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The Black American Law Student Association

by Barbara Solomon

The Black American Law Student Association (BALSA) is a national organization of black law students, which was started at New York University Law School in 1967. Its parent organization is the National Bar Association, a legal organization of black fraternities.

A BALSA chapter was founded at the University of Baltimore in September, 1975, by Reginald Washington. Currently a fourth year evening student, Reggie is serving as the 1976-77 president of the local chapter, as well as having the distinction of being the BALSA treasurer at the national level. The remaining BALSA officers for this year include Joyce Eaton, first vice-president; James Wilson, second vice-president; Randall Carroll, treasurer; and Washington Green, parliamentarian.

The aims and goals of BALSA nationally are as follows: (1) To articulate and promote the professional needs and goals of the black American law student, hopefully combating a feeling among some blacks that they either cannot or should not enter the legal system; (2) To foster and encourage professional competency, as many blacks have little if any faith in the legal system and often feel that black lawyers are not as competent as white lawyers; (3) To focus upon the role of the black attorney within the American legal structure and to promote the profession as a whole; (4) To instill in the black attorney and in the black law student a greater awareness of, and commitment to, the needs of blacks, thus focussing on the belief that the black lawyer owes some duty and responsibility to the black community; (5) To influence American law schools and legal

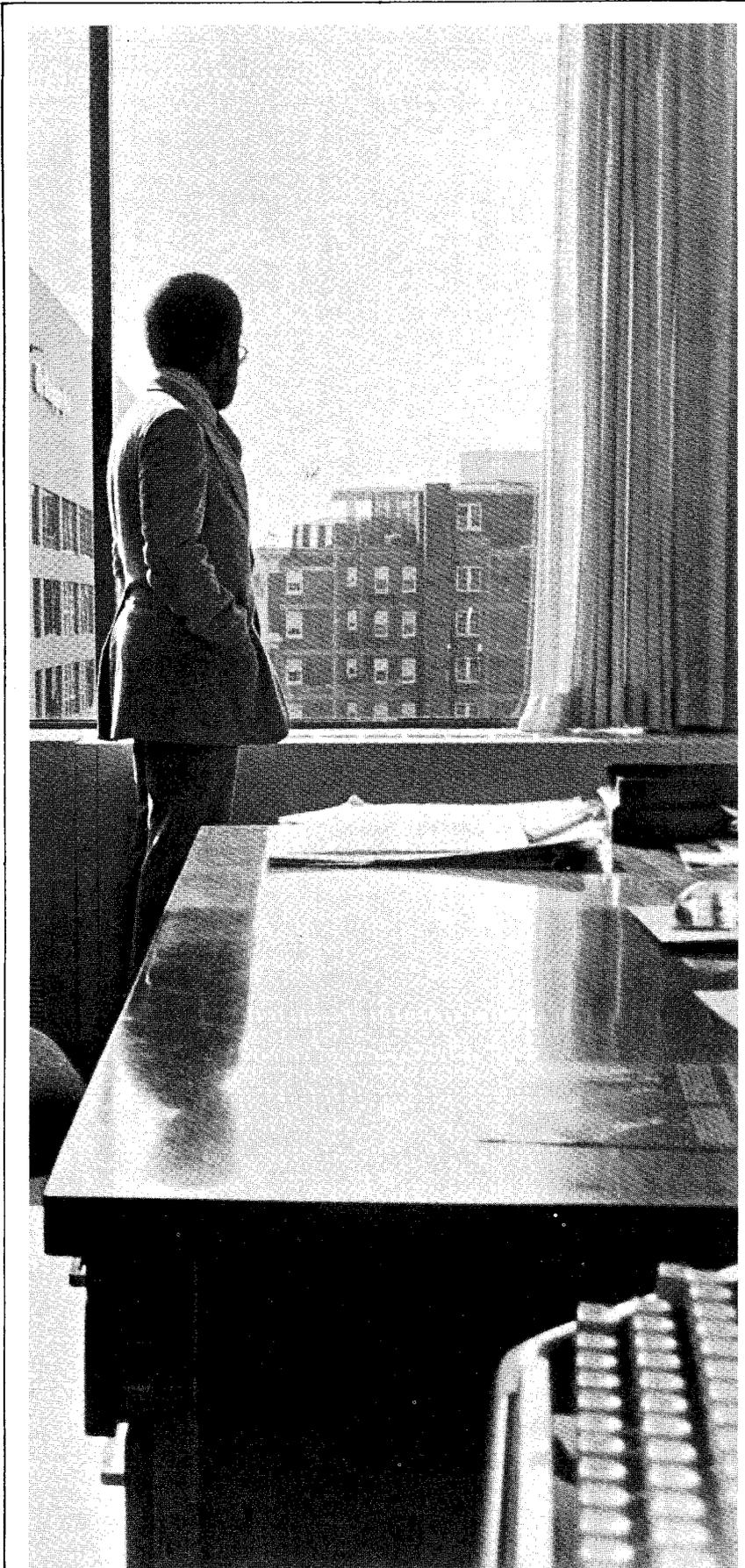
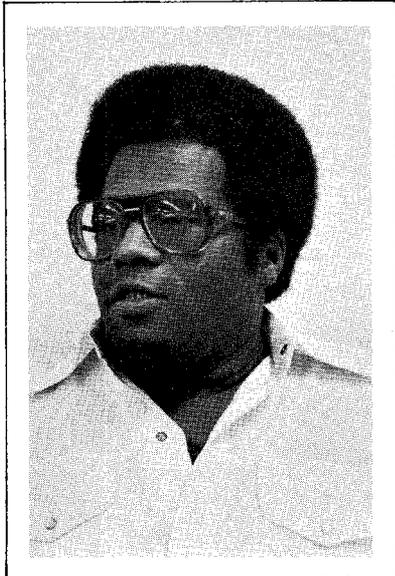


