

# Advancing Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in the Connecticut Legal Community

By CECIL J. THOMAS AND KAREN DEMEOLA



**A**s we write this, our country continues to wrestle with the legacy and impact of racial injustice. The tragic deaths of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and Breonna Taylor, among so many other Black men and women, have awakened a broader consciousness, started or continued difficult conversations, and invited us to understand and address the manifestations of racial injustice in our society. These events have also added a greater sense of urgency to our profession's diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts. Lawyers have always stood on the front lines of efforts to obtain true justice and equality before the law. For the last several decades, lawyers have also worked tirelessly to address our own profession's struggles with achieving true diversity, equity, and inclusion. While we have made significant progress, we also have much to do.

Necessary change will necessarily take time, support, and sustained effort. This article marks the launch of a new recur-

ring column in *CT Lawyer* magazine focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion in the Connecticut legal community. In this introduction, we hope to share some of our vision for this column with you.

should be a familiar one. Our profession pursues ideals such as truth, equality, and justice. As with any ideal, these words mean different things today than they did five, ten, 50, or 244 years ago. The pursuit

**“Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.”**

—The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.  
“Letter from Birmingham Jail” April 16, 1963

Any successful diversity, equity, and inclusion effort must be an ongoing one; a sustained and permanent effort to advance an essential and core value. This is true on every level: in our individual personal and professional efforts, as well as those undertaken by our organizations and the profession as a whole. This type of effort

of truth, equality, and justice are professional core values. Diversity, equity, and inclusion are the same: ideals we pursue tirelessly, with the understanding that our commitment is to the journey.

The Connecticut Bar Association was formed in 1875 with 58 founding mem-

bers.<sup>1</sup> This original group did not include women, people of color, or many other diverse perspectives and identities that were not yet admitted or acknowledged within the privileged ranks of the profession at that time. Attorney Edwin Archer Randolph, the first Black attorney in Connecticut, was admitted five years later in 1880.<sup>2</sup> Attorney Mary Hall, the first woman to be admitted to the Connecticut bar, was admitted seven years later in July of 1882.<sup>3</sup>

The Connecticut Bar Association has focused more significantly on diversity and inclusion in recent years. The CBA implemented the affinity bar delegate certification process, in an effort to diversify its House of Delegates, in 2012. The CBA enacted its first Diversity and Inclusion Policy in 2015,<sup>4</sup> and its first Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan<sup>5</sup> in 2016. The Connecticut Legal Community's Diversity and Inclusion Pledge and Plan<sup>6</sup> was also launched in 2016, and now features close to 40 signatory organizations. The CBA has made progress in the diverse identities represented within our leadership, in the diversity of our many sections and committees, in the policies we have adopted, in the sustained efforts of our Diversity and Inclusion Committee, and in the many diversity and inclusion events and initiatives the CBA sponsors and pro-

duces. While all of this represents positive progress, we cannot declare "mission accomplished" for diversity, equity, and inclusion for the same reason that we cannot do so for our professional and organizational commitment to the pursuit of truth, justice, and equality.

The Connecticut legal profession and our bar association are examples of "an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny." All of us work together to serve and uphold the rule of law. Together we form a tapestry, richer and stronger, more capable of meeting our mission, by the full inclusion of all. We hope that this recurring column will be instructive to those interested in advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion within the Connecticut legal profession in a sustained and strategic fashion. We acknowledge the limitations of our own perspectives, and so will invite others to share their insights as this column develops. Finally, we envision this to be a cumulative presentation, building and evolving over time, towards a fuller and more meaningful understanding of diversity, equity, and inclusion. Of course, we also welcome the opportunity to hear from you, and hope you will share your own reactions, thoughts, and feedback with us at [info@ctbar.org](mailto:info@ctbar.org). ■



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*Attorney Thomas is the co-chair of the CBA's Diversity and Inclusion Committee, having previously served as co-chair of the Committee from 2015 through 2018, including with Attorney DeMeola in 2017. Attorneys Thomas and DeMeola have been instrumental in the development of many of the CBA's diversity and inclusion initiatives, and regularly speak and teach on diversity, equity, and inclusion in the legal profession.*

**NOTES**

1. Victor M. Gordon, "A History of the First One Hundred Years of the Connecticut Bar Association: 1875-1975," 49 *Conn. Bar Journal* 201, 215 (1975)
2. Connecticut Bar Foundation, "History Project on Attorneys of Color Timeline" (2012).
3. ConnecticutHistory.org, "Mary Hall: Connecticut's First Female Attorney" (May 29, 2020)
4. <https://www.ctbar.org/about/diversity-inclusion>
5. [https://www.ctbar.org/docs/default-source/resources/strategic\\_diversity\\_and\\_incl.pdf?sfvrsn=37a9d7cd\\_0](https://www.ctbar.org/docs/default-source/resources/strategic_diversity_and_incl.pdf?sfvrsn=37a9d7cd_0)
6. <https://www.ctbar.org/about/diversity-inclusion/diversity-inclusion-pledge-plan>

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