

# The Promise of Lutie A. Lytle: An Introduction to the Tenth Annual Commemorative Lutie A. Lytle Black Women Law Faculty Workshop *Iowa Law Review* Issue

Angela Onwuachi-Willig\*

It is with great pleasure and pride that I offer this introduction and welcome to this special *Iowa Law Review* issue in celebration of the Tenth Annual Commemorative Lutie A. Lytle Black Women Law Faculty Workshop. Named after Lutie A. Lytle, an African American woman who became the first female law professor in the nation (and, likely, in the world) in 1897,<sup>1</sup> the Workshop has afforded diverse law faculty an unparalleled opportunity to prepare for the job market; to develop teaching and leadership skills; to hone scholarly agendas; and to workshop articles, book proposals, and “ideas-in-progress” since its founding at the University of Iowa College of Law in July 2007. The Workshop grew, in part, out of conversations (real and virtual) that I had with other African American black women faculty about the disturbing trend that a couple of Association of American Law Schools (“AALS”) studies revealed about the experiences of faculty of color in legal academia. In particular, those AALS studies exposed a widening tenure gap between majority and minority law professors as compared to the nearly closed gender gap between male and female professors in the legal academy.<sup>2</sup> The data also revealed a decline in the percentages of law faculty of color hired from two

---

\* Chancellor's Professor of Law, University of California, Berkeley School of Law. I give my sincere thanks to all of the women who have worked hard each year to ensure that the Lutie A. Lytle Workshop survives and thrives in legal academia. Special thanks for this Tenth Annual Commemorative Workshop goes to Taja-Nia Henderson, Lolita Buckner Innis, Victoria Sahani, Shaakirah Sanders, Catherine Smith, and Adrien Wing. I also thank Charles and Marion Kierscht, Dean Gail Agrawal, and the University of Iowa Provost's Office for their kind support. Finally, I give special thanks to my husband Jacob Willig-Onwuachi and our three children, Elijah, Bethany, and Solomon for their constant love and support.

1. *Pioneering Facts About Black Women Lawyers and Law Teachers*, in *REBELS IN LAW: VOICES IN HISTORY OF BLACK WOMEN LAWYERS* 277 (J. Clay Smith, Jr. ed. 1998); *See* J. CLAY SMITH, JR., *EMANCIPATION: THE MAKING OF THE BLACK LAWYER 1844-1944*, at 57-58 (1993).

2. Meera E. Deo, *Looking Forward to Diversity in Legal Academia*, 29 *BERKELEY J. GENDER, L. & JUST.* 352, 356-61 (2014).

cohorts in the early 1990s to later cohorts by the end of that decade.<sup>3</sup> Viewed together and in conjunction with anecdotal evidence about the tenure challenges of women faculty of color at law schools across the nation, these studies seemed to suggest that women of color were in an especially precarious position when it came to promotion and tenure.

When I created, organized, and hosted the first Lytle Workshop at the University of Iowa College of Law in July 2007,<sup>4</sup> I never imagined how the Workshop would grow over the years. In 2007, the Workshop began with just 25 black women law faculty and aspiring law faculty. By its tenth birthday in 2016, registration for the Workshop had grown by 100 women, topping out at 125 women. The Workshop also included far more programs and panels than the inaugural conference offered in 2007. Additionally, although I had the foresight to end the Workshop with a planning meeting for a second convening, I only dreamed of the longevity that the Workshop has experienced. The Workshop is now in its 11th year, with its next two conferences and locations settled and, more importantly, with a dedicated army of black women law faculty who are invested in ensuring the Workshop's continued success. Moreover, I never imagined the sheer productivity that would emerge out of the Workshop. As of April 2016, Lytle Workshop participants have published nearly 652 articles, 74 book chapters, and 34 books since its founding. Furthermore, among the Workshop's alumnae are five law school deans and a whole host of associate deans, chaired professors, tenured professors, untenured professors, and aspiring professors, with more and more being added to these ranks each year.

Every summer, and in fact, throughout the entire year, black women law faculty who attend or have attended the Workshop carry on the legacy and spirit of its trailblazing namesake, Lutie A. Lytle. Not only do the women who attend the Workshop produce scholarship and ideas that can and do have an impact on the legal profession, just as Lutie Lytle did, they also regularly exhibit the type of generosity and service that Lutie Lytle always extended to the African American community. They do so by advising and assisting each other in ways that help ensure that each one of them can overcome the challenges that black women routinely face in legal academia, which ultimately allows each faculty member to thrive in the academy. I have no doubt that Lutie Lytle—whom I imagine could not have even conceived of more than ten black women law faculty at one meeting, much less more than 100 black women law faculty at one convening—would be proud of the efforts that Workshop participants make each year to help other black women as part of this now well-established, annual institution in her honor. Certainly, Lutie Lytle would be honored to see how she continues to serve as an important inspiration in the lives of many of today's black women law faculty.

