



RUTGERS  
Law School



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Law School

CAMDEN  
217 North Fifth Street Camden, NJ 08102  
Phone: 856-225-6375

NEWARK  
123 Washington Street Newark, NJ 07102  
Phone: 973-353-5561

# MSP 50

Rutgers Law School  
Reflections on the  
Minority Student Program at 50



# The Minority Student Program at Rutgers Law School

**FOUNDED IN 1908, RUTGERS LAW SCHOOL** today comprises two locations—Newark and Camden. With a world-class faculty, a geographic presence in two of the nation's largest legal markets—New York and Philadelphia—a strong tradition of diversity and social impact, and an alumni network of over 20,000, Rutgers Law School has a deep history of service to its host communities, New Jersey, and the world.

The Minority Student Program (MSP) of the Rutgers Law School story began shortly after the 1967 uprisings that shook a number of America cities, including Newark. Recognizing the need for a meaningful response to the immense social and legal challenges of our nation and Newark in particular, the MSP was established and welcomed its first class of 23 black students in the fall of 1968. Since then, the MSP has been instrumental in advancing our commitment to provide access to legal education to those historically under-represented in the legal profession, namely, people who have faced racial and ethnic discrimination, socioeconomic challenges, educational disadvantages, and a lack of resources.

The success of the MSP stems from a multifaceted approach to acclimate and assist participants in learning skills and techniques to be successful in law school and beyond. Starting with a two-week orientation in the summer and continuing with facilitated study groups, networking opportunities, career development workshops, alumni mentoring, and summer internships, the MSP plays a vital role in each student's law school experience. The MSP was an anchor for students who had to navigate law school on their own by providing a connection and sense of family that has endured throughout their careers and personal lives.

The nationally acclaimed and highly successful post-admissions program was expanded in 2016 to the Rutgers Law Camden location, and includes more than 200 students preparing to join the more than 2,500 MSP distinguished alumni in the workplace.

The following reflections offer a window into the experiences of MSP's illustrious graduates. Like so many other Rutgers Law graduates, each has enjoyed a remarkable career—whether in the public or private sector. Each also carries an appreciation for how the inclusive and supportive environment fostered by MSP has shaped his or her professional life. Just as importantly, the MSP alumni have together woven a deeper sense of empathy and social justice into the fabric of the legal profession in NJ and beyond. MSP's first 50 years have been an emphatic affirmation of the value of how diverse perspectives in the classroom can and will continue to change the dialogue and impact the legal profession.



## Guillermo Artiles '12

Associate Counsel  
Office of New Jersey Governor Phil Murphy

A COUPLE OF DAYS BEFORE he left McCarter & English to become an associate counsel in Governor Murphy's office, Guillermo Artiles reflected on a formative experience.

It was his first day or two in the Minority Student Program when Judge Esther Salas—then magistrate judge and now a U.S. District Court judge—spoke to the new class. Like the judge, Artiles was a Union City resident of Cuban descent from a family that had never sent anyone to law school. “I met the woman who

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*“When I found out that Rutgers had the MSP it was sort of a natural calling, almost literally, ‘come back home.’”*

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singlehandedly changed my professional life,” he recalled.

Artiles approached Judge Salas after her remarks and said, “I’d love to work for you.” She laughed and said, “You’ve got to do a few things first, like get a semester under your belt and get good grades.”

From an internship with Judge Salas, he advanced to a clerkship. Artiles would go on to serve as corporate counsel for Greenskies Renewable Energy and work in the Intergovernmental Affairs Group in Governor Chris Christie's office as Governor's Executive Fellow from the Eagleton Institute of Politics. Later

at McCarter & English, his work focused on litigation in federal court and government affairs in Trenton. He is active in the New Jersey and National Hispanic Bar Associations and sits on several nonprofit boards.

He feels strongly that his experiences might have been much more limited, if not for MSP. “That internship opened every subsequent door,” he said. “I can draw an almost straight line from Judge Salas to every opportunity I’ve had since then. I call her my madrina, my godmother.”

He believes MSP's nurturing of law students from nontraditional backgrounds is important for filling a void that needs to be filled—a “great tool that law firms and companies use to deal with lack of diversity and respond to current client demands.”

“The real win is the pressure that Fortune 1000 companies are putting on outside counsel,” he said. “Not just the numbers, not just the smiling face at an interview, but that the numbers will mean something—will they be second chair in the trial, will they draft the summary judgment motion?”

“The law is a contact sport and I mean that from a networking perspective,” he said. “MSP encourages and develops the next generation of diverse lawyers who call New Jersey home— and New York benefits a bit too.”

“There is a massive talent pool at 123 Washington and now in Camden.”



## Jeffrey Hsi '97

Wolf, Greenfield & Sacks, P.C.

THE TITLES SCIENTIST/INVENTOR, entrepreneur, counselor, and attorney only begin to describe the man who continues to live out his favorite Gandhi quote, “Be the change you wish to see in the world.” For this MSP alumnus, law was a second career, and attending Rutgers Law School and taking part in MSP was central to that transformation.

“What resonated was the stature of the school,” said Hsi. For Hsi, the turning point began on day one. “When I arrived, I knew nothing about law and law school; it was foreign to me. As a youth, I never imaged myself here.”

Hsi remembers fondly his experience at MSP. “It’s a family that takes you in and helps you grow. It helps you with the whole milieu of

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*“My MSP experience helped me in my corporate career because of the diversity perspective. It helped me to solve problems and see other perspectives.”*

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being in the law. As a class, we grew together and transitioned.” The experience was not only supportive, it was foundational for all that Hsi would face in law school. “MSP was invaluable to learning the ropes. It provided us with study groups and tutorials, along with mentors to help us navigate through law school.”

Hsi recognizes that he “learned the value of

seeing and understanding a diversity of perspectives,” something that he has carried throughout his life—both personally and professionally. “My MSP experience helped me in my corporate career because of the diversity perspective. It helped me to solve problems and see other perspectives. It has positioned me to both act and be seen as analytical, fair, and trustworthy. Because of that, I ascended through management and helped influence the business culture. I was the first person of color in certain roles, and this helped to open perspectives and provide opportunities for those who were to come.”

When asked why someone should study law today, Hsi was effusive, “I believe that law school is a great training ground that can lead to any career—legal or non-legal. If you have an interest in developing communications, analytical, advocacy and writing skills, you’ll gain them at law school. Don’t focus on what you think you may want to practice; be open to the wide and diverse exposure.”

The MSP 50th anniversary is, “huge, huge... enormous” for Hsi. “I appreciate its history. I was always struck by the founding of MSP—the vision, the foresight; what it must have taken to create such a program. It was monumental. The impact of MSP lawyers in the world today is ‘absolutely amazing.’ The MSP founders’ blueprint achieved so much, yet is as relevant today as ever; thus, we must commit to ensure that the MSP legacy continues unabated.”

## Vincent Warren '93

Executive Director  
Center for Constitutional Rights



VINCENT WARREN CASTS THE Minority Student Program as a game changer—calling it its 50th year, “extraordinary.”

“If my work today is viewed as game changing fifty years from now, it will be in large part because of my MSP experience,” Warren said. “The program was a great entree into a school that had an enviable reputation with regard to public interest work.”

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Public interest work is at Warren’s core. He litigated the University of Michigan’s affirmative action case to the Supreme Court; battled to close the prison at Guantanamo; fought to end the stop-and-frisk policy in New York City; helped to end long-term solitary confinement at Pelican Bay Prison in California; worked diligently to ensure the meaningful right to counsel for members of the Blackfoot Tribe in Montana; and took the helm as executive director at the Center for Constitutional Rights—an organization founded in 1966 by his constitutional law professor, Arthur Kinoy.

“Becoming executive director of the center in 2006—having first served as a summer intern while at Rutgers—was one of the great moments

of my life because of what this position allows me to do for social justice,” Warren said.

In honoring his mentor, Warren now takes great pride in helping to train the next generation of lawyers in what Kinoy referred to as “people’s lawyering”—lawyering where the people and not the systems and organizations are at the center. The civil rights of people had always been Warren’s focus—well before he first set foot in a courtroom.

“My first law appearance in court ever was when I was part of the Constitutional Law Clinic at Rutgers, representing people who had been taken off the voting rolls during the ‘92 presidential election,” Warren said. “That was a proud moment.”

Warren is also proud of the impact MSP has on New Jersey. “Like a lot of states,” he said, “New Jersey has intractable problems that can be solved with smart compassionate legal talent.”

“At Rutgers MSP, a tremendous amount of energy is focused on helping to create the legal capacity to solve New Jersey’s problems,” he said. Warren pointed to a number of ways MSP makes a difference, particularly that many of its graduates have been appointed to serve on state and federal benches. He believes that through the years, MSP graduates have in many ways helped the courts to better understand the “plight of real people.”

“A critical role of MSP is to ensure that diversity of talent gets deployed in meaningful ways throughout the state and the country,” he said.

## Hon. Esther Salas '94

U.S. District Court Judge



FAMILY MEANS A LOT to Judge Salas, including the extended family she felt part of in MSP. As the first in her immediate family to go to law school, she said, “I didn’t know what to expect when I got there.” When she went to see Dean Janice Robinson, she recalled being greeted first by the Dean’s assistant, Elvira, with a smile and a hug, and thinking, “I was going to be okay.”

Soon after starting classes at Rutgers Law School, Judge Salas had a nagging feeling that she just wasn’t up to it. “When I told the Dean I didn’t think I had what it takes to make it in law, she said all the right things at a moment when I needed it most,” she recalls. “During that

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*“They made you feel like, one, you belonged, and, two, they supported you through the ups and downs.”*

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time period, if you said I would become the first Latina U.S. District Court judge in New Jersey I wouldn’t have believed it.”

It turned out Judge Salas did have what it takes.

After serving as an associate at Garces & Grabler, she became an assistant federal public defender. “I didn’t feel a big firm was right for me, and I was encouraged to follow my gut,” said Salas. She then became the first Hispanic mag-

istrate judge for the U.S. District Court in New Jersey in 2006. Nominated by President Obama, Judge Salas was confirmed to her current position in 2011.

The MSP experience was much more than outlines and study guides, Judge Salas said. “It was camaraderie. From the professors to the administrators to your classmates, there was a critical sense that, together, anything is possible. I never felt alone. I always felt accepted for who I was and who I wanted to be. It didn’t matter that I looked the way I looked, talked the way I talked, or came from where I came from, or the astronomical goals I set for myself.”

“They made you feel like, one, you belonged, and, two, they supported you through the ups and downs.”

She bristles at the notion that MSP gives students an unfair advantage, “MSP doesn’t give you the answers on the test. It doesn’t tip the scales. For first generation law students, it gives them a fighting chance. MSP generates excellence.”

Every year, the new MPS class pays a visit to Judge Salas. The students watch court proceedings then chat over pizza about what to expect from law school. It’s something she loves to do. “We owe MSP,” she said. “You just don’t get where you are and forget to leave the door open.”



## Oliver Quinn '75

Senior Counselor, Taft Communications  
Former Assistant Dean & Director, MSP (1977-1981)

OLIVER QUINN'S DECISION to attend Rutgers Law School MSP emanated from a desire to go to a law school that had experience with minority students. Having attended Syracuse University at the time when the experience of students of color could be contentious, Quinn welcomed the introduction to MSP by several Syracuse grads. He found it more than serendipitous that the administration of Newark's first black mayor, Kenneth Gibson, was giving support and practical experience to law school students.

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*"MSP has contributed to Rutgers Law School's very tangible ethos of producing lawyers who have a positive impact in their community and beyond."*

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"My experience in MSP heightened my appreciation for the value of working with others; of being a part of a community; of collaborating," said Quinn. We really contributed to each other's education; that helped me to get more from the academic experience than on my own."

That philosophy carried him throughout his career. "I knew that I could do more through collaboration; it would maximize what I brought to the table," he said. Quinn served as vice president and chief ethics officer for Prudential Financial. His distinguished legal career also includes his time as deputy solicitor at the U.S.

Labor Department; deputy commissioner at N.J. Department of Labor; N.J. administrative law judge; assistant counsel for the U.S. House of Representatives Judiciary Committee; and assistant dean, Rutgers Law School and director of MSP. He has also served on many state and national boards.

Quinn reflected on how MSP provided legal education and employment opportunities: "MSP significantly contributed to diversifying the legal profession, in the public, non-profit, and private sectors. The selection process that would have rejected us was flawed, not the MSP students. We deserved to be there!"

Quinn counts his time as director of MSP as one of his proudest achievements, "I understood what the students were facing; I could relate to their experience. I had a sense of their academic and social needs, and with the support of the faculty and administration, I was able to provide this."

At 50 years, MSP is still needed. "Just take a look at the ranks of general counsels and partners; you continue to see underrepresentation. There is still much work to be done."

"MSP has contributed to Rutgers Law School's very tangible ethos of producing lawyers who have a positive impact in their community and beyond," said Quinn. "MSP graduates have achieved great success throughout New Jersey and the world."



## Jennifer Velez '96

Executive Vice President, Community and Behavioral Health  
RWJBarnabas Health

JENNIFER VELEZ HAS SPENT a lifetime gaining an intimate understanding of the many layers of New Jersey society—from her early days living in a Moonachie trailer park, to improving life for the state's most vulnerable families during her eight years as N.J. Commissioner of Human Services.

The daughter of an immigrant from Ecuador, Velez became the first in her family to go to college.

"I didn't have role models who were lawyers and was intimidated by the prospect of attending

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*"Today it is just as important—I daresay even more important—to ensure that attorneys continue to reflect the communities in which they practice."*

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law school," she recalled. "I wanted a supportive environment, and that's exactly what MSP offered." Velez remembers sitting next to current Passaic County Prosecutor Camelia (Nancy) Valdes in first year contracts class. "If it weren't for Nancy, I would not have made it through." The two remain very close today.

At Rutgers, she not only found kindred spirits, but also a clear focus on how the law can be used to bring about positive change. "I understood that the law is much more dynamic than statutes and published decisions," she said. "Instead, it can be shaped to invoke positive change and address inequities on behalf of

vulnerable people or those without a voice. It is the vehicle to 'do good'."

And Velez has made a career of doing exactly that. Serving in Governor Whitman's Counsel's Office, she helped create NJ FamilyCare, the state's subsidized insurance program for low- and moderate-income families. During her extraordinary run leading the Department of Human Services—spanning two governors of different parties—she helped convince a Republican governor of the merits of Medicaid; a significant accomplishment, given the considerable number of people with substance use disorder that rely on Medicaid.

With responsibility for community and behavioral health at the state's largest healthcare system, Velez uses the empathy and critical thinking skills honed at Rutgers Law School and the MSP to advance equitable policy decisions in the private sector. Over the years, in a journey from economic uncertainty to the corridors of power, she has never lost sight of those core values.

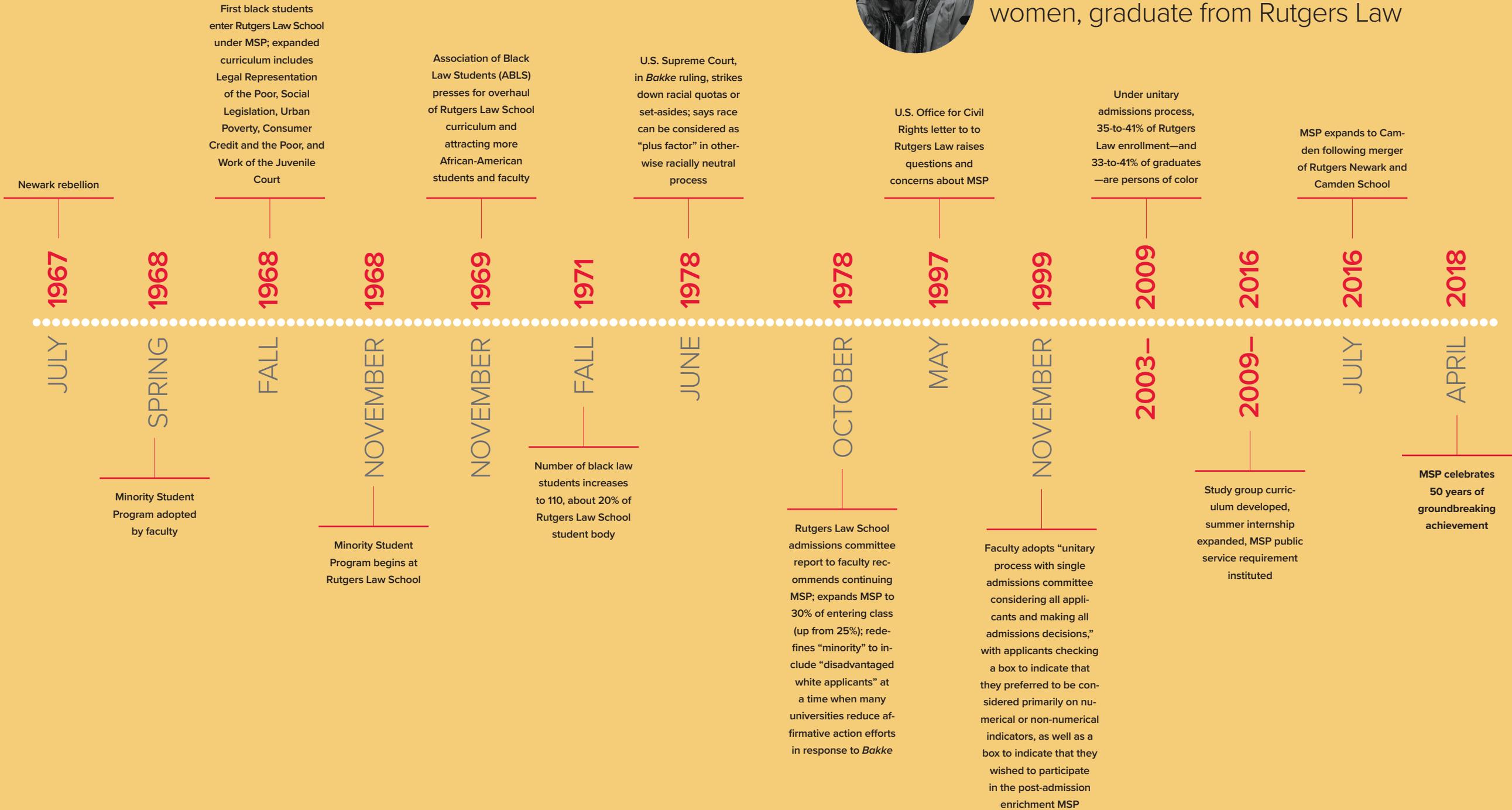
Velez maintains that MSP has been a key to her success, and to strengthening the legal sector in New Jersey: "Today it is just as important—I daresay even more important—to ensure that attorneys continue to reflect the communities in which they practice and ensure that principles of equity and inclusion are paramount. We owe to others no less."

# 50 Years of Rutgers Law School Minority Student Program



1970 to present

3,000 people of color, and a like number of women, graduate from Rutgers Law





## U.S. Sen. Robert Menendez '79

U.S. Senator

FROM HIS EARLY DAYS practicing storefront law in Union City, U.S. Sen. Robert Menendez shares an anecdote describing why the diversity the Minority Student Program fosters is so important, from the top of the legal system to street level.

“I was before a judge with a defendant, who was looking down,” Sen. Menendez recalled. “And the judge yelled at my client and yelled at me and said, ‘Tell your client to look at me when I’m speaking to him.’ And I had to say, ‘Your honor, where he comes from, looking at you in your eye is defiant.’ Now you see a legal profession that is more diverse, you see greater justice

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*“So, for me, the program created a foundation that was both rooted in the law but also rooted in activism that I considered uniquely Rutgers and definitely uniquely MSP.”*

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being offered to a greater cross section of people. So that’s why I think it is incredibly important.”

When he entered Rutgers Law School, the young Menendez was already on the Union City School Board and interested in the practical application of the law he learned at Rutgers. “The diversity of the school gave you not only the context of diversity among the student body but showed you that you could rise to, in this case

a law professor, public advocate, and so on,” he said. “I remember the law as being alive, not an esoteric thing, but a live enterprise by virtue of both the people I was with as students and the professors that I saw and the history that they had.”

Sen. Menendez stressed that the sort of change a law degree promotes can come in many forms. “One of the things that you got through the MSP is how everybody came through some sort of struggle, and the desire to create change—whether that was change to the law, using the law as a tool of social justice, economic change, or change to the political process,” he said. “That was a common currency that was running through the program.”

Asked to sum up the impact of MSP in a word, Sen. Menendez chooses “empowering.”

“It was empowering in terms of someone who grew up poor in a tenement, the first person in his family to go to college and then to go to law school. It was empowering educationally,” he said. “It was empowering in terms of activism, it was empowering in terms of the actual application of the law in clinical programs, and then seeing those skill sets be used in the public arena. So, for me, the program created a foundation that was both rooted in the law but also rooted in activism that I considered uniquely Rutgers and definitely uniquely MSP.”



## Ronald K. Chen '83

Co-Dean and Distinguished Professor of Law  
Rutgers Law School

CO-DEAN RONALD CHEN has travelled an incredible journey—a journey profoundly influenced by the Minority Student Program at Rutgers Law School—and one that continues to unfold.

As a former New Jersey Public Advocate and litigator of civil rights and civil liberties cases for the Rutgers Law School Constitutional Rights Clinic, Dean Chen has applied his legal knowledge at the highest levels. His experience has led him to serve on the ACLU National Board

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*“That is perhaps Rutgers’ greatest gift to me; it empowered me to make a difference—to promote social justice and give voice to the voiceless.”*

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Executive Committee and as general counsel of the ACLU and chair of the New Jersey Supreme Court Advisory Committee on Professional Ethics. He was named New Jersey Law Journal’s 2007 Lawyer of the Year and throughout his career has served as a legal warrior for voters’ rights, affordable housing, utility consumers, eminent domain reform, and deinstitutionalizing people with developmental disabilities.

