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# NO ONE HERE

NANCY FREEMAN<sup>1</sup>©

I asked that my name not be given, because my name is not important. What is important is my affiliation with a group facing extinction, whom you may call the disappearing ones. So take a good look at me now, while you can. Now you see me, soon you won't. You'll see others like me— less and less in your neighborhood. And some of you will think: “And?” “So?” “What’s wrong with that?”

I am not here to cast blame. Or to point a finger, or to say that the UCLA law school environment is anyone's fault. Indeed, you drown me in your cries of “It's not our fault! There's SP-1 and SP-2! There's 209! There's nothing we can do!” Nothing you can do indeed. Now, I concede that we are operating under some restrictions. We may in some ways be constrained by the “community voice” as to what can and cannot happen in the neighborhood. But, beloved faculty, administrators, and to whom it may concern, let us all take a closer look at what happens within the four walls of your own house.

Can I tell you a story? And again, my name is not important. For there are other stories like mine. And those stories may come from persons whose faces look different from mine, or whose hair is straighter, or whose lover happens to be of the same gender, or whose parents don't speak English, or from persons who, for any number of reasons that human beings feel, feel disconnected, on the outside, or invisible.

My story is not unique. But I can only speak with my own voice about life as seen through my eyes as one of the disappearing ones. Can I tell you a story?

The eyes through which I view the world are different from your eyes, not just because they're green, but because I am a so-called woman of color.

Now, my story is not addressed to all of you. I'm here to address a specific group of persons, and you all know who you are. So if you're not in that select, specific group, I respectfully

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1. All rights reserved. Copyright 2000. Third year law student, UCLA School of Law. BA, UCLA 1994. My enduring gratitude to Jane Spade for her spirit, presence, and light.

request that you tune me out, go get coffee, take a break and come back, because I guarantee that I will not be saying anything of interest to you. I'm here only to address the particular group of no one here. I'm talking to no one here, because I have issues with no one here.

And so my story begins.

I have escaped poverty, but not connection, responsibility, unity, or community. You could say that I am here because my father's mother picked cotton. But that is the fault of no one here. My mother's mother returned to the one-room school-house after her teacher 'graduated her,' so hungry was she to learn. But that is the fault of no one here. As fate would have it, my great-grandfather didn't have the money to pay to bus her to the high school for coloreds outside of Pecos, Texas. And why am I bringing up stories about my daddy's momma and my momma's momma? Educational segregation and its effects are the fault of no one here. Moreover, I am confident that the highly esteemed, honorable, dedicated faculty and administration of the UCLA School of Law would vehemently decry segregation in their midst. I further predict that a clamor would rise like a deafening roar to protest such injustice at this highly regarded, reputable, public institution. That is the world of my dreams.

I only share my story here as a source of information, because the eyes through which I view the world are different from your eyes. My experience in your midst is different because my life context has been different, and that is the fault of no one here, so again, I explain, I am not talking to any of you.

The eyes through which I view the world are eyes that watched my inadequately educated grandmother work as a domestic for women half her age who she called mam address her by her first name in the tone of voice one would use with a child. And please feel free to tune me out because this has nothing to do with you, I'm talking to no one here.

So when I bring these eyes and life experiences, which none of you created and which I unequivocally acknowledge I alone am responsible for, and I sit in your classrooms, and listen to your stories being told from your books, all I can say is the eyes through which I view the world are different from your eyes.

I sit in Constitutional Minority Procedure which some call Constitutional Criminal Procedure, understanding that criminal and minority are interchangeable, knowing the course would be more accurately entitled Unconstitutional Negro Procedure, because more than 1 out of 2, more than 2 out of 3, more than 3 out of 4, more than 4 out of 5 of the defendants in your book are black. I finally figured out that that's because only black people commit

crimes— that's why we constantly read about them in Negro Procedural law.

And I sit in your classrooms in racialized silence and I cringe and I wonder if the students in the class think that it is odd that all the defendants are black.

And I wonder if they know how uncomfortable and ashamed and embarrassed I feel when more than 1 out of 2, more than 2 out of 3, more than 3 out of 4, more than 4 out of 5 of the criminals in your stories in your books are the same race that I am. So then I glance around the room and I further scan the room and I look around the room and I peer around the room and eventually— I see a face that looks like mine. And after more looking and searching and searching and seeking at long, long last, I see another. After more looking and searching and looking and searching I finnnnnally see another. But that is all—that is all that these eyes see. But I guess that that's not strange since most of the people with faces like mine are in your stories in your books and in jail. And it seems strange to me that no one in my class thinks that's strange.

So I know, and I say this to no one here, that my thoughts about life here are different because the eyes through which I view the world are different from your eyes, and again, that is the fault of no one here.

I further realize that my trauma at having the dubious distinction of being the only African-American in my first year section was the fault of no one here. I understand that when the seven African-American students in the 1997 entering class were 'randomly' assigned to the four sections of the 1L class, with two African-American students placed in every section except for mine, that my anguish and my isolation was the fault of no one here, because the eyes with which I view the world are different from your eyes. And again I re-remember and understand that my discomfort is my own responsibility.

Now, I'm not finding fault— there is no blame to be placed. The infinitesimal minority numbers are the fault of no one here. So as I've explained repeatedly, I am not talking to any of you.

But just in case, on the slight chance that there are some who might be interested in what one like me with eyes like mine has to say, eyes that view the world in a different way, I would guess that she might tell you that she would tell her sisters and brothers and cousins and friends that UCLA School of Law is not a welcome place for eyes like mine, to go instead to the places that make you feel wanted, or where you feel comfortable, or where section placement is not "random" and you are not used, ignored, or forgotten.

In the world that I am from, the world of connection, responsibility, unity, and community, there are still eyes like mine with eyes on me that will come to me and ask—

Where shall I go? UCLA? Who there will welcome me?

I will with sorrow shake my head and answer “no one here.”

The bottom line is that the party line is that curriculum is everything. Substance is the idol that we worship over all.

Who cares about the context in which curriculum descends? Who cares that I am silenced and invisible in your world? Who cares that I despair that so few professors have faces like mine? Have stories like mine? Have life experiences like mine?

My name is not important. And you will soon forget us, the disappearing ones. The eyes with which I view the world are different from your eyes. But if with different eyes, and different face, or different voice, you understand, tell me your story and save me from no one here.