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Why I Lawyer

RANDY K. JONES

The reason why I lawyer is because, first and foremost, I absolutely love being an attorney and counselor at law. I love the personal satisfaction of helping clients solve their legal problems or concerns. I truly enjoy counseling and advising individuals and corporations on their legal rights and responsibilities. One of the best feelings in the world is working together with a client who has entrusted you with a personal and/or business matter of great concern and helping them achieve a favorable resolution.

I most love being in the courtroom. As a trial lawyer, I am honored and thrilled to present evidence, examine witnesses, and argue legal positions on behalf of individual and corporate clients before a judge, arbitrator, or jury. As an admittedly competitive person, I fully embrace the challenge of persuading an opponent to resolve a matter in my client's favor peacefully, with civility and respect for the legal and judicial processes and each other.

However, having been born and raised in the segregated South, probably the most important reason why I lawyer is because I am convinced that my purpose in life is to use my skills, talents, and training as a lawyer to make the world a better place.

When I was a child, I never thought of becoming a lawyer. In fact, I never knew a lawyer until I attended college. (I grew up in a small eastern North Carolina town (population 1,100). All I ever wanted to be was a pitcher for the St. Louis Cardinals. Although I didn't dream of being a lawyer as a kid, I did dream of a world free of racism, discrimination, and hate. I have always envisioned a world where justice, equality, and freedom is more than a mere slogan for a political campaign.

As one of a handful of Black children helping to integrate my hometown elementary school, I have personally felt the sting of racism and hatred and the impact it has, especially on the lives of Black people. (Our entrance into that school was in the face of protests by members of the Ku Klux Klan.) I have always had a deep and abiding faith in the belief in our nation's creed that all human beings "are created equal" and have the "unalienable rights" to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness," as stated by the Founding Fathers in this country's Declaration of Independence. As lawyers, judges, and legal professionals,

I strongly believe that it is our duty to apply these principles to the work that we do.

Our history books tell us that when our country came into being, our Founding Fathers wanted a country governed by the rule of law, and not by a king. I believe that since that time, lawyers, judges, and legal professionals have been primarily charged with making sure that our country maintains the ideals upon which our society was built. As lawyers, judges, and legal professionals, we have the unique obligation and responsibility to ensure that our laws, institutions, and our systems of justice are applied fairly and equally to all. Charles Hamilton Houston said it best. Mr. Houston was a prominent African American lawyer, former dean of the Howard University School of Law, and the chief architect of the *Brown v. Board of Education* cases that led to the dismantling of Jim Crow laws in the 1950's, including the legal theory of "separate but equal." He once stated that "a lawyer is either a social engineer or a parasite on society."

This principle has guided my work as a lawyer and goes a long way in helping to describe why I lawyer. As a practicing attorney for nearly 40 years, I have gone about law practice with a commitment and dedication to being a social engineer rather than a parasite on society, with the determination to help change the world for the better. Whether as a military lawyer, federal prosecutor, or civil litigator, I am, and always have been, committed to giving back to society rather than taking from society. I have personally strived to be a lawyer whose actions and words serve as a positive role model for other lawyers.

I lawyer because I want to continue the work of those lawyers who were social engineers, who used their legal skills and talent to build a better society — indeed a country — that is more just, fair, and equitable for everyone. A country where discriminatory practices and policies within institutions (policing, schools, workplace, health care, etc.) that deny resources and opportunities and produce racially inequitable outcomes for people of color, particularly Black people, no longer exists.

Randy K. Jones (rkjones@mintz.com), Member at Mintz, was featured on the cover of the first issue of *San Diego Lawyer* magazine in 1997.