

Q&A with UCLA Law Women LEAD Board Members Tanya Greene '09 and Adwoa Ankoma '20 in celebration of Women's History Month.

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Tanya Greene '09
Partner, McGuireWoods

What are your intersectional identities?

My mom is white and my dad is Black, so although I am of mixed race, I primarily identify as Black. I grew up in the inner city, in South Central Los Angeles, under fairly poor socio-economic circumstances. As I reflect on my childhood, I didn't have the experience of seeing my parents go to work, nor did they set expectations for me to excel academically. But the good that came out of my upbringing in an environment with no familial drivers is that it taught me to be self-driven, self-motivated and self-reliant. Growing up, it never occurred to me that I wasn't well-positioned to become a lawyer — I never felt that being Black, or being a woman, or coming from a low socio-economic background was an obstacle. I no longer have the luxury of being oblivious; I must attribute my success in the legal profession to the long list of women who have helped me overcome these obstacles along the way.

When did you know you wanted to be a lawyer?

I knew I wanted to be a lawyer by the time I was 9 years old, and I don't recall ever wanting to be anything else. At that point, my desire to be a lawyer was not driven by anything particularly noble. It was driven purely by the fact that I loved to argue. If my siblings or my classmates were on one side of an issue, I was going to be on the other. I knew that if we all agreed, we would have nothing about which to argue.

But when I looked around at my family and circle of friends —the people I had access to — I realized quickly that I didn't know anyone who was a lawyer. The vision I had for myself was based on lawyers I saw on television. I wasn't aware of the troubling statistics that made it unlikely that I would find a female role model I could look to in carving out a path toward a successful legal career. I was someone who could have easily slipped through the cracks and almost did. And that's the challenge many of us face as first-generation lawyers — you can have all the determination and still lack that critical roadmap to success, the tools and resources that seem to fall into others' laps.

How can we be more inclusive in the legal profession —specifically within women’s groups in the legal profession, especially with respect to those with the most often marginalized identities?

Many women lawyers continue to face challenges as they strive for upward mobility in the legal profession. [NALP released its Diversity Report](#) data earlier this year, showing that women, people of color and women of color made small improvements in representation at the partner level but still only hold 25percent of partner positions. And with equity partnership often being an inroad to firm leadership positions, the numbers continue to be disproportionately white men. Last year, one in five equity partners at firms nationally were women (21.3 percent) and only 8.1 percent were people of color. Despite the numerous diversity initiatives and programs, these numbers have not changed significantly over the past 10 or so years. If we continue at this pace, it could be another couple of centuries before women achieve equality in the top ranks of the legal profession. It is our job to disrupt this troubling paradigm by intentionally connecting with other women in the legal profession. What would my 9-year-old dream of becoming a lawyer have been if not for the women who took an interest in me, and took the time to mentor me and guide me at pivotal moments in my career? At every pivotal moment of my legal career, I can point to an influential and inspirational woman who helped me reach the next milestone.

One of LEAD's initiatives is to recognize and integrate inclusivity as an intentional strategic priority for the organization. Why do you think this is the right moment?

UCLA Law Women LEAD’s organization and mission play a key role in not waiting to build a pipeline, but in intentionally setting out and advancing our own journeys — as women, as people of color, as first-generation lawyers. Whereas in my own journey, I randomly, spontaneously, and perhaps with a degree of dumb luck, managed to find myself in the presence of women who had a genuine interest in bringing me up through the ranks, LEAD represents a deliberate and coordinated effort that connects law students and women in the legal profession, making it possible for us all to thrive individually and, at the same time, support each other’s advancement. Dumb luck and unbelievably fortunate circumstances should not be the deciding factors for why some women advance and others do not.

No matter where you are on your journey, I think it is always the right moment to be a deliberate connector. Be that law student who connects your fellow classmates with the lawyers in your network. Be that woman lawyer who connects a law school student or another female attorney with your firm, corporation or government agency. Be that female judge who connects other female students and lawyers to other judges in your courthouse. And as you continue along your journey, connect yourself to your fellow LEAD members, so that as a group we continue to support you and connect you when the time and opportunity arises.



Adwoa Ankoma '20
Legal Fellow, Wikimedia Foundation

What are your intersectional identities?

I am a Cis Heterosexual Black African woman. I was born in South Africa to a Ghanaian father and a South African Mother on Pan African ideologies. I was raised in Johannesburg in a family of entrepreneurs and travellers who encouraged the pursuit of knowledge and education, and a dedication to the empowerment of the community, above all else. I do not think that there was ever a time I did not know I was a Black South African. Traditional cultural values, and the upliftment of a decolonized, progressive and united Africa were ingrained in me from the very beginning. In South Africa, our national Anthem is an extension of a Pan African anthem composed by Enoch Sontonga - Nkosi Sikele iAfrika (God Bless Africa) - and for me, as was the case for most children of my generation, it was the first song I was taught to sing. So an African identity has always anchored in me, and I grew into the rest.

When did you know you wanted to be a lawyer?

I love learning. I have always wanted to be a lawyer, particularly policy leaning. I love debating and arguing political views was definitely a constant feature of all family gatherings and dinner table conversations. Everyone, young and old, was encouraged to have an informed opinion on a wide range of interests. I love the law because it allows you to potentially explore a wide range of interests. I have also always been taught to pursue social and economic justice. The South African Constitution and judicial decisions are quite progressive, so the legal profession, at least in an academic setting, tends to be a wide net for do-gooders and people who see the world as it could be.

How can we be more inclusive in the legal profession - Do you see any blind spots in how we currently approach inclusiveness within women's groups in the legal profession?

I think that we need to acknowledge our differences more. You know what they say - if you can't see colour, you can't see patterns of oppression. I think that the legal profession needs to recognize that it exists in a society that was segregated, not too long ago, and be comfortable with the fact that that societal segregation would be mirrored in the profession. So if the conversation was just normalized, if management was curious about the differences that inform you lived experience, and therefore your work life experience, then that space would be more inclusive, because it actually sees you. You can't be colourblind and see people of colour. It's the same with all the other aspects that colour our lived experiences – if you don't see all the colours in the rainbow flag, then how will you be able to see the people who live those colours? How will you be able to utilise their strengths, and respond to their needs?

Is there a specific Black woman from history who inspires you?

There are so many, it is hard to choose. In South Africa, Charlotte Maxeke. Charlotte Maxeke was a South African activist for womens rights and religious leader who was the first Black South African woman to obtain a university degree, as well as the first Black African woman to obtain a degree from America. In the United States, particularly because she just passed on, Cicely Tyson. She was such a

vanguard in film and television and was very intentional about creating empowered representation of Black women in entertainment.

If you could invite any three individuals, live or historical, for dinner, who would they be and why?

I'm really obsessed with U.S. politics right now. I would love to have a conversation with Congresswoman Stacey Plaskett. I ended up doing a deep dive on her after the impeachment trial. And Dr. Bernice King because she really preaches love as the answer. And Yvette Flunder, a senior pastor and activist whom I just learned about through the documentary *The Black Church*.