

Black Law Students Association hosts month-long "Black History Month" celebration

The Black Law Students Association (BLSA), in conjunction with the College of Law Diversity Committee, is hosting a month full of events to commemorate and honor "Black History Month" at the University of Illinois College of Law.

On February 6, the month-long schedule kicks off with an Opening Celebration wine and cheese event from 5-7 p.m., featuring a power point presentation on "Great African-American Legal Figures" in the Pedersen Pavilion. The event is free and open to all students and the general public.

As part of the College of Law Social Justice Film Series, the movie "Four Little Girls," will be shown on Thursday, February 8 at the College of Law. "Four Little Girls" is the 1997 Spike Lee-directed documentary film recounting the people and events leading up to the one of the most despicable hate-crimes during the height of the civil-rights movement, the 1963 bombing of the 16th Street Church in Birmingham, Alabama. In that attack, four little African-American girls lost their lives and a nation was simultaneously revolted, angered and galvanized to push the fight for equality and justice on. "Four Little Girls" will be shown at 6:30 p.m. in Room A at the College of Law with commentary to follow led by Professor Margareth Etienne and Professor Victoria Hadfield. There is no charge for the film and it is open to the public.

The BLSA Bake Sale is set for February 15 from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. in the Pedersen Pavilion, with a variety of baked goods and desserts available for purchase.

Noted attorney and new Board of Trustees member James D. Montgomery - Keynote Speaker - Tuesday, February 27 - 6 p.m. - Max L. Rowe Auditorium

The keynote presentation will take place on Tuesday, February 27 at 6 p.m. in College of Law Auditorium, featuring noted Chicago attorney James D. Montgomery, who was recently appointed to the University of Illinois Board of Trustees by Illinois Governor Rod Blagojevich. Montgomery, 74, a Chicago attorney, was appointed by Governor Rod Blagojevich to the Board and his appointment was approved on January 18. He is a two-degree alumnus of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, receiving a degree in political science in 1953 and a law degree in 1956. A renowned trial attorney, Montgomery is a former City of Chicago corporation counsel and over the years has been a frequent lecturer at law schools throughout the country. The lecture will be immediately followed by a reception in the Pedersen Pavilion.

BLSA Alumni Weekend: "Continuing the Legacy"

The annual BLSA Alumni Weekend is set for March 3-4 at the College of Law, including the traditional Saturday night banquet. The theme for the weekend is,

"Continuing the Legacy". Among the festivities is the annual BLSA Alumni Banquet at the Champaign Country Club honoring the 100th anniversary of the graduation of Amos Scruggs, the first African-American College of Law graduate in 1907. BLSA will also be honoring distinguished alumnus David Addison with the Seaberry Alumni Award. David Addison is the co-founder and first president of the University of Illinois Black Law Students Association.

A look at Amos Potter Scruggs '07

Amos Potter Scruggs is listed as the 14th African-American student at the University of Illinois and was the first African-American graduate of the College of Law. This information, titled "Negro Matriculants List, 1887-1937" was originally compiled for Dr. W.E.B. DuBois, working on behalf of the N.A.A.C.P. magazine, *The Crisis*.

Mr. Scruggs was born January 16, 1874 in Shipman, Illinois, the son of Matthew and Eliza Steward Scruggs, and moved to Litchfield when he was 12 years old. He was the first African-American student to graduate from Litchfield High School in 1896 at the age of 22. He graduated from the University of Illinois College of Law in 1907 at the age of 33.

Mr. Scruggs married Mary Fitzpatrick on September 7, 1906. He was a traveling salesman in Springfield from 1907-1914 and was admitted to the Illinois Bar in 1910. He was admitted to the Nebraska Bar in 1914 and was appointed Sealer of Weights and Measures for the City of Omaha in 1916. He argued 13 cases before the Illinois Supreme Court from 1930-1935, including two criminal defendants appealing their convictions. The robbery conviction in *People v. Washington* (342 Ill. 350, 174 N.E. 405) was affirmed but the conviction in *People v. Jenkins* (342 Ill. 238, 174 N.E. 30) was reversed.

Mr. Jenkins, a black man, had been convicted of assault with intent to commit rape. The victim was an eighteen-year-old white woman. Race was never mentioned in the decision but the defendant was described as being on his way home from a meeting of the American Negro Protective Association while the victim was described as the step-daughter of an Austro-Hungarian immigrant. The Supreme Court overturned the conviction, finding that the evidence of Mr. Jenkin's "passion" was not sufficient evidence of his intention to commit rape. The next time Mr. Scruggs appeared before the court, it was as a member of the state's attorney's staff.

The College of Law alumni directories list Mr. Scruggs living at 1700 E. Capitol Street in Springfield in 1915 and at 3807 F. Canadean Ave. in Omaha, Nebraska in 1923 and 1927. While living in Springfield, Mr. Scruggs was a member of Holy Angel Catholic Church.

Mr. Scruggs retired from his practice in 1945 and died on January 29, 1946 at the age of 72. He was survived by his wife, Mary, one sister and several nieces and nephews.

"The Negro and Education" delivered by Amos P. Scruggs -
Litchfield, Ill. - Sept. 12, 1908

On Saturday, September 12, 1908, Mr. Scruggs delivered a speech entitled, "The Negro and Education" at the Litchfield Public Library. The Litchfield Herald described the audience as "appreciative and representative" and gave the following description of the speech, "Scruggs begin a colored man, having been raised and educated in Litchfield, and having worked his way through college and advanced himself to a high plain in life by performing the humblest of labors, returned to the city to appear before a home audience on a wustion that is paramount in his chosen line of work. Amos Potter Scruggs delighted his audience with his intelligent address. He handled his subject in a way that was interesting to hear and easy to believe. The speaker is modest, cultured and well fitted for platform speaking. His manner is earnest and he talks with a seriousness that is convincing."

Here is an excerpt from his speech, amazingly prophetic for 1908:

"The negro, since emancipation, has made himself generally useful in every walk of life excepting two: president of the United States and governor of a state. But senators, representatives, foreign ministers, state legislators and many other positions of honor he has filled with credit and dignity.

The progress of the race can here be shown by figures. In about forty-five years of freedom the ten millions of negroes in America, in the face of difficulties, have accumulated more than three and a half billion dollars worth of taxable property, have acquired nearly half a million homes and farms, have moved forward to the extent that fifty-six percent can read or write the English language, have 16,000 christian ministers, 24,000 church organizations with \$27,000,000 worth of church property.

The importance of the negro question to the American people cannot be too highly estimated. The Americans with their much boasted civilization contrasted with their treatment of the negro, an American citizen, has made the American people the laughing stock of the entire civilized world.

America reaches out to foreign countries for conquests and to enlighten the Filipino when she had a greater problem within her very home which has not been solved. America sends missionaries abroad when they are more needed at home.

A new suggestion to relieve race difficulties is not amiss. Congress should appoint a committee to investigate the conditions where large numbers of both races are located and whatever the difficulty may be that national government should arbitrate the matter.

Prejudice, disrespect for law, malice, hatred and ill will, such as has been urged by United States Senator Ben Tillman, Governor Vardaman of Mississippi, Thomas Nelson Page and Frank Dixon, the authors, the later being the writer of Leopard Spots, never solved and never will solve the race problems.

No race can be judged by its worst characters. An individual of any race should be given credit for his personal acquirements and ability. At law one is presumed to be innocent until proven guilty, just so should any man be presumed to be good until proven bad."

College of Law
504 East Pennsylvania Avenue
Champaign, Illinois 61820

Phone (217) 333-0931
Fax (217) 244-1478

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