

New Study Exposes Role of Race & Racism Students' Experiences in Predominantly White Law Schools



Richmond, Virginia Jan 25, 2023 ([Issuewire.com](https://www.issuewire.com)) - [Virginia Union University] Since the racial protests and uprisings across the nation in the summer of 2020 ignited, in part, by the shameful killing of George Floyd, “over 500 major corporations and firms” have signed petitions and statements demonstrating a public commitment to racial equity and justice, especially in the legal profession.

However, of the 35,723 juris doctorates (JD) degrees awarded in 2021, **just 12% went to Latinx graduates and only 7% to Black Americans**. To increase diversity and achieve equity in the profession, steps must be taken to build pathways to supportive environments through America's almost 200 ABA-accredited law schools for students of color. A new study tackles this issue head-on and sheds much-needed new light on their experiences.

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The multi-year study titled, "[Tellin' the Truth in their Own Words: A Critical Race Qualitative Analysis of Ethnic Minority Law School Students' Experiences](#)," was conducted by **Professor Terrell Strayhorn**, best known for his cutting-edge research and scholarship on racial equity, student success, and sense of belonging in learning- and workplaces.

Drawing on in-depth, one-on-one and group interviews with 29 students of color enrolled in one of three predominantly white law schools in the United States, the study breaks new ground on what's known about how race, racism, and other social realities influence law school students' decisions, feelings, and experiences once enrolled. Major findings speak to several important issues including:

- Key Factors Influencing Law School Decisions
- Importance of Meaningful Interpersonal Relationships
- Experiences Affecting Performance in Law School

With [ongoing debates](#) about its use, it is newsworthy to note Strayhorn's judicious use of **critical race theory (CRT)** in framing the study. In addition to demonstrating how CRT can be used effectively in social science research focused on law—from which CRT initially emerged—this new study provides a clear and compelling language for talking about difficult and dehumanizing issues such as color-blind policies, race-neutral curricula, and tokenism, to name a few.

Though the study exposes "real life" aggressions experienced by individuals, the author throws weight on institutions—advocating for changes that create conditions for belonging and success for all law students. Strayhorn writes:

Focusing on the individual only is a strategy of institutional racism. Results presented herein underscore the importance of taking supportive policies, practices, and programs to scale by institutionalizing them for the benefit of all, or at least many.... Equity-minded law school staff go the next step by formulating new or revising existing policies to ensure effective programs and practices benefit all students who need assistance.

The study has significant implications for all those engaged in legal education. Specifically, the published article includes evidence-based recommendations for the following groups without limitation:

- Law school deans and senior leaders
- Law school faculty
- Legal clinic directors
- Law review editors and advisors
- Diversity officers and EEOC compliance staff
- Academic researchers and policymakers.

The full study is published in the American Journal of Qualitative Research (Vol 7, Issue 1). Read the full article here: "[Tellin' the Truth in their Own Words](#)"

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: [Dr. Terrell Strayhorn](#) is one of the nation's leading education researchers, racial equity experts, and a highly prolific scholar on the sense of belonging in education and workplaces. Author of 12 books and over 250+ peer-reviewed journal articles, chapters, and other academic publications, Strayhorn is a Professor of Higher Education and Women's, Gender & Sexuality Studies at Illinois State University; Director of the Center for the Study of HBCUs, Visiting Scholar in the School of Education, and Lecturer in Psychology at Virginia Union University.

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