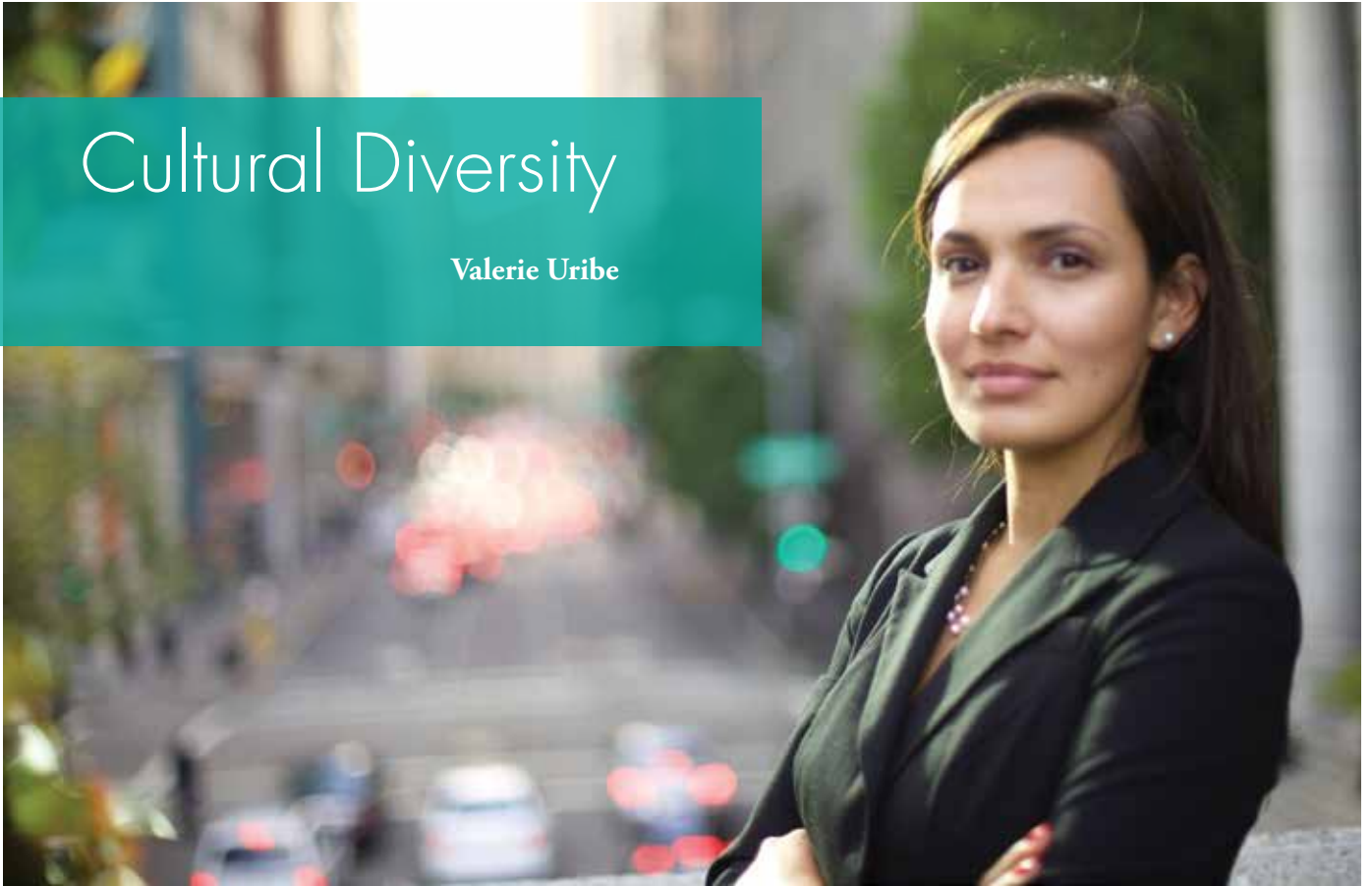


Cultural Diversity

Valerie Uribe



“In diversity there is beauty and there is strength.”

— Maya Angelou

I did not fully embrace my Mexican ethnicity until high school. I distinctly remember having a conversation with my mother at a young age informing her that I wanted to be a white blond girl because, in my adolescent opinion, they were more successful than girls who looked like me. As I strived for success, ironically or not so ironically, my education isolated me from some of my family members. I can distinctly remember one of my family members calling me a coconut. I looked puzzled and asked her what she meant. She said, “You’re brown on the outside, but white on the inside.” These are experiences that I have never forgotten and that have stayed with me for years.

It was not until high school that I started to feel more comfortable in my own skin, in large part because of a shift in pop culture in the late 1990s. An increased number of Latin music artists and actors became mainstream, and all of a sudden it seemed being of Latin descent was “cool and exotic.” Diversity felt more celebrated than it had when I was younger.

Nevertheless, during college I never thought law school was a place where someone like me belonged. My former high school teacher’s husband was a lawyer and needed some help in his law office. I started working for him my first year of college, and at some point I knew I wanted to

practice law. However, I did not know where to start. No one in my family had ever attended graduate school, let alone law school. I was fortunate enough to have my high school teacher and her husband mentor and support me.

One of my goals for 2015 is to increase cultural diversity within our membership and at the leadership level. This is something that's important to me on a very personal level. To that end, I spoke with Heather Wong, 2014 Barristers Club vice president; Yolanda Jackson, The Bar Association of San Francisco (BASF) and the Justice & Diversity Center (JDC) executive director; Jareem Gunter, the JDC Diversity Pipeline Programs director; Ryan Sandrock, co-chair of the mentoring committee of BASF's Law Academy; and Michael Rosenberg, teacher at Balboa High School who works with the Law Academy, about efforts Barristers have made to increase diversity and ways we can get more involved.

BASF & JDC'S EFFORTS ON DIVERSITY

Goals and Timetables Report

Every five years, BASF measures the advancement of diverse attorneys in the profession. BASF's 2015 Goals and Timetables Report will show what is occurring in the Bay Area legal community as it pertains to the hiring, retention, and advancement of diverse attorneys, along with best practices for increasing diversity. There are four working groups and Heather Wong from Lief Cabraser Heimann & Bernstein is a cochair of the retention working group. When I asked her how the Goals and Timetables Report helps increase diversity, she said, "This report brings diversity to the forefront of people's mind so that they are aware of the issues and goals."

Additionally, this report sets up a timetable to meet these goals. Then BASF will ask firms to sign on and support

these goals in their hiring and advancement of diverse attorneys. The last time this report was published, Wong was on a committee that conducted interviews with diverse attorneys of color. I asked her what drove her to continue to be involved and she said, "Unfortunately, discrimination still occurs, whether consciously or unconsciously. We are in 2015 and there are many times I am the only female and person of color in the room. The law profession still has a long way to go. We need all lawyers to believe in the importance of diversity and support it. Not just big firms, which we tend to focus on because it is the easiest group to gather data from, but we also need to address diversity among the solos and small law firms as well."

The Goals and Timetables Report is scheduled to be published this summer.

Justice & Diversity Center

The Justice & Diversity Center is committed to increasing diversity in the legal profession, having pipeline initiatives that start as early as middle school up to the bench. Yolanda Jackson says, "It is imperative that our profession reflect the wide array of individuals accessing legal services. Our profession flourishes when different perspectives, experiences, and ideas are shared and encouraged." By giving students access to information and resources, JDC provides the support they need to apply, matriculate, and thrive in this profession. The focus of JDC is all areas of diversity, including minority, LGBT, disabled attorneys, and women.

This month, JDC is launching a 1L-Open Doors job shadowing program with the University of San Francisco. This program is specifically targeting diverse students who do not have a background in the legal profession. It is a three-day program that will occur during their spring break where they will shadow attorneys in different legal environments.

BARRISTERS CLUB REPORT

WHAT ARE BARRISTERS DOING TO HELP INCREASE DIVERSITY?

The Law Academy encourages and increases career opportunities for many underserved and ethnically diverse students. It is a program at Balboa High School in San Francisco whose students learn, among other things, legal concepts, interview techniques, and job skills that prepare them to join the workforce directly out of college. Michael Rosenberg, the Balboa High School teacher who works with the Law Academy, says, “When students see that adults care for them, you see these kids, who have little to no support at home, all of a sudden really buy into what we are doing.”

Ryan Sandrock, a partner at Sidley Austin, used to teach high school in Louisiana, so volunteering with the Law Academy was a natural extension for him. Sandrock says, “These students are already great and we just hope to help them a little bit on their way.” Sandrock has now been involved with the Law Academy for four years. When I asked him what has kept him engaged and involved for all these years, he said, “It is a minimal commitment and yet extremely rewarding. Every time I come back, I feel better about myself, about lawyers, and about the day that is before me.”

WHAT MORE CAN BARRISTERS DO?

Donate

Barristers can donate directly to JDC. There is a minority law student scholarship that is given to diverse 1L and 2L students attending Bay Area schools. The vast majority of scholarships awarded are \$10,000 annually. This past year JDC awarded six scholarships to well deserving, exceptional law students.

Volunteer

There are several ways that Barristers can help:

- **Be a mentor.** You can control how little or how much you want to be involved. You can talk to mentees over the phone or assist them with questions.
- **Teach through the Law Academy.**

To volunteer and to find out about other ways to help, contact Jareem Gunter at jgunter@sfbar.org.

ADELANTE—AKA MOVING FORWARD

One of my main goals for 2015 is to encourage a more diverse group of attorneys to become involved with the Barristers Club. I hope to continue collaborating with the Minority Bar Coalition in unifying our efforts with other diverse bar associations. Let’s keep the momentum going! It is imperative we continue to take steps forward. If you have any ideas, please reach out to me. I want to hear from you.

“Be the change you wish to see in the world.”

— Mahatma Gandhi

Valerie Uribe is the 2015 Barristers Club president. She is a contracts and grants officer at the University of California, San Francisco, and she recently launched her own estate planning practice. Contact her at Valerie.Uribe@gmail.com.