

[Home](#) [GO](#)

Washington University in St. Louis | Law School | Anheuser-Busch Hall | One Brookings Drive | St. Louis, Missouri 63130 | 314.935.6400

Norwood to Receive National Humanitarian Award



Professor Kimberly Norwood has been selected to receive the National Bar Association's (NBA'S) Humanitarian Award, as well as two other prestigious awards locally, in large part due to a high-school-to-law-school pipeline/mentoring program she created, pairing law students with inner-city high school students. Norwood will receive the award in August at the NBA's annual convention in San Diego.

The NBA's Humanitarian Award is given to someone who has "dedicated time, career and/or money to improve the community, whether it be in education, community services, social services, health services, or political activism." The recipient is also someone who "empowers others to improve their situation or condition."

In 2007, Norwood created a high-school-to-law-school pipeline program for disadvantaged youths of color, which is designed to create interest among high school students in education and in the law. The program is a service learning component of her *Race, Education, & the Law* course for law students, who research and write about public education in America and its impact on minority races, ethnicities, cultures, and economically depressed populations.



While serving as mentors for students at Soldan International High School, the law students also are exposed to the realities facing poor urban youths. The course is designed to challenge the law students to use their legal and advocacy skills to

change the educational structure contributing to the academic demise of such youths. As part of the program, the law students and high school students pair up with local attorneys to create hypothetical law firms. The firms focus on a mock case in which an illiterate high school graduate sues his former school and district for failure to educate him. Half of the firms represent the high school student, and the other half represent the school district. Much of the semester is spent gathering facts, exploring case theory and strategy, and preparing for a hearing on a defense's motion for summary judgment. At the end of the program, the high school students visit the St. Louis Circuit Court and argue their respective positions on the motion before actual judges. Additionally, the law students work with the high school students on study habits and ACT/SAT preparation strategies.

Recently, the Rev. Jesse Jackson, Sr. met with Norwood to learn about the program and to discuss the possibility of his transforming her model into one that could be used in churches and community centers throughout Chicago. Additionally, Norwood, her law students, and several lawyers conducted smaller law enrichment workshops at Imagine College Prep High School, a charter school in St. Louis. Norwood and one of her colleagues, Professor Katherine Goldwasser, are currently preparing to launch another pipeline project at Northwest Law Academy, a public school in the city of St. Louis.

Among her other work in the St. Louis community, Norwood teaches an all-day workshop, using primary sources, for public school teachers, through a grant provided by the U.S. Department of Education's Teaching American History Program, titled "The Struggle for Education in Black America: From Slavery Through the Reconstruction." She and several Washington University law alumni also supervise a mentoring program for interested black law students.

In addition to her core courses in *Torts* and *Products Liability*, and seminars in *Stereotypes & Bias in the Courtroom* and *Race, Education & the Law*, Norwood occasionally teaches in the Civil Justice Clinic, working on behalf of domestic violence victims. She also oversees public interest externships for law students working on human rights issues in Ghana and Kenya. Her recent writings have focused on black identity matters and on the academic plight of urban youth. Her latest article, "Adult Complicity in the Mis-Education of the Black Male High School Athlete and Societal Failures to Remedy His Plight," will appear in volume 34 of the *Thurgood Marshall Law Journal* this spring.

Norwood received her J.D. from the University of Missouri, where she became the first black student to be accepted on the *Missouri Law Review*. She clerked for U.S. District Judge Clifford Scott Green, and later practiced in the litigation department at Bryan Cave LLP in St. Louis. In 1990, she joined the Washington University Law faculty. She also currently serves as a professor of African and African American Studies.

Other awards Norwood will receive this year are:

- The Mound City Bar Association and The Mound City Bar Foundation's **2009 Scovel Richardson Community Service Award**, which recognizes "individuals who are making a difference in the community and upholding the Mound City Bar's mission statement. The award will be presented in June at the annual Scovel Richardson Scholarship Dinner in St. Louis.
- The St. Louis Daily Record/Missouri Lawyers Media's **Women's Justice Award** in the category of **Legal Scholar** on April 16. The justice awards recognize women who have "demonstrated leadership, integrity, service, sacrifice, and accomplishment in improving the quality of justice and exemplifying the highest ideals of the legal profession." The Legal Scholar Award specifically honors "women faculty members or administrators at area law schools who fulfill these ideals through their own work with the justice system, through their research or scholarship, or through teaching and inspiring others."

Also at the St. Louis Daily Record/Missouri Lawyers Media's **Women's Justice Awards** ceremony, second-year law student **Melissa Lin** will be honored in the category of **Leaders of Tomorrow**. The award is given to women law students who "demonstrate leadership, professionalism, and a passion for making a difference in the justice system or the legal profession."



News

- News and Headlines Home
- Current News and Headlines
- Events
- Faculty in the News
- Magazine and SideBAR
- For News Media
- University Calendar
- University News
- St. Louis News
- Video Collections
- News Archive
 - 2007-2008
 - 2006-2007

Contact Information

Ann Nicholson
Email: anicholson@wustl.edu
Phone: 314.935.6430

PLANTING SEEDS: U

Professor Kimberly Norwood founded a program in St. Louis to introduce high school students to law, and to encourage them to embrace academic

SUCCESS. BY JUDY H. WATTS

"From a distance, some believe youth in our inner cities just want to hang out, get high, and get in trouble. And many are quick to decide that, 'Well, that's how they are; that's what they want for themselves,'" says Kimberly Jade Norwood, professor of law and of African and African American studies in Arts & Sciences. While Norwood is referring to popular assumptions about poor, black people born in the United States, her observations also are broadly applicable to underprivileged urban members of other races and ethnic groups. In her research and teaching, she focuses on these groups and the educational disparities they encounter. At a deep level, her work is about the society the U.S. legal system seeks to govern; how stereotypes on all sides affect decisions at every conceivable level and play out in lawsuits; and "how the law can help create systems that will improve people's lives and eventually change negative attitudes."

5: Using the Law to Help Young People Grow



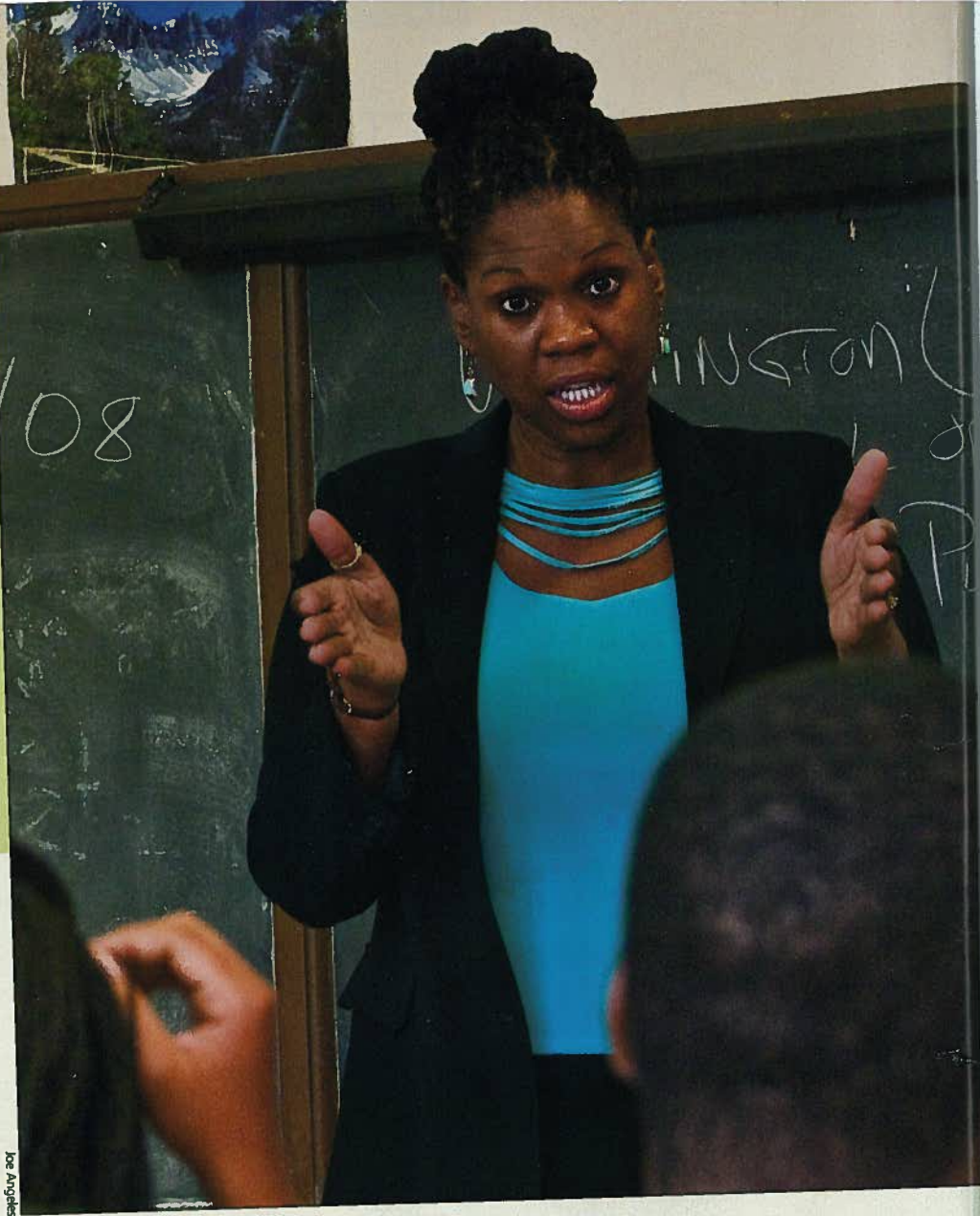
Professor Kimberly Norwood engages the community in multiple ways. In the law school's Civil Justice Clinic, for example, she advises students who help women and children of domestic violence. (Photograph by Joe Angeles)

"Children in these seriously disadvantaged communities seldom know of anyone from the neighborhood who has taken an educational path to success," Norwood says.

Books, documentary films, and countless articles describe black students at inner-city schools—living in poverty, danger, and defeat yet somehow expected to succeed in institutions with appalling facilities and demoralizing, crumbling infrastructures. Norwood's own observations include the following:

- "Children in these seriously disadvantaged communities seldom know of anyone from the neighborhood who has taken an educational path to success. Rather, success often means being a rapper, gang banger, or a basketball player."
- "Black youth are sold the myth of the millions to be made playing sports. The myth is that this dream is realistically attainable."
- "The graduation rates for black youth are horrific throughout the country. And for many who do graduate, they are functionally illiterate."
- "There is so much hopelessness. So these young people join gangs to boost their self-esteem and make money with drugs. Why should they go to McDonald's and make under \$7 an hour when they can make a thousand a day? Choosing long-term education is very, very hard."
- "Add to this the layer that if a black student does well in school, he or she is sometimes taunted and shunned for 'acting white.' The pressure 'to be black,' and thus loyal to the race, means doing poorly in school,

Joe Angiles



cutting class, avoiding AP courses, and other destructive behaviors." [Norwood's article, "Blackthink's 'Acting White' Stigma in Education & How It Fosters Academic Paralysis in Black Youth," and others appear at <http://law.wustl.edu/faculty/index.asp?id=303>.]

Harlem roots

The support that once helped Norwood herself explains her conviction that powerful action is needed on behalf of these unrealized lives. While a strong network of family and friends helped save her life ("it was a village thing"), Norwood says even that doesn't entirely explain "how I was able to stay on the right path. Some other force was definitely looking out for me!"

Raised in Harlem in the '60s and '70s "when it was 99 percent black," Norwood says: "Heroin was big. I had to step over people lying on the sidewalks."

Her parents divorced when she was 2. Because her mother worked two jobs, her grandmother often took

Professor Norwood speaks with students at Soldan International High School. Here, she created a high-school-to-law-school pipeline for disadvantaged youth of color. Her course, "Race, Education, & the Law," matches University student-mentors and professional lawyers with the high school students to interest them in education and the law.

care of her and her cousins—and talked constantly about their staying in school.

Norwood always performed well, academically, in school and can almost pinpoint the moment she chose a career in law: "When I was in elementary school, I think maybe 6th grade, I met a black lawyer for the first time," Norwood says. "She was so tall, smart, and beautiful, and that planted a seed."

Growing an interest in law

After ignoring a college counselor's verdict that in spite of top grades, her low LSAT scores meant that she would never be accepted into a "real" law school, Norwood went on to attend the University of Missouri law school. She also became the first black student to be accepted on the *Missouri Law Review*, the school's prestigious law journal. After graduation, she clerked for U.S. District Judge Clifford Scott Green. She later joined the firm of Bryan Cave, LLP, in St. Louis and in 1990, while pregnant with her first of four children, joined the Washington University School of Law faculty.

Perhaps the capstone of her many contributions (see sidebar at right for examples) is a course she created as part of a high-school-to-law-school pipeline for disadvantaged youth of color. Her course "Race, Education, & the Law" has a tall order. It is designed to interest high school students in education and in the law, and to help them develop close mentoring relationships with wonderful role models. It offers law students something as well. It is designed to get them thinking about the realities poor urban youth grapple with daily. The course also aspires to interest them in changing the educational structure currently contributing to the academic demise of these students and to value mentoring.

Soldan International High School, a magnet school in the City of St. Louis, was the 2007 test case for the new course. In the first half of the semester, the WU law students researched and wrote about public education in America and its impact on minority races, ethnicities, cultures, and economically depressed populations. They also formed mentoring relationships with the Soldan students and conducted various workshops on the necessary steps from high school through law school. Several attorneys conducted workshops with the Soldan students as well. (Her husband, Ronald Norwood, was one).

By mid-semester, Norwood divided the lawyers, law students, and Soldan students into hypothetical law firms, each comprising the following: a lawyer (who serves as senior partner in the firm), several law students (acting as senior associates in the firm and the prime weekly teachers of the Soldan students), and three or four Soldan students (as new associates).

The firm worked on a case in which an illiterate high school graduate sues his former school and district for failure to educate. Three mock firms represented the graduate; three the school district. After the students sorted through myriad issues and developed their positions, they spent a day touring the St. Louis Civil Courts, sat in on actual court proceedings, met with judges, and then argued the merits of the case before Judge David Mason.

Says Linda J. Riekes, development officer for the Saint Louis Public Schools: "Kim's enthusiasm, organization, dedication, and ability to connect with students were incredible, and the Washington University law students were wonderful mentors! Soldan students truly benefited from the experience."

For the academic year 2008–09, the pipeline program at Soldan expanded to two classes. In addition, Norwood, her law students, and several lawyers started a smaller project at Imagine College Prep High School, a charter school in the city.

"My hope is that this project will eventually become part of an education law clinic," Norwood says.

Sometimes Norwood is asked about the tens of thousands of desperate students who aren't being reached. She believes change multiplies. "I was saved by people who rejected that defeatist theory. Because I was saved, I try to save others," she says. "We keep forgetting that we are all in this boat together. We can't take a cynical attitude or we'll all drown. So, we need to, and must, help each other, one 'starfish' at a time." ☐

Judy H. Watts is a freelance writer living in St. Louis and a former editor of this magazine.

Educating, Giving Back, Empowering

In addition to her high school pipeline program (see article) and her traditional courses, Professor Kimberly Norwood teaches other courses not historically offered. These equip law students with specific skills and empower clients and community members so that legal recourse becomes less necessary.

Civil Justice Clinic Students interview clients—primarily indigent women and their children who are victims of family violence—gather evidence, argue in court, and counsel clients about safety plans, safe housing, and survival.

Externship program in Accra, Ghana One of five Washington University law school programs in Africa, the Ghana program has, for three summers, supported students who help struggling people protect themselves from scourges, such as human trafficking, and improve their living and working conditions.

Workshop for public school teachers in St. Louis Through a grant provided by the U.S. Department of Education's Teaching American History Program, Norwood participates in a multidisciplinary effort at Washington U. by teaching a workshop to Saint Louis Public School teachers. The workshop is titled "The Struggle for Education in Black America: From Slavery Through the Reconstruction."