you really can get out of your head and figure out where people are coming from. And the fact that so many people were asking this question, I began to change my talk, and I would incorporate more and more material about criminal legal transformation and reform efforts in the community that I was speaking.

But no matter how much I put in my talk, people wanted more. And so the book that I decided to work on, and it's co-edited with Premal Dharia and Maria Hawilo, who are wonderful former public defenders turned academics, it's called Dismantling Mass Incarceration. And what it tries to do is take the system, from the very front end, policing, to the very back end, which is reentry or collateral consequences, and all the way through prosecutors, public defenders, judges, prisons.

And it tries to ask, within this part of the system, if you're an individual citizen that wants to make that part more restorative, more humane, less punitive, or if you're a policy maker, we have ideas for you we are going to lift up in that chapter the best writing that we can find that tries to articulate a set of solutions in that space. So my goal is, when you put the book down, you won't have the thought of, well, I don't know what to do. You'll have the thought of, well, where should I start?

Because I've got like 50 ideas that have been presented on these pages, and so I'm going to, in community with other people where I live, try to decide, OK, which of these things would be most

impactful where we live? What's the thing that I want to pick? I can't do everything. We always tell our students, you cannot do everything, but you can do one thing. And then you can do a second thing, and then you can do a third thing. And if you do all of that, you will look back at your life and think, I've really made-- I've had an impact. So that's the message that we're hoping that the book will deliver.

Well, it is certainly a message that you're living right now. And I wonder if you could talk a little bit about the amazing center that you've created and the work that you're doing inside of it. Because it very much embodies the spirit, and it very much embodies the thing that Bryan Stevenson told our students when he was here, which is, get proximate. So could you just talk a little bit about the new center?

Yeah, absolutely. And Bryan's words, when he talks about getting proximate, they've been ones that have resonated with me for my whole career, I think without even thinking about it. That's how I started as a local public defender, working in Washington, DC and trying to have an impact there. And I've really tried to carry that ethos to New Haven, where I've now been for a decade.

And so for the first five years that I was here, I was buried in writing this book. And then I had a couple of years where I was on the road a lot trying to talk about it. But the last couple of years have really been, for me, an opportunity to take Bryan's words and try to live them out here.

So the Center for Law and Racial Justice has two main projects. The first one is a program that a group of law students and I started three years ago, and it's called Access to Law School. And the idea behind the program grew out of teaching that I was doing in prison here in Connecticut, where I was teaching incarcerated students, and some of them would come up to me and say, is there any way that I could become a lawyer? And I would tell them, yes, absolutely. And I would give them articles by Dwayne Betts, our amazing alum who went on to win a MacArthur Fellowship, and say, yeah, you can do it. You can do it.

And I realized that, OK, telling people you can do it is a good first step, but you also need to give them the scaffolding, the pathway. And so Access to Law School is that scaffolding. It's not limited to students that have been incarcerated, although we do recruit heavily from among that community. But it's open to anyone from the New Haven area who is first generation or low income or from some group that's underrepresented in law.

And it says to them, we don't care about your test scores. We don't care about your GPA. What we care about is your grit and your determination and your commitment to the community. And if you want to become a lawyer, we believe we can help you get there. And so along with Kayla Vincent, the director of the Center, and myself and about 20 law students a year, we hold a series of Saturday Sessions where we go through every single aspect of creating a successful law school application.

I always tell my students-- this is Bryan Stevenson's point-- when they say, well, what can I do? And I'm like, well, the one thing you all are geniuses at is writing good law school applications. So they're very good at that, and we also do LSAT programming, and we do a lot of emotional support because this is a hard, grueling process, particularly for people that may not have found academic success at the early years. Most of the people that come to our program are not like our law students at Yale in that regard. But they have the potential, they have the ability, and they have the desire. And so the Access to Law School program is designed to get them there, and it's designed to do that in community. So we're very

intentional about selecting fellows who are local, who are from the New Haven area, in part because we believe that Yale has an obligation to the community that hosts us, that in which we sit, and also because it's quite meaningful for the law students to be able to be in relationship with their neighbors in that way. But also because by focusing locally in a city like New Haven, which is 100,000 people, we think that over time we will create a collective power and a collective energy so that our fellows five years from now, when they're in the courthouse, they're not going to be the only one. They're not going to be the only lawyer of color. They're not going to be the only lawyer of from New Haven. They're going to see other fellows who they-- from the program, either their year or in other years.

So we really think we're kind of building up a kind of intellectual and cultural and legal capital in this town that-- my hope is that 10 years from now, 15 years from now, 20 years from now, the courthouse looks and feels different because of a program like ours.

It's wonderful, and I love that it is, right now, being paired with-- I think we're the only law school in the country with two pipeline programs. One is a national program, which we're doing with Latham & Watkins. And I was just talking to our Admissions Dean, Miriam Ingber, and she had been interviewing the students. And first of all, we got hundreds of applications, which gives you a sense of the need. But just how inspiring it is to get a chance to give a helping hand to someone who really does belong in our profession, but just doesn't have the same opportunities to get there. So it's wonderful.

No, I think that's right. And the program that Miriam is running is, I think, going to be incredibly impactful. You said that we're maybe the only law school with two pipeline programs. I think that's right, and I think we're also the only law school that has a pipeline program that is principally-- that is led by students in collaboration with a faculty member.

So that's the thing about Access to Law School that really, in some ways, distinguishes it from most pipeline programs around the country, is the way that the current law students are so involved not just in delivering the programming, but designing it. I tell them at the beginning of every year, you are in this program to be leaders. So if you see a feature that you don't like, that you think needs to change, let's talk about it. And then you go lead the change. And so every year, we're constantly changing our programming in response to things that our students say.

What I also love about that is I can see you, James, the clinician at heart, in very much the same teaching model of our clinics. And I want to get there because I want to talk a little bit about your journey. But before we get there, I want to talk first about your other project, which is just another inspiring project that you're doing right now.

Absolutely. So the other part of the Law and Racial Justice Center is a newer program, and it's called New Haven Neighbors for Justice. And the basic idea behind the program grew out of questions that Kayla and I were asking around town over the last year when we would ask people, do you have any incarcerated neighbors? And most people on Yale's campus or in the East Rock neighborhood where we live and many of our students live didn't even-- couldn't even process that question. Like, what do you mean incarcerated neighbors?

But the Whalley Avenue Jail is less than a mile from where we are sitting right now to have this conversation. It's 7/10 of a mile from Yale's campus, and there are anywhere between 600 to 700 men incarcerated there every night. And the question that New Haven Neighbors for Justice wants to ask, and we take some of our inspiration from a DC group called Neighbors for Justice, is, what would it feel like and be like and look like if we thought of those men as our neighbors? What obligations would grow out of that instead of thinking them as men locked up a mile away, but as our neighbors?

And we are using that sort of provocation to then engender a series of community conversations because when we start asking people that, it's remarkable the kinds of responses that we get both from our students, but also from people in New Haven. I mean, we've had a group of retired Yale professors come reach out to Kayla and say, we want-- we want to form a collective, and we want to know how can we be good neighbors. What should our project be?

And our students, Darnell Epps and Natalie Smith, two of our students, last year have put together a project for a community-based law library. And I said to them right away, look, I don't want a project that you all come up with that you just think is, you're sitting in the Yale Law library, and you think, well, that's a good idea. Go talk to 50 people, and after you've talked to 50 people in the community, come back to me with a memo that reflects what they said. And because of the community we're building, some of those people that they were able to ask were people in the Access to Law School program that I talked about.

But they went out, they talked to all community groups, librarians, folks that they knew had been formerly incarcerated to ask them, would this be a useful resource? And I'll be honest, Heather. I kind of thought the answer might be no. They're just like, OK, fine, but there's 17 other things that would be more important. But I was shocked when I got the memo at how universal the enthusiasm was for this. And so that's a project that is, I think, going to be one of the first New Haven Neighbors for Justice Projects. But I really think our ability to generate ideas for how to become meaningful neighbors to the men who are at the Whalley Avenue Jail, and then we hope over time to other prisons around Connecticut, including the women's prison at York, is really only limited to our willingness to sit down and set aside the time to have these conversations in community. Because as soon as we do, as soon as you create space to have one of these conversations, the whiteboard is overflowing with energy and with ideas.

That's amazing. So maybe you can talk a little bit about your journey here because, I mean, everyone is-- I mean, you are the only person I can think of at the law school who should be holding the J. Skelly Wright Professor of Law Chair, given who J. Skelly Wright was, which is why it was such a joy to watch you take that chair. I wonder if you could talk a little bit about your journey because I think sometimes our students think journeys are linear.

And you've actually done a lot of different things. You started a school. You clerked for the Supreme Court. You did things that don't seem naturally connected in a story. You were here as a clinician first when you wrote your Pulitzer Prize-winning book as a clinician, which is unusual. I wonder if you could just take us through your path a little bit and talk about how you got from here to there.

Yeah, you know, you're right that a lot of that our students sometimes think-- the students come and they say, well, I want to come up with a five-year plan, so I want to know what your plan was. And I have to tell

them, I really-- it's just not how it worked out for me, which is not to say, if you're the kind of person that really wants to have a 5- or a 10-year, plan go for it. That's not a bad way of operating, but it's just not the only way.

