

AN OPEN LETTER FROM THE HARVARD BLACK LAW STUDENTS ASSOCIATION

Dated April 29, 2010

Harvard BLSA denounces racially inflammatory language - The Harvard Black Law Students Association (HBLSA) strongly condemns the racially inflammatory email that was circulated among the entire Harvard Law School community. Like many individuals who read its content, we find the message to be deplorable and offensive. We are open to thoughtful discourse on even the most controversial of views, and yet we categorically reject the archaic notion that African-Americans are genetically inferior to white people. We recognize, however, that this issue is much larger than any single email or any particular student.

Harvard BLSA is not at fault - HBLSA did not cause, create, or instigate these events. HBLSA was not the initial recipient of the student's controversial email. HBLSA did not forward the email to Above the Law or any other media outlet. HBLSA did not contact or meet with any other BLSA chapter regarding this email. HBLSA had no contact whatsoever with the author's clerkship judge or future employer. Any information to the contrary is unfounded and patently false.

Harvard BLSA should not be the focus - It is unfortunate that HBLSA has become the center of this ordeal. We are disheartened that the reckless coverage of this controversy has shifted the nation's attention away from the injustice and onto an unrelated third party. The real conversation—and all of the media coverage—should be about the unspoken assumptions and enduring racial prejudices that continually resurface throughout our nation. Simply put, the focus on HBLSA is misplaced.

Harvard BLSA recognizes the opportunity - After learning of this disappointing email and before this incident ever went viral, the outgoing and incoming HBLSA Presidents immediately sent an email to our members calling for a “well thought-out and strategic” response. We began brainstorming and soliciting ideas from our members to determine the best way to seize this opportunity. We called for strategies that would promote constructive dialogue and meaningful solutions, not those that would merely serve to further inflame racial prejudices. Moreover, we foresaw that sensationalized blogging would be reactive and counterproductive.

Harvard BLSA is moving forward - What is needed in this hour is a well-developed and effective course of action. After all, true advocacy is not a rash, knee-jerk, or emotionally charged response. Words are incredibly powerful. And as future attorneys, we realize that our words are our stock in trade. They can be used as a weapon to divide and tear down, or they can be used as a tool to unite and restore. HBLSA has chosen the latter approach. In so doing, HBLSA will continue to be a voice against injustice on our campus and in our community.