

Roger Williams University

DOCS@RWU

Life of the Law School (1993-)

Archives & Law School History

3-22-2022

Law School News: 'Why I Know Anti-Blackness Doesn't Define Ketanji Brown Jackson' 03-22-2022

Brooklyn Crockton

Follow this and additional works at: https://docs.rwu.edu/law_archives_life



Part of the [Civil Rights and Discrimination Commons](#), [Judges Commons](#), [Law and Gender Commons](#), [Law and Race Commons](#), [Law and Society Commons](#), [Legal Profession Commons](#), and the [Supreme Court of the United States Commons](#)

March 22, 2022

Law School News

'Why I Know Anti-Blackness Doesn't Define Ketanji Brown Jackson'

Brown Jackson could become the first Black woman U.S. Supreme Court justice. But as law student Brooklyn Crockton discovered, being mistaken for a defendant while entering a courtroom is all too common for Black lawyers.

March 22, 2022

|

Brooklyn Crockton, RWU Law 3L



RWU Law 3L Brooklyn Crockton; U.S. Supreme Court nominee Ketanji Brown Jackson.

RWU Law 3L Brooklyn Crockton contributed this OpEd to the [WordInBlack](#) column of the [Sacramento Observer](#), March 22, 2022 edition. It is reproduced here with the permission of the author.

(WIB) – We’re surrounded by the manifestations of the greatness of Black women: We can turn on the television and see Issa Rae writing awkward Black girls into history. We can see Vice President Kamala Harris addressing the nation. And soon, we might be able to crack open a textbook and read an opinion by none other than United States Supreme Court Justice [Ketanji Brown Jackson](#).

As a third-year law student at Roger Williams University School of Law in Rhode Island, I, like so many Black people, felt a rush of emotion over [Brown Jackson’s historic nomination](#). Indeed, the confirmation of the future Justice Jackson would offer us a symbolic double hand-tap on the seat next to her for younger generations of Black girls.

Brown Jackson’s accomplishments are also a powerful reminder that the anti-Blackness that Black attorneys experience is not what defines us.

In early March as I waited — dressed professionally and carrying case-related folders and binders — to enter a Rhode Island courtroom, a deputy sheriff put his body between me and the door and told me to step to the side.

I was there as part of my law school’s experiential Criminal Defense Clinic — I’m conditionally barred to appear in court through the program. However, the sheriff’s deputy questioned me within earshot of other people about my name not being on the docket. To my shock, he asked me, “Are you the defendant?”

[I shared this humiliating experience on Tik-Tok](#) and [my video about it went viral](#). As I asked in the video, why would he assume that I was a defendant?

I think we all know why.

After my video went viral I heard from so many lawyers who have had this kind of racist experience. Imagine how many times Judge Jackson has had something similar happen to her?

In 2021, only 4.7% of lawyers in the United States were Black, according to the American Bar Association’s [Profile of the Legal Profession](#). Once the shimmer of law school wears off after graduation, the disregard for Black and Brown lives become obvious to Black lawyers. For centuries, the law has been used as a mechanism for the degradation of people of color. Joining the legal profession means actively challenging statutes made to oppress people that look like me — like Judge Jackson — and doing so is no easy feat.

Black people who enter the legal profession are expected to form a vibranium skin against racial microaggressions. People — like that deputy sheriff — question our credentials. We are undermined, overworked, underpaid, over-analyzed, and under-represented, but we are always overprepared. And a system made to oppress us is no match for the strength of our ancestors — for the strength they give us right here, right now.

As Judge Jackson's confirmation hearings begin, I'm reminded of my Alabama-born-and-raised great-grandmother. She gave me a gift — the gift of sight. Not sight in a literal sense, but the ability to see past myself when the weight of life and the law seems too heavy to bear.

On the first day of law school, as I stood in the mirror eagerly preparing for the day, for a short second, I saw myself through her eyes — the same eyes that saw *her* enslaved grandmother carry the weight of a nation on her shoulders. The same eyes that saw Emmitt Till's death reported on the front page of the newspaper — a paper she held onto for the rest of her life. The same eyes that saw a fiery cross burning on a neighbor's lawn who had bravely exercised the right to vote.

My great-grandmother saw many things in her life, but justice for Black women was not one of them. She exchanged her aspirations for the reality of being treated as a second-class citizen. However, her hopes manifested in me the desire to create space for Black women so future generations could dream limitlessly. I saw her dreams come true in the mirror.

Judge Jackson's presence on the Supreme Court will be more than just *another* Black woman doing *another* incredible thing. Her presence will be the guttural croaking of a voice never before heard on the Bench. Her voice will be the song of justice resounding nationwide.

I am grateful to witness Black women everywhere continue to shatter barriers — yes, please. I'm the first in my family to go to college and I'll be the first to graduate from law school. Although I'm not sure where the law will take me, I know this for sure: If it leads me to the Supreme Court, I'll know that place was made by Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson.