

July 31, 2020

Dear Students:

We welcome you to law school during a particularly meaningful and impactful time in our world, our nation, and our legal community. For several months, we have witnessed ongoing protests and demands for justice stemming from centuries of systemic racism and racially motivated violence against people of color, particularly Black people, in the United States. In light of these events and the law's integral place in responding to them, the Legal Analysis, Writing, and Research Faculty have reaffirmed our commitment to taking concrete steps toward building an anti-racist culture at the School of Law. As part of this effort, we have reexamined our curricula to explore ways to honor Black lives, not merely in a reactionary way, but in a way that provides a framework for understanding the historical and legal context of systemic racism in the United States.

As a result, we are requiring all first-year law students to read *Devil in the Grove* prior to the start of the fall semester. The book was mailed to you with your orientation materials. This Pulitzer Prize-winning book is a nonfiction account of a 1949 criminal case against four wrongly accused defendants, the "Groveland Boys." The book also explores Thurgood Marshall's role as a NAACP lawyer in the Groveland case as well as in many other landmark civil rights cases that he pursued prior to becoming a United States Supreme Court justice.

As you read, we would like you to consider the conditions in the United States that allowed for such a great miscarriage of justice. We would also like you to consider the conditions within our current legal system that disenfranchise people of color, particularly Black people, in the United States. To assist you in your reflection, we have compiled a list of reading questions that we will discuss with you in the fall. We encourage you to keep detailed notes so that you are prepared for this discussion.

We look forward to this important discussion as you begin your journey to become advocates and advisors for our society.

Sincerely,

Tolu Odunsi, Assistant Dean for Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion & Legal Skills Faculty

Bernadette Gargano, Vice Dean of Student Affairs & Director of Legal Analysis, Research, and Writing Program

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