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Michael M. Bowden

*Roger Williams University School of Law*

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April 27, 2018

## 15th Diversity Symposium Dinner

Lively and engaging, the 15th Annual Diversity Symposium Dinner was packed with legal and community leaders – as well as high school and college students interested in pursuing careers in law.



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Credit: Christine Awe/RWU Law

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Roger Williams University recently celebrated its 15th Annual Diversity Symposium Dinner at the Providence Marriott Downtown. The premiere pipeline event was packed with legal and community leaders; students, faculty, staff and alumni of RWU Law; and, most importantly, a burgeoning contingent of high school and college students interested in pursuing a career in law.

The symposium dinner also gave the community a chance to mark two important milestones:

- First, Rhode Island District Court Judge William C. Clifton, who passed away shortly before the event, was fondly remembered as a witty, wise and much respected jurist. One of the very few African-Americans to serve as a judge in the state judiciary, he died in late March at age 75, after a battle with cancer. His brother, Judge Edward Clifton, who recently retired from the state Superior Court and is [currently an adjunct professor at RWU Law](#), was present at the Symposium.
- Also honored was Brown University's general counsel Beverly Ledbetter, who has announced she will be retiring this summer after four decades as the school's chief legal officer. Since becoming Brown's first general counsel in 1978, Ledbetter has been instrumental in helping the university navigate a wide spectrum of issues and initiatives. RWU Law Director of Diversity & Outreach [Deborah L. Johnson, Esq.](#) shared heartfelt remarks, flowers and a memento of the event.

Following dinner and warm welcoming remarks from [Linda Rekas Sloan, Esq.](#), president of the Rhode Island Bar Association, and [Dean Michael J. Yelnosky](#) of RWU Law, a lively panel discussion on U.S. immigration policy got underway, featuring:

- Nelida S. Barbosa, a current RWU Law student, slated to graduate in May;
- [Professor Jared A. Goldstein](#), RWU Law
- [Professor Deborah S. Gonzalez '07](#), Director, RWU Law Immigration Law Clinic
- Ondine Galvez Sniffin, Esq., prominent Providence immigration attorney; and
- Stacey P. Veroni, Esq., Office of the Rhode Island Attorney General

None were particularly happy with current immigration policy. A sampling:

- Mexican immigrants are being scapegoated. "Societally, they are simply more visible to us, just by the color of their skin. We have a lot of immigrants from the former Soviet Union, for example, but they are not as visible." (Gonzalez) "Our undocumented population is 12 million people right now, and 40 percent of those folks are from China. The majority do not come from Mexico." (Galvez Sniffin)
- It's 'undocumented persons,' not 'illegal aliens.' "'Illegal' has a negative connotation, and besides, human beings can't be 'illegal.' The proper descriptor is the state of their documentation." (Galvez Sniffin)
- On the travel ban. "The travel ban itself says, 'We're excluding people from countries where we don't know enough about them.' But then we have the president's tweets and long history of saying, 'Really, we're trying to keep out Muslims.' So what the real reason is will continue to be the source of a lot of debate." (Goldstein)
- On the border wall. "The idea that a physical wall would keep us safe is illusory. The truth is, a lot of the people who are here undocumented didn't cross the border illegally. They came with a visa, and they overstayed it." (Goldstein)
- Stealing jobs and living off welfare? "Undocumented immigrants do not take advantage of our welfare system. They are very limited in what benefits they can access, and they are not here to live off the dole. If anything, they are working two or three jobs. Their public assistance is their family members and friends, and sometimes their employers." (Galvez Sniffin)

- We're almost ***all*** 'illegal immigrants'! "For hundreds of years, most people who came here just showed up – and that doesn't even count the enslaved millions who came as involuntary immigrants. So to say, 'We did it *right* and these people are doing it *illegally*' is only correct in the sense that now we have very technical laws in place that prohibit entry in certain ways, whereas before it was just the Wild West." (Goldstein)

The 15th Annual Diversity Symposium Dinner was proudly sponsored by RWU Law and the law firm of [Nixon Peabody](#), and presented by RWU Law's Multi-Cultural Law Students Association, the Thurgood Marshall Law Society of Rhode Island, and the Rhode Island Hispanic Bar Association.