UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON LAW CENTER

A Note from the Office of Dean Leonard M. Baynes

Black History Month is a time to celebrate the achievements of African Americans who have shaped the course of our nation.

It is a time to remember the heroes who stood on the front lines, the visionaries who dared to dream of a better tomorrow, and the resilient souls who moved forward refusing to be intimidated. From the abolitionists who fought against slavery to the church leaders who marched for civil rights, their stories are woven into the fabric of the US. Together, we can make Black History Month not just a time of remembrance, but a continued commitment to excellence by adhering to our bedrock principles of equality under the law.

In the struggle for civil rights and equality, we have come a long way, but with the recognition that more progress remains. For instance, in the legal profession, the percentage of lawyers of color — Asian Americans, African Americans, and Latino/a/x/Hispanic Americans — almost doubled in the past decade, according to the American Bar Association's National Lawyer Population Survey. The survey indicated that in 2013, attorneys of color- comprised 11% of the profession. In 2023, that percentage of lawyers from underrepresented backgrounds increased to 21%. But despite this increased representation, African American attorneys have made virtually no gains in representation. Black lawyers were 4.8% of the profession in 2013, and 5% in 2023, while Black people comprise 13.6% of the U.S. population and despite the fact that the Before the JD survey shows that almost 50% of Black law students contemplate going to law school before even attending high school.

With these statistics in mind, let us use Black History Month to not only reflect but to inspire future lawyers by highlighting one of our alumni trailblazers. This Black History Month, I would like to recognize Derrick Mitchell, a 1999 graduate of the University of Houston Law Center. Mitchell is a partner at Holland & Knight's office in Houston, where he leads the firm's public finance team and represents national and regional investment banking firms. In his practice, he has shepherded deals that involved the City of Houston, the City of Beaumont, Missouri City, Pearland Independent School District, and Fort Bend County to name a few. It should come as no surprise that from 2005-2011, Mitchell was named a "rising star," by Texas *Super Lawyers* magazine. Since 2011, his star has continued to rise, and he is now even more firmly grounded in the firmament of the Texas legal community.

Derrick Mitchell '99

Mitchell currently serves as the finance chair on the board of Scenic Houston, which seeks to preserve and enhance the character of the spaces where Houstonians live, work, and visit. Previously, he was a member of Texas Southern University's Board of Regents.

Mitchell's successful career and penchant for volunteerism is a sterling example of how Law Center alumni make meaningful contributions to their communities. The Law Center is also very thankful that Mitchell pays it forward with his philanthropy and support of the Law Center. Mitchell has been a key member and organizer of the Law Center's Black Law Alumni affinity group.

Please take a moment to click through the slideshow to see other African American UH Law Center graduates, law faculty, and administrators who have made a significant impact while at the Law Center, in the world of academia, the legal profession, and society.

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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