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Becoming the Change She Wished to See

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Becoming the Change She Wished to See

Constance Slaughter-Harvey delivers Commencement address for School of Law

JUNE 10, 2019 BY STAFF REPORT

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Alumnus Constance Slaughter-Harvey addresses graduates at Commencement ceremonies for the UM School of Law in May. Submitted photo

OXFORD, Miss. – In January 1970, Constance Slaughter-Harvey became the first black woman to graduate from the **University of Mississippi School of Law**.

She was so busy helping others with her new degree, she forgot to come back to the Commencement ceremony that May.

"It seems as if I filed a lawsuit a week for almost six months, so it was easy to forget," she said.

On May 11, Slaughter-Harvey finally got to wear her regalia when she delivered the law school's Commencement address, inspiring a class of 107 graduates to enact change.

"I want to let the graduates know that my education and my experience here at the university prepared me for life, and it prepared me to be the change I wanted to see in Mississippi," Slaughter-Harvey said.

As a young girl growing up in Forest in the 1950s and '60s, Slaughter-Harvey was discouraged by the separation she witnessed between black and white citizens.

"I was discouraged because state agencies excluded black people from many jobs, as well as all counties excluded black folks from juries," she said. "I was furious that my father had to pay poll taxes to vote, and I still have his poll tax receipt in 1952 for \$2.

"The dual system of education and public accommodations gnawed at my soul."

Her parents, Willie L. and Olivia Kelly Slaughter, were both business owners and educators. However, Slaughter-Harvey realized she needed to pursue a law degree to enable the change she wished to see in Mississippi.

"I had to challenge the legal system in order to effectuate that change," she said. "I envisioned a new Mississippi where all players, all of us, understood the game rules."

She fought through discrimination and the rigors of law school to earn her degree from UM in 1970. During her time in law school, she was one of eight students and the only female to serve on the first board of the **National Black Law Student Association**.

The organization was established after a group of students met in Chicago and determined a need for the organization to assist black students. Following that meeting, she returned to Ole Miss and

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Campus Briefs

Civil Engineering Professor Receives Most-Cited Paper Award

OXFORD, Miss. – Peer recognition is a rewarding experience for anyone, but University of Mississippi researcher Amir Mehrara Molan was elated when an article he co-authored recently received the Most Cited Paper Award at the 102nd Transportation Research Board meeting in the nation's capital. The International Journal of Transportation Science and Technology presented the civil engineering

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Young Alumna Gives Back to School of Accountancy

OXFORD, Miss. – Stephanie Jennings Teague, of Chicago, sees her commitment of \$100,000 to the Patterson School of Accountancy's new building at the University of Mississippi as a means of saying "thank you." "It is a way to show a small token of my appreciation to Ole Miss, the faculty and staff, and the accounting

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Ole Miss In the News

Reuters: Keep an Eye on the Money Supply

U.S. inflation roller coaster prompts fresh look at long-ignored money supply By Michael S. Derby NEW YORK – The amount of money sloshing around the U.S. economy shrank last year for the first time on record, a development that some economists believe bolsters the case for U.S. inflation pressures continuing to

established a **BLSA chapter**. The campus chapter is named in her honor.

"We realized we were not the only black law students who didn't fit in," she told students at a BLSA event in February. "I came back and we celebrated, because we felt we actually found a place to belong."

BLSA gave black law students a home and a voice at the university. Since its founding, 521 students at the law school have been members.

Slaughter-Harvey has dedicated her entire career to being an agent of change. She worked for the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights as a staff attorney and represented the families of two Jackson State University students killed by highway patrolmen in 1970.

She was instrumental in changing the state in many ways, including desegregating the Mississippi Highway Patrol, integrating jury pools, challenging conditions at the Mississippi State Penitentiary, integrating state agency employment rolls, legislative and congressional redistricting, and working to create mail-in voter registration.

Slaughter-Harvey served as executive director of Southern Legal Rights and founded East Mississippi Legal Services, an organization dedicated to providing high-quality legal representation for minority and economically disenfranchised people. She served in the administration of Gov. William Winter and as assistant secretary of state for 12 years.

She has influenced many through education, as well. She was an adjunct professor at Tougaloo College for 35 years and has mentored many attorneys in the state. She also founded the W.L. and O.K. Slaughter Memorial Foundation, where she supervised an afterschool tutorial and summer enhancement program for at-risk children and youth.

The attorney and activist has received numerous awards for her storied career. Slaughter-Harvey retired from the active practice but continues to serve in the youth court system. Following retirement, she and her daughter founded Legacy Education and Community Empowerment Foundation Inc., whose mission is to empower youth and families through mentoring, tutoring, summer camping and other means.

In her Commencement address, Slaughter-Harvey challenged law graduates to take a page out of her playbook and become change agents in a world of state, national and global unrest.

"The gifts you've acquired here at this law school – namely knowledge, confidence and vision – should accompany you in your daily journey to be the change you wish to see in this world," she said.

The class of 2019 represented 45 different undergraduate institutions. The graduates performed an estimated 13, 433 hours of public service during law school, demonstrating their strong potential to make a difference in the lives of others.

"We are so honored to have Constance Slaughter-Harvey address our students," Dean Susan Duncan said. "She is committed to advancing the rights of others and has served as a wonderful mentor and inspiration to our students and attorneys. She continues to bless us and our students in so many ways."

Graduates also heard from Patricia Bennett, dean of the Mississippi College School of Law and Mississippi Bar Association president, who wished them success in their endeavors and the upcoming bar exam. Student Bar Association President Sammy Brown addressed his peers; graduating student Katherine Farese sang the national anthem; and graduating student Jaquon Irby served as class marshal.

Additionally, several faculty members were recognized. Clinical professor Phillip Broadhead was recognized for his years of service in leading the law school's Criminal Appeals Clinic and was this year's recipient of the Ben A. Hardy Faculty Excellence Award. He retires June 30.

Antonia Eliason, assistant professor of law, was recognized as this year's Outstanding Law Professor. Professor Ron Rychlak was recognized for the 2019 Distinguished Research and Creative Achievement Award, which he received at the university's overall Commencement ceremony earlier in the day.

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