

The Whole is Greater Than the Sum of Its Parts

by Alana M. Glass

Philomena Essed, author of "Diversity: Gender, Color and Culture," states,

"Homogenous societies are quickly becoming a relic of the past. Continuing migrations, intercultural communications, international agreements, transnational cooperation, and cross-cultural coalition all testify to the fact that we have entered the age of diversity. Life and work in a multiethnic society comprises ambivalence, conflicts, and

contradictions around the experience of national or ethnic identity. People have multiple identities and they use multiple strategies to achieve their aims. The challenge that we are facing is: How can we create **justice** and **respect** between groups of people and between individuals?"

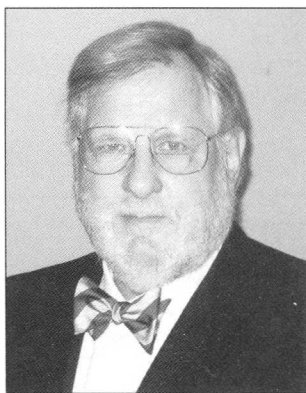
Have you ever had a long conversation with yourself? You know, the kind of conversation that keeps you awake at night? Well, that's actually not a conversation. You're just operating in a monologue. No one hears you. No one responds to you. And nine times out of ten the monologue that you were in doesn't create a single attainable result. In fact, what it usually creates is angst, frustration, and ultimately a sleepless night.

I had one of those nights several months ago. I began questioning why in 2009 is there still such a disparity between the "haves" and the "have-nots"? Why is education still unequal in so many communities 55 years after *Brown v. Board of Education*? And I found myself wondering why job opportunities are still not readily available for educated and qualified minorities. My last question really hit home as I was frustrated by the lack of job opportunities for myself and other women of color.

When I graduated from Thomas M. Cooley Law School with a J.D. in 2006 and with an LL.M. in Intellectual Property in 2008, I was sure that doors would fly right open for me. I couldn't imagine someone not wanting to hire a young, fresh, ambitious mind; mentor it; and mold it into a "legal force to be reckoned with." I knew I had a wide range of views that could be useful to an organization, challenge the status quo, and offer knowledge that would help support its core values.

What I quickly realized was that I needed to get out of my monologue and into dialogue. I knew that I was not going to obtain any results wondering "Why?" all alone. So I began searching for a group within the legal profession that has the same interests and concerns that I do. A group that believes there is room in the profession for us all, and that we shouldn't be defined by our gender, race, ethnicity, age, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, physical abilities or religious beliefs. Also, I wanted to have a dialogue

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Feature Article

with individuals who were not just like me. It's easy to find agreement when you're among those who have similar challenges and backgrounds.

In dialogue is where ideas can be exchanged and debated. It's in dialogue where concerns and fears can be expressed. It's in dialogue where change and transformation occurs. And as history notes, it was the dialogue between Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and President Lyndon B. Johnson that facilitated the passing of the 1964 and 1965 civil rights acts – the federal laws that eradicated the shame and humiliation of being denied the right to vote, to eat in a restaurant, to use a public restroom, to have a job, and to choose a place to live strictly because of the color of one's skin, the origin of one's ancestors, or one's gender.

My quest eventually led me to the Oakland County Bar Association's Diversity Committee. The OCBA's Diversity Committee is a place where ideas are freely and openly expressed, actions are taken, and results are produced. The Diversity Committee is a place where my voice is heard and the membership truly wants to know what I think.

When I think about the Diversity Committee and what it means to Oakland County, I am reminded of the principle, "The whole is greater than the sum of its parts." This philosophical principle is attributed to concept of *synergy*. For me, simply put, this is teamwork. What I know for sure is that collectively a group can produce far greater results than a single individual.

Together the members of the Diversity Committee are dedicated to creating an inclusive community that is grounded in respect and appreciation for individual differences. It's an undeniable fact that the world has become more global and technology has brought us closer together; our environment has become more diverse. The Diversity Committee is looking for people who can move past their history and into their imagination. It's looking for people who can transcend differences and build relationships with the spirit of cooperation. And it calls for people who will

continue to grow and develop, and who will bring *justice* and *respect* to themselves and those they represent.



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If you are interested in joining the OCBA's Diversity Committee or any other committee, contact Candice Russ at (248) 334-3400

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