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BLSA Weekend Countdown

Myra McKenzie, BLSA Vice President

As Spring approaches, we continue to finalize our plans for the 28th Annual BLSA Alumni Weekend. To reiterate, the theme for this year's Weekend is: BLSA's Legal Legacy: Using the Past and the Present to Create a Network for the Future. Throughout the Weekend, our activities will highlight the worth of using our Notre Dame connections to achieve our collective and individual career goals and to continue our efforts to aid in Black student recruitment and retention at the Law School. We will also honor the two earliest Black graduates of the law school and plan to have them in attendance.

The Weekend will take place **April 6th-8th, 2001**, and some of the notable events are a panel discussion entitled, "Reaching Back to go Forward: The Value of Mentoring and Investing in Today's Youth," and our annual "BLSA Brunch at Tippecanoe." We have planned a variety of activities, but we need your support. All alumni have received registration and Alumnus of the Year nomination forms in recent mailings. Please

return them as soon as possible. The deadline for Alumnus of the Year nomination submission is March 9, 2001. If you are concerned that you will not have enough time to return your nomination form, please e-mail your nominations to me at mckenzie.5@nd.edu.

Additionally, to aid our alumni as much as possible, we have secured several rooms at the Jamison Inn Bed and Breakfast for the reduced rate of \$70 per night. The Jamison is within walking distance of Notre Dame, and hotel reservations can be made by calling (219) 277-9682. Be sure to mention that you are calling as a part of the BLSA Alumni Reunion group.

We are looking forward to a great Weekend. We would certainly appreciate your support and look forward to your presence in April. If you have any questions about the Weekend, please do not hesitate to contact me at (219) 259-4850.

ND-BLSA?

Qiana Lillard, BLSA President

Greetings once again from the Frozen Tundra otherwise known as South Bend, Indiana. Like always it brings me great pleasure to write to the Notre Dame BLSA family. As my tenure as BLSA President nears its end, I must say that I am very pleased with some of the progress that we have made as an organization this year. Despite all of our busy schedules and demanding courses, our officers and members have given much of themselves to ensure BLSA's success.

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This semester we kicked things off with a very creative and lucrative fundraiser, the BLSA Valentines Day Raffle, spearheaded by our Treasurer Daniel Sattizahn. Also, through the tireless efforts of our Secretary Tamona Bright, BLSA recently launched its official link to the Law School website. Overall things have been running smoothly. In fact things were going so well that I was just starting to convince myself that I would be the first BLSA President in recent years to make it out of office with no major drama. Was I ever wrong

It all started in October when a representative from the Midwest Region of National BLSA contacted me. He called to, among other things, invite our chapter to take a more active role in regional activities. Our conversation was brief and soon after I received information in the mail about the regional convention, regional dues, national dues, and the Frederick Douglass Moot Court Competition. Receiving these materials sparked a discussion among the executive board about why our chapter does not actively participate with the National Organization. As I am sure most of you are aware, National BLSA maintains separate categories of membership for people who are not Black. While non-Black people may join the organization, they are not considered "full" members. This means, among other things, that a non-Black person may not hold office or participate in the Frederick Douglass Moot Court Competition. However, here at Notre Dame our constitution does not distinguish the rights and privileges of our members based upon race. Our organization is open without limitation to anyone who is committed to supporting our goals regardless of race. In fact, two members of our executive board are not Black. While this is not a problem for us, the materials we received caused us to question if this would be acceptable to National BLSA. After briefly discussing how we could best deal with the conflicting policies we decided that it was really a non-issue because all of the events

were too expensive for us to even contemplate participating in anyway. With that said, as in years past, the E-Board decided that we would most likely not be participating with National or Regional BLSA this year.

Some weeks went by when I received another call from the Midwest Region representative. This time he was little less friendly and much more aggressive. He wanted to know why our chapter had not paid dues or registered for the convention. A lengthy discussion ensued, the details of which I will spare, but ultimately I was told that if we did not change our membership policies and pay them money we had to either stop calling ourselves BLSA or the University would be sued for copyright infringement. For a minute I felt like I was talking to a bill collector or a telemarketer instead of a colleague. I told him that I hoped we could reach some amicable resolution to the matter without litigation and that I would share his position with our chapter.

In the following weeks I sought the advice of the E-board, our advisor Assistant Dean Vincent Rougeau and Assistant Vice President and General Counsel of the University Bill Hoye. The entire time I remained in contact with various representatives from the Midwest Region. By December the E-board decided that we would stand firm to our position and refused to more than triple our membership dues or otherwise raise the large funds necessary to be considered an active chapter or make any attempts to conform our membership policies to meet the ultimatum we had been given by the Midwest Region.

The communications continued into the New Year between Regional representatives and Dean Rougeau. I can only imagine that because he was unsatisfied with the results of his conversation with Dean Rougeau the representative contacted Mr. A.J. Cooper. As you may know Mr. Cooper is one of the 50 University of Notre Dame Distinguished Black Exemplars. A '67

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graduate of the University Mr. Cooper, among many other accomplishments, co-founded the Black Alumni of Notre Dame and the Black American Law Students association (the organization which is now National BLSA). Mr. Cooper had also agreed to deliver the Keynote address at our BLSA Alumni Weekend Reunion. Let's just say Mr. Cooper is not too happy with our BLSA chapter's refusal to comply with the membership requirements of the National organization. On February 9, 2001 he formally withdrew his acceptance of our invitation to speak at the Reunion.

I personally stand firmly behind our decision not to comply with the mandates of the Midwest Region. It seems to me that discrimination of any form has no place in the 21st century. The non-Black members of our organization are important to the survival of our chapter. Last time I checked, I was one of only two African American people in the class of 2001. As a third year I know that I would not have made it through NDLS without the support and camaraderie of my non-Black classmates, the closest of whom I met at a BLSA event. Furthermore we simply cannot afford to pay hundreds of dollars to be a part of National Organization that seems to be more concerned with collecting our money than providing any meaningful programming. I'd rather see BLSA spend our money on books and study aids for 1Ls than attending conventions held in fancy and exotic locations like Lansing, Michigan. On more than one occasion, representatives of the Mid-West Region suggested that we solicit alumni for the funds necessary to pay their fees. Wouldn't our organization be greater served by alumni contributions to a fund, similar to the BA of ND Frazier Thompson Memorial Scholarship, to provide tuition assistance to African American law students so that in years to come there won't be classes with the demographics of the class of 2001 (just two chocolate chips in a sea of vanilla ice cream)? I could go on and on listing the ways that we could spend our time and resources doing

more productive and important things than being a part of National BLSA. It's just sad to see that in this day and age we, as Black people, continue to act like crabs in a barrel climbing clawing and stepping on each others backs struggling to get to the top instead of finding a way to work together for mutual and collective improvement.

Cornel West Speaks...

Eric Mahler, 1L Liaison

Cornel West, professor of Afro-American studies and Philosophy of Religion at Harvard University, delivered a probing and reflective speech to a standing room only auditorium at DeBartolo Hall on January 23 in celebration of the anniversary of Dr. Martin Luther (the) King's birthday. Dr. West, noted lecturer and author of several books including *Race Matters*, is on sabbatical this year from Harvard and has been lecturing throughout the country. The event was sponsored by the Dr. King's Celebration Committee, which is a division of the Office of Campus Ministry and attended by several members of BLSA.

Prior to the lecture Chandra Johnson, Special Assistant to the President, performed a nine-minute libation ceremony accompanied by Notre Dame African-American students using water as a symbolic conduit, calling upon the spirits of our forebears to provide living African-Americans with strength, wisdom and guidance.

There was also a recognition ceremony acknowledging the winners of elementary school essay contests throughout the city of South Bend. All the children received a plaque for themselves and a separate one for their schools.

Dr. West, seen on numerous television panels regarding African-American issues and most recently at BET'S Tavis Smiley's forum on the condition of Blacks in the U.S. today, spoke on the dual themes. The first half of the speech, Dr. West put the question of what it meant to live up to ideals

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of living in a democracy to the audience. In the second half, he spoke forcefully on what it meant to be a human being. His message was clear: Dr. King's legacy to **ALL** of us was his transcendent ability to live out the very best of these two ideals and to set a standard by which, as flawed but capable people, we ought to aspire. His delivery was full of humorous, poignant, powerful and sometimes disturbing rhetoric. Dr. West started the speech by opining that if he didn't make us uncomfortable during the speech, he had failed. In the resonance of the standing ovation he humbly accepted after he concluded, it appeared that his only failure was in not feeding the crowd his incandescent wisdom throughout the night. He remains the foremost Black Agitator of this age.

Celebrating Black History

Tamona Bright, BLSA Secretary

American society has set aside February as the month to pay special tribute to the struggles and the accomplishments African-Americans. BLSA, in an effort to embrace and celebrate Black History Month, planned several activities. These activities included our Valentine's Day Raffle and a

movie night featuring *Zebra Head*, a film depicting the life of an interracial couple and the Minority High School Student Initiative LEAD. BLSA also co-sponsored two undergraduate events—a lecture by Derrick Ashong and Blak Koffee House, a literary talent show. The culminating event for the Month was our Death Penalty Panel discussion: The Disproportionate Application of the Death Penalty on African Americans. The Panel was extremely successful with over 100 people in attendance, including Dean O'Hara, and made the front page of the Observer. We hope to continue to provide events that celebrate our heritage.

Announcements & Upcoming Events

Congratulations to BLSA officers **Tamona Bright** and **Myra McKenzie**, 3rd Place Winners in the Midwest Regional Client Counseling Competition

Checkout BLSA's link to the Law School Website at <www.nd.edu/~ndlaw/blsa/>

BLSA WEEKEND

4/6-8/2001

INTERESTED IN SUBMITTING AN ARTICLE TO MARSHALL'S LAW or HAVE BLSA NEWS TO SHARE? WRITE US AT OUR NEW ADDRESS: ndblsa@nd.edu

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