

Change is Natural Progression

Kate O'Leary's letter, in the June/July *Virginia Lawyer*, reflects unfortunate attitudes.

Her euphemism for her regional prejudice is "northern sensibilities," but her assumption of intrinsic superiority shows she has not become any more sensible since being "mortified" at the fact that Robert E. Lee and Martin Luther King Jr. are honored at the same time, near their birthday anniversaries. Studying history might have left her a little less surprised; she might have learned that our respect for Lee includes the anecdote of his kneeling for communion in Richmond's largest church, beside a gentleman of color, demonstrating racial tolerance and acceptance when nobody else would do so. Probably nobody in Connecticut would have, either, but she doesn't say that was the reason she was mortified. A look into more recent history would have shown her that the triple Lee-Jackson-King holiday was implemented by the nation's first African American governor, who wasn't from Connecticut.

Ms. O'Leary becomes condescending when she states that "I have seen things change in the Commonwealth of Virginia" in the last ten years. It may be her perception that has changed. When I started practicing law three decades ago, the Virginia bar showed racial diversity and was in the awkward process of achieving gender diversity. Attorneys worked well with colleagues, court officials and employees, police, and others of all ethnic backgrounds, without tension. Any "change" in Virginia during the past decade has been only natural progression in the atmosphere that already existed.

After attending one conference, Ms. O'Leary presumes to preach to us how to "learn what it feels like to be in the minority." To me, as the first woman to practice law in one Appalachian community, her statements seem tinged with arrogance. It wasn't just a matter of "walk one's talk," for a week or a weekend, but of walking a tightrope between

the accepting, generous, and courteous majority of colleagues and judges and the rare but poisonous "good ol' boys" who sometimes turned up in unexpected places and positions. She is fortunate to have missed those days, even though there was no queue for the ladies' room at CLE classes.

If she found the Old Dominion Bar Association conference worthwhile, and wants to recommend it, fine. If the ODBA wants more diversity of members and conference attendees, appropriate invitations will be extended.

But her migration doesn't qualify Ms. O'Leary as moral arbiter of what VSB members "must" do.

Patsy A. Bickerstaff
Richmond

Cover Conveyed President's Message

Hurrah for Jon Huddleston and *Virginia Lawyer*. Your June/July 2009 cover captured Jon Huddleston's message "to emphasize the many contributions lawyers make to their communities in ways other than law."

Keep up the good work and spread the message.

Susan Pesner
McLean

Letters

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