photo by Chris Michael



Reginald Washington

fraternities and associations to use their expertise and prestige to make the legal system more responsive to the needs of blacks. Since at the present time, only a small percentage of attorneys are black, this includes more active recruiting of black law school applicants and more political pressure to establish a priority of admitting blacks to law school.

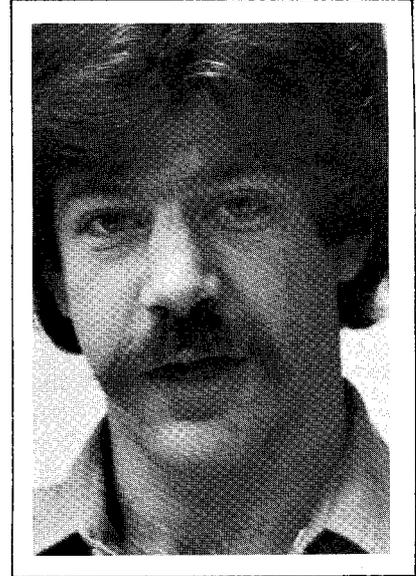
The Black American Law Student Association supports a quota system for applicants to law school, as long as all applicants admitted under such a program possess at least the minimum qualifications required for admittance. In other words, if the minimum grade point average required for an incoming student in a given law school is a 3.2, a black or other minority applicant with a 3.2 or higher average should be given priority over white applicants, even though the white applicant's grade point average may be higher. This policy recognizes that certain priorities must be established, but that applicants granted such a priority must have the proper qualifications, since incompetence in law school presents a bad reflection of black law students and the profession as a whole.

During 1975-76, the local BALSAs chapter had a membership of thirty-six. It is anticipated that membership this year may reach fifty. BALSAs is not a part of the Student Bar Association at the University of Baltimore. As Reggie Washington stated in a recent interview,

BALSAs represents a special interest and therefore should not be under the control or dominance of another organization. The members of BALSAs have different primary concerns, problems and priorities from the majority of the members of the predominantly white SBA. Thus it may be somewhat impractical and illusory to expect the SBA to work with as much vehemence and concern in furthering these solutions as could be expected of an organization such as the Black American Law Student Association. While this is the case, BALSAs will probably have to receive funding from the SBA since no other financial backing has been made available to it. Although BALSAs is a separate and distinct Bar Association, it is also a desire of its president that all members carry a dual membership in BALSAs and the SBA. This will hopefully aid in bringing about a better and more wholesome relationship between the two organizations.

According to Reggie Washington, the University of Baltimore chapter of BALSAs hopes to gain a greater degree of visibility, to promote further cooperation with the SBA, and to institute a race-relations program at the school. For the current school year, BALSAs has planned a series of events and activities to facilitate minority enrollment, as well as academic excellence. Additionally, the chapter hopes to initiate cooperative programming with the BALSAs chapter at the University of Maryland School of Law.

The Black American Law Students Association has enjoyed a good relationship with the law school and university administrations, and fortunately it has not encountered the problems of racism which some other chapters have experienced. BALSAs considers its most important goal for this year to be working within the environment of the University of Baltimore in such a manner as to improve the level of interaction among black and white law students.



John M. Crabbs

“Legal Summer Camp”: Summer School in England

by John M. Crabbs

During the past summer, John Crabbs, a second year day student at the University of Baltimore School of Law, participated in the William and Mary “Summer School of Law in England”. This program is a cooperative effort between William and Mary and the University of Exeter. For the cost of \$790.00, which includes room and board and tuition, the American law student is offered a chance to broaden his legal education by studying law in the country which gave us the basis for our “common law” system.

The University of Exeter is located on the edge of the “ancient” cathedral town of Exeter in the county of Devon, the heart of the English “holiday country”. It is about four hours, by train, from Lon-