So for me, I became a public defender. Actually, it was a conversation with Bryan Stevenson because when I was in law school, I had seen him give a talk. And then I did some death penalty work, and I talked to him about how as the federal courts were becoming so shut down to habeas claims, I really wanted to do trial work, and I wanted to do trial death penalty work.

And he said, look, there's 100 people on Alabama's death row right now. And if we hire you as an attorney, you are going to need to represent one of those people. We don't have enough resources to send lawyers out to do individual trials in the first instance because there are just too many death-eligible trials happening around the state. We'd love to. Conceptually, I agree with you. We just don't have the resources for it.

So I decided-- because I felt like I didn't want to do appellate litigation, I felt like arguing in front of what then seemed to be historical standards impossibly hostile federal judiciary was not the move for me. I decided I wanted to become a trial lawyer because I thought, well, I can make my case to juries. And so I became a trial lawyer at the public defender service in Washington, DC. I think most of us who were there remember it as the best job that we ever had, even people like me who have jobs now that I love so much.

And when I was there, one of the things that I saw pretty quickly was how the juvenile system was not-- the education system wasn't working for my clients in juvenile court. They were being shunted out of traditional schools. They were being pushed into alternative schools, which if they had been properly resourced, might have been a solution, but really were the worst schools with the worst teachers and the worst curriculum for the students who needed the most.

And so along with David Domenici, I decided-- I thought, well, how can I make a difference? What can I do? Well, I really know about what young people who are in the juvenile system need, and David is an educator and a lawyer. And so together, we started what became a school called the Maya Angelou School, which now has five campuses in Washington, DC and is celebrating its 25th year history. And I go back to DC, and I meet people who are working-- who are in government, who had been kicked out of school and came to Maya Angelou. And so I view that as one of probably my life's-- the things that I'm most proud to have been associated with over time.

When we decided that we wanted to leave DC, because my wife Ify was pregnant with our son Emeka, who is watching us have this conversation and is now 14, but when he was not yet born, Ify wanted to live closer to her family. Half of her family is Nigeria, and half is in New England. Well, we weren't going to get to Nigeria, but we could get closer to New England. And so I started looking to make that transition.

And Randy Hertz at NYU, one of my mentors, he made the pitch that I should become a clinical professor because he said, look, James, you're able to do so much in the DC community because of your roots in DC as a public defender. And you just know that city in a really intimate way. But if you move, as you're proposing to do, to a new city, New York or New Haven, and you move as an academic professor, it is going to be hard for you to develop those community connections that you take for granted now. So you should try being a clinician.

And it was a very kind of powerful argument that he made. And so I started talking to Mike Wishnie and Muneer Ahmad and Jean Koh Peters, and just sort of pathbreaking clinical faculty, Jay Pottenger, who we

have here, and decided that made sense to me. So I came back, and I did that for a number of years, and I loved it. But I did find that it was very hard to balance the writing with the demands of being a clinical professor and having a full clinical caseload.

The law school was wonderful to me in helping me sort of cabin my clinic work so that I could get my writing done, but it felt-- it started to feel a little bit untenable to try to do both of those things. So that was the point at which I made the transition to become non-clinical. There's never a good word for the non-clinical professors, like some people say doctrinal or podium or academic, or I don't know what the good title is, but the not clinical professor. And I've been doing that now for five years.

And the last thing to say is Randy was right in a sense because the relationships that I built as a clinical professor here in the New Haven community, I do draw upon now. And I'm not sure-- it would have been harder. I would have been able to do it eventually because I'm oriented in that direction, but it would have been harder to develop some of those community connections without the years that I spent in what I think is the best clinical faculty in the country.

Well, as your colleague, I mean, you seem built for this place. But I also feel like this place is built for you because we have a lot of people on the non-clinical side of the faculty who are running clinics. I'm one of them. There's a lot of movement between and partnerships. Miriam Gohara just got a book contract for this fantastic new book that she's writing. She works with Gideon Yaffe, who does philosophy in neuroscience on projects together.

So there's a lot of traffic and conversation and engagement here, which is a little bit of a surprise, I think, for some people because they think of Yale as a theory school, which it is. But it's also a school that takes practice really seriously and does both at a kind of extraordinary level.

But also, the other thing is, you have a lot of colleagues here working in the criminal justice space. I was thinking of your book, and you said, you want to talk essentially from beginning to end. There are a lot of people here who've been telling parts of those stories. So what is it like working through the Justice Collaboratory with your center on our faculty with that group?

