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# Class of 1972 Five Year Report Alumni Comments, Part 3

University of Michigan Law School

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RIDER A

THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN LAW SCHOOL  
FIVE YEAR ALUMNI QUESTIONNAIRE - CLASS OF 1972

I have taken the liberty of altering question number VIII on the questionnaire. I believe that the question, in its altered form, is a relevant area of inquiry for the law school since my class and the class that followed were the products of intensive recruitment efforts in 1969 and 1970. We were among the brightest and best minority students in the country with the opportunity to graduate from one of America's great law schools. We were not treated differently while in ~~law school, contrary to popular belief. We competed intensely with each~~ other and the white students. We had the same frustrations, disappointments and anxieties about law school as the average white student. We laughed, we cried and joked about someday being a lawyer. We believed, as all Michigan students, that upon graduation from the law school, we would be given an opportunity to advance our legal careers at all levels of the legal profession. A Michigan law degree, like a Harvard and Yale degree, we were led to believe, would open many doors in the legal profession. Many doors, despite a Michigan, Harvard or Yale degree, remain closed or only partly opened to minority lawyers. We believed that your dream was within our grasp.

In pursuit of the dream, after law school, I joined a prestigious east coast law firm. It was a grand opportunity despite the subtle racism and skepticism of many of the partners in the firm of the ability of minority lawyers. I remained there for two (2) years. There were only three (3) minority lawyers with this firm -- two from Harvard and, of course, me from Michigan. All three of us left the firm at about the same time. The older and more senior attorney left to protest

the racism of the firm, and the other attorney left at the same time I did to form our own law firm. We wanted to provide "the community with a high-powered, capable and prestigious minority law firm," -- so we thought. We got caught up believing that society, and the legal profession in particular, was ready for such a firm. It was not. After three years of struggle, and several hundred thousand dollars later, the firm had to close its doors. We were doing a lot of business but not the kind of business that would sustain or permit us to grow. We had come to expect more, being believers in the dream. Perhaps we had become spoiled at our success. We were not attracting the large corporate client, the middle class client, etc. The real sad fact is that we were not attracting sufficient middle class minority people to sustain the operation of the firm at a high level. Sure, we could have broadened our perspective and taken on low grade workmen's compensation, civil negligence and criminal law cases. However, we were not prepared nor willing to accept the "hustle" practice which would have required us to cut corners and quality. Michigan and Harvard had told us that we were special --- but in the end, we were not. [Michigan, and law schools like it, must not delude its minority students into believing that the legal profession has abated its racism and that minority lawyers have an equal opportunity to practice in all areas of the law. Minorities entering private practice must recognize the very special problems that they face -- a refusal by their own people to adequately utilize their services, the refusal of major corporate firms to utilize their services and, unfortunately, a practice limited to tort and criminal law.

The private practice of law is fact becoming a difficult proposition. Minority lawyers who engage in private practice can only expect to have and make a marginal living. Perhaps there are exceptions? Too few, I am sure, to mention.

By the time this short note is read, I will be working for a large corporation or the government. (It has pained me to write this piece, but I had to say it.) Thank you, anyway, Michigan for the dream.