



A Note from the Office of Dean Leonard M. Baynes

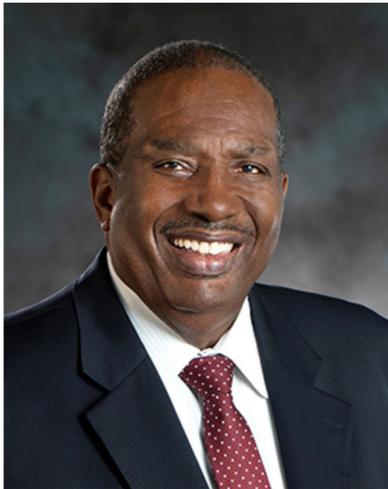
This February, Black History Month celebrates 100 years of honoring the history, culture, achievements, and contributions of African Americans and the African diaspora. This milestone reminds us of our nation's progress that was neither inevitable nor accidental.

The story of Black History is in many ways the story of American history since African Americans were here at the time of the settlement of the first American colonies. Moreover, the law is very instrumental and defining of African Americans often revolving around their status and evolving rights.

From the grassroots organizers to the Constitutional strategists, the movements that redefined American democracy were propelled by advocates who translated dreams of not being judged by the color of their skin, into the language of justice. Through advocacy and litigation strategies, African American lawyers and leaders ensured equality for all and opened the legal profession to people of all backgrounds.

At the University of Houston Law Center, we recognize that Black History Month is not merely a static look at the past. It is a living conversation about our present responsibilities and the enduring role of legal education, legal advocacy and legal action in affording legal rights to all.

This Black History Month, I am proud to highlight someone who has put their analytical thinking and leadership to good use — Royce West, a member of the Texas Senate and a 1979 alumnus of the Law Center.



State Senator Royce West

After earning a master's degree in sociology, West initially envisioned a career in social work or social science. He soon realized, however, that meaningful and lasting change often requires advocacy in courtrooms and legislative chambers alike. Law school provided him with tools, discipline, and confidence to stand up for others, which are skills that have defined his career as a lawyer and public servant.

Since 1993, West has served the people of Texas's 23rd Senate district in Dallas County while also leading a successful law practice as managing partner of West & Associates, L.L.P. His career reflects the versatility of a legal education and its power to shape leaders who can navigate complex issues with clarity, conviction, and civility. In a [previous discussion](#), West noted that the skills developed in law school allow one to think critically, argue persuasively, and, importantly, "disagree without being disagreeable."

Equally significant is the enduring commitment West and his wife, Carol West, have made to the UH Law Center. Through their support of the Royce '79 and Carol West African American Law Heritage Classroom, the Wests have invested in future generations of students who may one day follow similar paths of leadership and service. Their generosity is rooted in gratitude and responsibility.

The progress achieved through historic advocacy and the contemporary leadership of individuals like Senator West and Carol West demonstrate that the law is a potent tool for transformation in the hands of those trained to use it. It reminds us that institutional change requires both the passion of an advocate and the precision of a scholar. Our duty is to prepare our students to think critically and lead with integrity as they encounter complex and evolving questions that shape our law, society, and future.

I encourage you to use this Black History Month as an opportunity to reflect on our shared history of ensuring liberty and justice for all. I hope you will join us in person or online for what promises to be a rigorous and inspiring dialogue.

In the spirit of reflection and progress that defines this month, I also encourage you to view the accompanying [slideshow](#), recognizing our UH Law Center trailblazers, the alumni, faculty, and administrators whose work has strengthened the legal profession and society in Houston and across the nation.

Sincerely,

Leonard M. Baynes
Dean, Hugh Roy and Lillie Cranz Cullen Distinguished Chair, and Professor of Law
University of Houston Law Center

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