

Through the Gale- Why this Podcast?

[00:00:00] **Olati** I'm all Olatunde Johnson. I'm a professor at Columbia Law School, and this is our first episode of Through the Gale. It's a podcast about lawyers in the struggle for multiracial democracy. What we thought we'd do in this first episode is just introduce you to us and to the ideas that motivated us to do this podcast. So I wanted to start with Marica and Sneha, who have been with us from the start on this. You want to introduce yourselves?

[00:00:40] **Sneha** I can start. Hi to our listeners. My name is Sneha Pandya. I am the class of 2021, graduate of Columbia Law School and currently working on the Senate Banking and Housing Committee.

[00:00:53] **Olati** Thank you. Marica.

[00:00:55] **Marica** My name is Marica Wright. I am a 3L at Columbia Law School. I am so excited to be a part of this project and to be able to have tackled all these subjects that we'll dig into. But I'm grateful for the opportunity to really have this conversation.

[00:01:18] **Olati** Wonderful. And then we'll turn to Dante.

[00:01:22] **Dante** Yeah. Hey, everyone. My name is Dante Violette, and I am a third year law student at Columbia. And just echoing what everybody said, just excited to be here. You know, I was kind of a late addition, but when I saw the podcast, I was like, I have to be a part of this. I saw the question of what it means to be a lawyer in this moment. And I tried to like think to myself, what is this moment? And the more I became a part of the podcasts, the more I kind of like tried to conceptualize what it meant to me. And I was just trying to figure out what's happening, what is happening? And I wanted to critique my understanding of the law and my role in it. And I feel like this podcast kind of gets to what do we do now and how do we get that multiracial democracy?

[00:02:09] **Olati** Thank you for that, Dante. Marica and Sneha, you were there from the start and I wondered if you could say a bit, either of you about what generated the podcast, what brought you to it, and what you think about its origins.

[00:02:28] **Sneha** Yes, I can start because it started while I was still a student in the fall of 2020, after the summer of 2020, which I think we all look back on as a real turning point in the conversation of the contemporary civil rights movement. Plenty of different institutions decided that they wanted to invest in anti-racism efforts, and Columbia Law School was one of them. So to me, this podcast really originated on two different bases. One of those is that schools and institutions that train lawyers are now trying to invest more so in anti-racism in all of its forms. And part of that is by giving us the space and the funding to create these conversations and seeing if they can emanate outwards in the field and have an impact on how we train the people who will go on to be lawyers and ideally join in the movement. And then I think the second part of this for me in terms of originating this podcast was not only was the summer of 2020 really a strong turning

point for those of us who are studying law or lawyers or professionals in the law. I mean, we're living through some of the most challenging times any of us will see in our lives. And I think the larger question is just what are we going to do with the training that we have? Who are we going to be and what is this moment looking like and what will the movement look like long term?

[00:03:55] **Marica** And I think that with the work that we're doing, creating this podcast and putting these conversations together, we're really hopefully creating something that can help people deconstruct for themselves how lawyers move and operate. This whole moment and movement, as Sneha put it, I think is really shown how much people who are kind of at the beginning phases of their legal career, have room to think about how they will take up space in their career. And I hope that at least for law students, for me, being kind of at the end of this journey and when we started, I was a 2L kind of in the middle of this and really in a place where I was thinking, "Okay, I know what I'm learning and I know somewhere I'm supposed to fit, but what does that mean after we've had this really groundbreaking eye opening moment?" And so I hope that it really puts students who listen to this in a place to think about those things very actively as they're moving into their career in more of a full form.

[00:05:19] **Olati** It was Columbia's response to the moment of 2020, which I think is inseparable from the pandemic. And it's also the killing of George Floyd and the so-called summer of racial reckoning, the protests. But very specifically, I think that reckoning could only have taken place because there was a pandemic. And one of the things I do credit the institution for is saying that we're not just going to have a single response that's top down. We're going to create the mechanism for people to express what that response is looking like, and we're going to create it together. But the other thing that was a pivotal moment happened in 2021, and that was the insurrection or the attempted insurrection or however we want to describe it of January 6th, 2021. It was disheartening, frightening, wrenching and eye opening moment in all the ways that I think we all know. It really made us think about the role of lawyers. I mean, lawyers were participants in different ways. Our Constitution in some ways was implicated because it made me think about the frailty of our regimes. If I could turn to you, Dante, and ask, who do you imagine listening to this podcast? Who's your audience?

[00:06:38] **Dante** I feel like law students because I feel like, you know, we're the future of the profession, and so I think our discussions will be really poignant for how we enter the field and how we then impact the field. But then, you know, the more I think about it, I feel like this is really for anybody. I mean, it could be, you know, your mom, your dad, people further in their career.

[00:07:06] **Olati** One of the things I've really valued about the podcast is as a faculty member here is to be in collaboration with you. And all the podcasts were meant to be student driven or students in collaboration with faculty. So building on that, I wanted to turn to Sneha, what do you want listeners to get out of this podcast?

[00:07:27] **Sneha** Something that unifies all of us in this project to figure out what the role of lawyers is in a multiracial democracy is that we're working toward something aspirational. What we're doing is hoping and I really listen to Mariame Kaba in saying that hope is a discipline. It's really something that we need to practice every day and choosing to engage with this question of what our role is in the world that we're building for social engineers, as you said, Professor Johnson, what is the society that we're creating? And I'm hoping that our listeners can take these questions and see where they could get activated in their everyday lives. Whether you're a law student, whether you've never been, you know, interacted with the law, whether you are interested in pursuing this profession, whether you're an organizer critiquing the institutions that we're basically trained to uphold. I really hope that our podcast sparks even more questions about the type of society that we want to create and that we can continue to work towards that because we're all here with that common hope that there's going to be a better tomorrow. And I think we all will have a role to play there.

[00:08:39] **Dante** When January 6th was happening, I was like, man, like, where do I go to? Where do I turn? Where do I go from here? And that really brought up King to me, you know, Dr. Martin Luther King. And King stressed this idea, like the need to guard ourselves from bitterness, and that guarding ourselves from bitterness is an exercise I see that we're doing. And, you know, he also spoke of the opportunity to transfigure both ourselves and an American society. And that is something, you know, as lawyers, it's kind of incumbent on us to at least investigate and grapple with. And so I would hope that whoever our listeners are, they grapple with these issues, but I think especially for law students and people further in their careers, that this is something really, really important to them.

[00:09:32] **Olati** I want to know what you learned making the podcast.

[00:09:35] **Sneha** We have lived a lot of lives in the time that this podcast has been worked on. I mean, it started right in the fall of 2020 and we are taping this right now in late April of 2022. We went through an election season, a transfer of power, if not peaceful, but a transfer nonetheless, an attempted insurrection, a whole pandemic. And I think a lot of the issues that we were thinking about have really been illuminated to me as ones that are ongoing, are constant. I'm thinking specifically of the rise in backlash to critical race theory on all levels. I mean, just since we started this podcast, I don't even think that was a term that was on the average person's mind. And right now, this like, highly nuanced theory that really found a home in the law is being outlawed on the state level in terms of what educators can teach to children and middle schoolers and high schoolers. And I'm just baffled at how much the conversation has shifted even in the time that we've been doing this work. And so I think what we need to rely on is what people have been doing for years, which is working together as a community, organizing. It's pushing for real justice.

[00:11:04] **Marica** As lawyers particularly, we really have very packed careers. This profession as a whole is very busy. There's a lot of work to be done. There's a lot of expectation. There's a lot of desire to want to do the best work for your client or the best

work for whatever team you're a part of, providing that legal insight that we spent the time in law school preparing for. And I think that really it is emblematic of why we have to take time to stop and have these conversations that we're having on this podcast, because we can be sometimes so in the weeds of what our day to day is in this profession, that I think it's more difficult sometimes to step back and say, wait a minute, what am I doing? Not just day to day, but what am I doing in this position, in myself, as a person with the credentials I have, with the network that I have, with the position that I have? What am I doing to make a better society? What am I doing to even understand what is happening in the world and how the law is shaping it?

[00:12:09] **Olati** We're really excited also for you to meet our co-hosts. You'll hear from Alexis Banks. Andres Estévez, Adaeze Eze. And we are also really grateful to our assistant producer, Katelin Walsch, and to Devan Kortan, who put all of these episodes together for us and did incredible editing. So that's our team and we're really excited to present this podcast to you.

[00:12:35] **Olati** I was thinking about what was the hardest part about this podcast and coming up with the title was one of our biggest struggles. But we settled on a line “through the gale” that comes from Ella's Song about Ella Baker, who was a civil rights activist. And she, to me, really epitomizes this idea that you all have been talking about, about hope being a choice, and she did it in a very specific way. It's not a kind of blind hope. It's about really a strategy. And it's a very bottom up strategy. It's a participatory strategy. It's about rendering democracy. And I think it's a great counter to a narrative of despair. So Ella's Song says, “We who believe in freedom cannot rest.” And it says something very specifically the line where “through the gale” is those lines say “To me, young people come first. They have the courage where we fail. If I can just shine a light on as they carry us through the gale.” And so there is a storm. No doubt there is a reckoning. But it is the idea to remember that there's a constant conversation and a reinvention, new energy coming from young people like yourselves is.

[00:14:00] **ELLA'S SONG** To me young people come first. They have the courage where we fail. And if I can shed some light as they carry us through the gale. We who believe in freedom cannot rest. We who believe in freedom cannot rest until it comes