

A photograph of a law library. In the foreground, a silver scale of justice stands on a wooden table. To its right is a wooden gavel. In front of the scale is an open book with text on its pages. A pair of glasses is resting on the right page of the book. The background shows wooden bookshelves filled with books. A red semi-transparent banner is overlaid on the top left of the image, containing white text.

# The Intrinsic Value of Legal Education: Lest We Forget

**Troy Riddle, Esq., MBA**

**With the barrage of negative press legal education is receiving these days, I would like to offer those of you who find yourselves wrestling with the pivotal question of whether law school is worth it, a different perspective upon which to evaluate the question.**

I believe the opening sentence in W.E.B. DuBois' controversial, 1903 article, *The Talented Tenth*, still rings true today: "The Negro race, like all races, is going to be saved by its exceptional men." (I believe the exclusion of women is a direct reflection of the times in which the writing occurred as opposed to being a deliberately sexist remark. So for purposes of this article, I am referring to both men and women.) He went on to say, and I paraphrase, "if we make money the object of education, we shall develop money-makers but not necessarily well-rounded, intelligent people with a knowledge and appreciation of the world in which we live."

Dubois' understanding of the benefits education provides at a time when there were so few options to be educated, is powerfully amazing. Fast forward to today. In 2011, we have so many more options to be educated, yet our representation in higher education does not mirror this reality. I believe some of it may be economic, but much of it is not. Mostly, I believe we have forgotten the opportunities that education provides.

As a lawyer, my first instinct is to defend legal education, because for me, it was the first educational undertaking that challenged me in ways I could not have imagined; in ways that both undergraduate and graduate degree programs did not; in ways that I find invaluable. As a practical matter, I understand the need to consider the cost of law school; however, the benefits must be given equal consideration. Taking "how much will I make when I'm done?" off the table for the moment, let's consider some other benefits that legal education can and does provide:

- 1** A terminal degree that provides you with a unique skill set and training; knowledge that no one can take from you.
- 2** The opportunity to obtain a license to "practice" law that affords an opportunity to make a living for the rest of your life – whether you choose to practice right out of law school or 10 years after you've completed law school.
- 3** The ability to be your own boss.
- 4** Proficiency in a language (the law) that touches every aspect of society (locally, nationally and globally).
- 5** The power to stand before judges and legislators and argue for causes that are important to you and to potentially affect drastic change in the world.
- 6** The ability to advocate for friends, families and others who otherwise would not have anyone to advocate on their behalf.
- 7** Powerful analytical/reasoning skills that are transferable and beneficial to almost any professional position you decide to pursue – immediately upon graduation or in the future.

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Though not a comprehensive list, these very important benefits are so often overlooked in the cost/benefit analysis for law school. If we continue to omit them from consideration, focusing only on making money, we continue to lose on the national and global stages of the world. If we continue to play the *US News & World Report* game, and allow a magazine to dictate what the most important factors are to consider in your comparative analysis of law schools, we continue to lose - because we will never have a legal profession that mirrors the diversity in our society. If we continue in this manner, we will not have a seat at the decision-making table - or a voice that can be heard - because we won't be in the rooms where these important discussions are taking place. Moreover, if we continue to choose law school for the promise of a six-figure salary alone, we trade the intrinsic value that education provides for essentially a lottery ticket. Think carefully about the odds of that decision. And if you happen to beat the odds, society gains a money-maker, often at the expense of societal change and progress.

Legal education has been and yet remains a good personal investment. If you decide that admission to law school is your goal, you must be clear about your reasons for attending, be realistic and smart about where you apply, balanced with the cost you can afford to pay to live your dream. However, if money is your only motivation, I admonish you to reconsider. You will find the challenge of law school daunting and unfulfilling without a real sense of purpose.

Instead, give some consideration to the good you can bring to the world and forget not the intrinsic value that education, which once eluded our people, can bring. Alternatively, if you're a narcissist, then consider all of the power, prestige and knowledge the study of law can bring to YOU.



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