

August 2, 2022

Dear UB Law Students:

We welcome you to law school during a particularly meaningful and impactful time in our world, our nation, and our legal community. Our theme for this school year is “Civil Rights and Civil Resistance.”

During the past several years, we have lived through a global pandemic and witnessed ongoing demands for justice stemming from centuries of systemic racism and racially motivated violence against people of color, especially Black people, in the United States. We have seen historical court decisions that have overturned a half century of settled legal precedent and fundamental rights relied upon by women. Considering these events and the law’s integral place in responding to them, our faculty and administration are continuing to take concrete steps toward building an anti-racist culture at the School of Law. As part of this effort, we have reexamined our curricula and programming to explore ways to honor Black lives, not merely in a reactionary way, but in a way that provides a framework for understanding the historical and legal context of systemic racism in the United States.

As a result, for each of our last three years, our Student Affairs and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion departments have collaborated to send each of our incoming students the book *Devil in the Grove* as part of our orientation materials. This Pulitzer Prize-winning novel is a nonfiction account of a 1949 criminal case against four wrongly accused defendants, the “Groveland Boys.” The book also explores Thurgood Marshall’s role as a lawyer at the NAACP in this case, among numerous others, prior to becoming a United States Supreme Court justice. Along the way, you will also learn about many other lawyers who fought for Civil Rights.

In addition, we have obtained the copyright permission to send each of you a copy of the law review article, *A Bronx Tale: Disposable People, the Legacy of Slavery, and the Social Death of Kalief Browder* by law Professor Donald Marvin Jones. This article addresses the much more recent case of a wrongfully accused young Black teenager, who was held at Rikers Island, a large-scale jail complex in NYC, for three years without trial. At Rikers, Browder was subject to solitary confinement, beatings, and abuse. After being released when his charges were dismissed, Browder struggled to recover and committed suicide just two years later.

As you read, we would like you to consider the conditions in the United States, as well as in our current legal system, that allowed for such great miscarriages of justice. To assist you in your reflections, we have compiled a list of reading questions on the back of this letter. We will have a series of events in the fall and the spring to reflect on the issues raised by these readings and to consider our thematic journey of “Civil Rights and Civil Resistance.”

We look forward to this important discussion as you begin your journey to become advocates in our society.

Sincerely,

Bernadette Gargano, Vice Dean of Student Affairs
Luis Chiesa, Vice Dean of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion