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50 Years After the “War on Poverty”: Evaluating Past Enactments & Innovative Approaches for Addressing Poverty in the 21st Century

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Professor Emerita Ruth-Arlene Howe
Faculty Advisor, *Third World Law Journal*, 1978–2008

No one was more instrumental in founding the *Boston College Third World Law Journal* (TWLJ) than Professor Emerita Ruth-Arlene W. Howe—the faculty advisor to the Black American Law Student Association (BALSA) who helped students develop a journal proposal that would gain faculty acceptance. Of the journal’s four original faculty advisors, she served the longest (thirty years), until retiring in 2008. She continues to be a moral compass of both the journal and the institution of which it is a part. As the *Boston College Journal of Law & Social Justice* (JLSJ), renamed in 2012, looks ahead, it is only appropriate to look back as well and pay homage to those who identified a significant void in the landscape of legal scholarship and took important steps toward filling it.

The history of this journal began in April 1977 when a group of over twenty BALSA members from the classes of ’77, ’78, and ’79, led by Charles E. Walker, organized the “Entertainment Law Symposium from a Black Perspective.” Dean Richard Huber assigned Professor Robert Berry, a national sports and entertainment law scholar, to serve as faculty advisor. Through Professor Berry’s close association with Fred Slaughter, then Associate Dean at the UCLA School of Law, UCLA’s *Black Law Journal* (BLJ) committed to publish the symposium’s proceedings in a future issue. The well-attended, three-day symposium was a huge success. Presentations by nationally-recognized academicians and practitioners in sports, music, television, and dramatic/visual arts addressed the legal challenges blacks faced when entering any of these four major industries. Technical difficulties transcribing the proceedings and the failure of speakers to submit their presentation texts, however, prevented BALSA from producing a BLJ issue. The students remained undeterred by these and other

challenges. Dean Huber, a champion of underrepresented students, escrowed funds raised to underwrite publication of the symposium's proceedings, and the idea of a future Boston College Law School journal was born.

In 1979, a group of diverse and progressive students—including Maurice Hope-Thompson, Bernard Green, Peter Y. Lee, and Richard K. Sherwin—envisioned a journal that would publish scholarship on legal issues affecting populations that were seldom addressed in American legal publications and even less frequently in the classroom. These issues included peoples, cultures, and institutions that have suffered a history of colonialism, oppression, underrepresentation, violence, or marginalization in the political and economic processes. In doing so, the founders recognized the irony that these problems also express themselves in highly developed countries as well as in the developing world. They also envisioned a journal that would provide a rigorous academic setting in which to prepare students for careers that addressed third-world issues and concerns. During the last three decades, the TWLJ became one of the most renowned journals of its kind in the country and among the most prestigious at Boston College Law School. Thirty years later, the need to examine what animates inequality still unfortunately exists. Scholarship that explores issues affecting marginalized and oppressed populations, human and civil rights, immigration, women's and children's issues, and issues of disproportionate economic impact is as necessary today as it was in 1979.

In 2011 many on the journal's staff were struck by how the founders' original vision fit squarely within the law school's current mission statement: "We encourage our students to develop their own individual commitment to others and to explore those themes which are central to the Jesuit tradition—the dignity of the human person, the advancement of the common good and compassion for the poor." In renaming the TWLJ, the now JLSJ students reached consensus on the merit of promoting a journal whose name connects those same values and mission more readily with the community of which it is a part.

That the journal was renamed did not indicate any intention to deviate from the trajectory begun in 1979. Indeed, understanding the TWLJ's history reinforces how indebted current students are to the founders who identified a mission that advocated inclusion in contrast with a legal academy that tolerated (and promoted) exclusion. Standing on the shoulders of the founding editors and their early administrative and faculty supporters, a new generation of students recommits itself to scrutinizing the legal and social forces that permit ongoing widespread assaults on our shared humanity—wherever they occur.