---

3. *Id.*

4. The first Workshop, not yet named after Lutie A. Lytle, was entitled the "Summer Writing Workshop for Black Female Faculty." Memorandum about the Lutie A. Lytle Black Women Law Faculty Writing Workshop (2016), [http://law.uiowa.edu/sites/law.uiowa.edu/files/wysiwyg-uploads/boyd\\_memo\\_on\\_lutie\\_a\\_lytle\\_history.pdf](http://law.uiowa.edu/sites/law.uiowa.edu/files/wysiwyg-uploads/boyd_memo_on_lutie_a_lytle_history.pdf).

Through her life and accomplishments, Lutie Lytle taught us, especially black women, so much about service, community, perseverance, courage, and the power within each one of us.<sup>5</sup> While Lutie Lytle did not give birth to or adopt any children during her lifetime, she has given light and life to many children in the legal academy.<sup>6</sup> Two common refrains among Lytle Workshop participants are “I am Lutie” and “We are Lutie,” and during each Workshop’s opening night, conference attendees have a tradition of introducing themselves not only with their individual names and institutional affiliations, but also with a brief note about how each one of them “is” Lutie. In fact, this ritual of delineating one’s relationship to Lutie often prompts me to recall the poignant words that Professor Patricia Williams wrote in her book *The Alchemy of Race and Rights: Diary of a Law Professor* when she described how her ancestral connection to her great-great grandfather, Austin Miller, a white slaveowner who raped and impregnated her great-great grandmother at the age of 11, enabled her to finish law school.<sup>7</sup> Williams wrote:

In ironic, perverse obeisance to the rationalizations of this bitter ancestral mix, the image of this self-centered molester became the fuel for my survival in the dispossessed limbo of my years at Harvard, the *Bakke* years, when everyone was running around telling black people that they were very happy to have us there but, after all, they did have to lower the standards . . . And it worked. I got through law school, quietly driven by the false idol of white-man-within-me . . .<sup>8</sup>

Just as the memory of Austin Miller helped Williams get through law school, the memory and the incredible life of Lutie Lytle helps each Lutie “lady” find her way through the legal academy. Specifically, they provide inspiration to these faculty as they make their way into and through the legal academy. Only, in this instance, the transformative work of these memories are not a perversion, mired in criminality and violence, but rather a motivating force that is rooted in strength, courage, grace, dedication, and intelligence.

Still, Lutie Lytle teaches us more. Her life has exposed for us the importance of owning and using one’s voice. It has shown us all how the voices of black women matter. Lutie Lytle went to law school because she wanted her voice and that of her people to be heard, and, more importantly, she knew that those voices needed to be heard. She once declared, “I like constitutional law because the anchor of my race is grounded in the constitution, and whenever our privileges are taken away from us . . . we must point to the

---

5. For a biography of Lutie Lytle see generally Taja-Nia Y. Henderson, “*I Shall Talk to My Own People*”: *The Intersectional Life and Times of Lutie A. Lytle*, 102 IOWA L. REV. 1983 (2017).

6. See Kan. Historical Soc’y, *Lutie Lytle*, KANSAPEDIA, <http://www.kshs.org/kansapedia/lutie-lytle/12136> (last visited May 2, 2017).

7. PATRICIA J. WILLIAMS, *THE ALCHEMY OF RACE AND RIGHTS: DIARY OF A LAW PROFESSOR* 155 (1991).

8. *Id.*

[C]onstitution as the Christian does to his Bible.”<sup>9</sup> She also later proclaimed:

I shall talk to my own people, and make a sincere and earnest effort to improve their condition as citizens. I shall talk to white people and appeal to them for fair play to my race. I am not a radical in anything [though to my mind, she was], nor do I intend to be. I believe in efficacy of reason to bring about the best results.<sup>10</sup>

Like Lutie’s voice, the voices of black women law faculty matter within both the academic and larger worlds in which they live and work. Black women law faculty’s voices matter as teachers through the ways they bring new perspectives to the classroom and create different angles from which students can and do read and interpret cases. Black women law faculty’s voices matter as colleagues in how they help to educate fellow faculty members on a wide variety of issues that affect their institutions and their missions. And, black women law faculty’s voices matter as scholars, as they write, research, and explore issues that too often are ignored and trivialized in the legal academy, many of which directly affect black women, or as they offer insights on legal problems that have been enriched by the knowledge gained from their experiences as black women. In this special *Iowa Law Review* issue, readers now have a wonderful opportunity to see the fruits of Lutie Lytle’s courage and pioneering efforts through the voices of black women law faculty in ten different articles and essays. These pieces are innovative, intellectually stimulating, insightful, and fully in the spirit of Lutie Lytle. Enjoy.

---

9. Noreen Connolly, *Attorney Lutie A. Lytle: Options and Obstacles of a Legal Pioneer*, 1999 NEB. LAW. 6, 11.

10. *Id.*