Well, I think it's fantastic. I mean, the criminal group here is-- I mean, I'm biased because I'm part of it-- but we think we're one of the strongest groups at the law school. And that's a real change. I mean, when I was a student-- I often reflect. When I was a student, there were either no or one, I think depending on how you count, former public defenders on the faculty. I think there was only one former criminal practitioner, who was Kate Stith, who was a prosecutor.

But now, there are five former public defenders, a couple of former prosecutors. There are more people who are interested in the topic, but there are also more people who have actual practice experience in the system. And I think that combination, the people like Tom Tyler or Gideon Yaffe or Tracy Meares, who operate at the very highest level from a theoretical standpoint, and people like me and Miriam and Fiona and Marisol, who have a lot of practice experience and who are also interested in all of those theoretical questions, and the group that I just mentioned to you is deeply-- wants to know how these theories play out.

They're interested in the theory for the impact that it has and as assessed by the impact that it has in the world. So I don't even, as your question, I think, suggests, I don't even think of that divide as a meaningful one here. I mean, I was a clinician, and the first class that I taught at Yale, the first class that I taught at

Yale Law School was constitutional law small group, as requested by the dean. So I don't know that that's-- well, sorry. I know that's not typical.

Yep. Can we talk a little bit about another form of change that's taking place at the school in the last few years because you have been the change agent that helped make it happen, which is just the change in the way the school is composed and who teaches and so on? So in 2016-- I know this because we did this. We were co-chairs, along with Tom Tyler, of a Diversity and Inclusion Committee-- that was what it was called back then-- that issued a report and made a lot of changes that have resulted in real change at the school.

There's still a lot of work to do, but I wonder if you could just talk a little bit about that, especially you were at our first reunion for alumni of color, the first of what I hope will be many reunions centered around folks with shared interests and shared backgrounds. But it was a chance really to look back and look forward at the same time, which feels important at this moment. And I wonder if you could just say a few words.

Yeah, absolutely. I mean, I think that serving on that committee and serving with you and with Tom as co-chairs and the other members of the committee, it started out as depressing and ended up as inspiring. To me, when I say it started out as depressing, the part that I found really quite demoralizing is when we started digging into the historical numbers and we realized that from at least since I was in law school in the early 1990s until the time we were gathering, which was a 25-year period-- this is not a short time frame-- that the school on most diversity measures just had not changed.

And I was shocked. I mean, you might be like, well, James-- maybe it's just I'm too optimistic, but even though I know everything about how structural racism works and how slow progress can be in this country, I was surprised, and I was demoralized. What I think we were, then, able to do as a committee, and your leadership here was really quite the driving force, was, we were able to mobilize the faculty and the staff and the students around a shared vision of saying, well, what would it look like if Yale Law School, in addition to being a leader in all the ways it's understood, to be a leader in legal education? What would it look like if we also became a leader in providing educational opportunities to groups that historically have been underrepresented in law? And that's true on many dimensions. Veterans, as you often talk about, dramatic increase. First-generation professionals, not great historical data, so it's a little bit hard to know how, but by every measure that we have, including just the sort of walking the halls measure when we had that gathering of alumni of color, and people were talking about how it felt different, dramatic growth. Growth for students of color of all members of various minority groups. And so that change, I think, has been very impactful, alongside the change in faculty. Faculty changed more slowly than students because of the nature of hiring. And for me, it's an area where I still feel like there remains work to be done, but I think that we had-- I think our report revealed that-- and I remember this as a student that, when I was a student, we had three Black faculty members in the law school in the early 1990s.

And now, this is a school that holds itself out as the school-- and the numbers back it up-- as the school that produces a higher percentage of law professors than any other school in the country. And 25 years later, after 25 years of classes of Black students, we still had three. In the years since that report came out, that has changed as well. And I think that we can be really, really proud of that.

For me, the most pressing part of the work that I think we have now is, how do we continue to change other aspects of the school, the culture of the school, the feel of the school, the pedagogy of the school, the curriculum of the school, the architecture of the school? You know, Bennett Capers has this wonderful article that I assign called "The Law School as a White Space," where he tries to point out all of the ways that law schools could be transformed beyond the numbers of people who are students and who teach there.

And I would like to think about-- continue to think about ways to push on all of those dimensions, including making the law school more open and accessible to the New Haven community, one of my great passions, as we've talked about. Because I think we have to do that. I think that's the moral course of action, and I also think it's the thing we have to do if we're going to make the space a meaningful and intellectually vibrant and challenging and supportive space for the more diverse students that we now have in the building.

Amen. Well, this has been amazing, James. And I always feel so lucky to be your colleague and so grateful to get to be at a school where you are present in every possible respect. So thank you so much for sharing your time with us today.

Thank you. It's been a joy and a pleasure.