Thirty-seven years ago, Dean Chen could not have imagined where his journey would lead him, but openly acknowledged MSP’s impact.

“MSP directed my career path in a way that I probably did not understand when I entered Rutgers Law School so many years ago,” he said.

“Initially, I might have thought MSP was just a support program. It’s much more than that. It provides a vision of the law as an instrument of positive social change by which to measure how I use my legal skills for the public good.”

After graduating from Phillips Exeter Academy and Dartmouth College, Dean Chen graduated magna cum laude from Rutgers Law School in 1983, he served as Editor-in-Chief of the Rutgers Law Review, and was awarded the Alumni Senior Prize for greatest promise as a member of the legal profession. For more than 30 years, he has been a member of the school’s faculty and administration.

“There is nothing I love doing more than teaching law students. Teaching is my first love,” he said.

Dean Chen said it was “fate” that brought him and Rutgers together. “Coming to Newark from very admirable but very traditional educational institutions broadened my perspective immeasurably. My classmates, who came from such diverse backgrounds and experiences, were just as much my teachers as members of the faculty.” Dean Chen recognizes that MSP was essential in fostering that diversity in the classroom, in addition to making the legal profession more inclusive. It taught him the need for passionate and skillful advocacy, as well as the difference one person can make: “That is perhaps Rutgers’ greatest gift to me; it empowered me to make a difference—to promote social justice and give voice to the voiceless.”



## David L. Harris '79

Retired Partner  
Lowenstein Sandler LLP

TO DAVID HARRIS, the Rutgers Law School Minority Student Program is as important today as it was when it first began in 1968.

As a student who was admitted to law school through MSP, Harris was best known for being the first minority and first evening student to win the Appellate Moot Court Competition in 1978. This achievement's significance was magnified because it was the same year the U.S. Supreme Court decided the *Univ. of Calif. v. Bakke*, a case challenging affirmative action admissions programs, such as MSP.

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*Rutgers Law School Minority Student Program is as important today as it was when the program first began in 1968.*

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"The Moot Court Competition, however, was not part of my plan," said Harris. "I was a student in the first evening program at Rutgers since 1955, had a full-time job at Brooklyn College, a wife, and a son; I did not think I could handle more." At the urging of two other MSP students, and the threat to MSP by the pending *Bakke* case, he nevertheless threw his hat in the ring. Within weeks of his victory, he joined Lowenstein Sandler, one of the premier law firms in New Jersey, as a summer associate—and never left.

Although Harris' practice as a trial lawyer in complex commercial and intellectual property

cases led to recognition in many publications that identified leading litigators in New Jersey, and he was named by the National Law Journal as one of the State's Top Ten Trial Lawyers in 2000, it is his pro bono work and community service for which he is known best. Among his many pro bono awards, he is most proud of the Fannie Baer Besser Award for Public Service from the Rutgers Law Alumni Association. He served on the Executive Committee for the Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights Under Law and serving as president of ACLU-NJ, and as corporate secretary and counselor for the Blanton-Peale Institute. Closer to home, he is the treasurer for the South Orange-Maplewood Community Coalition on Race, and has been a mentor to numerous students and younger attorneys.

Harris said his commitment to pro bono work and community service is rooted in MSP and the inspiration of Rutgers colleagues, professors and administrators who served as his foundation.

Harris is also one of the most consistent and most significant donors to the MSP Endowment Fund. He was gratified, in 2014 when a new Lowenstein associate approached him to say he too was admitted through MSP, and also won the Moot Court Competition. Then, just two years later, Harris was even more pleased to learn that young lawyer had already made his first financial contribution to Rutgers Law School.

## Camelia M. Valdes '96

Passaic County Prosecutor



WHEN APPOINTED TO THE top law-enforcement position in Passaic County in 2009, Camelia M. Valdes continued to grow her list of firsts: first Latina county prosecutor in the state, first woman prosecutor in Passaic County, and first lead prosecutor of Dominican ancestry in the United States. That list, for which Valdes is extremely proud, adds to being the first in her family to graduate college and the first to attend and complete law school.

When asked if she would be where she is today without MSP, Valdes said, "It is hard for me to say that; I am a fighter. I'd get here. But MSP is so germane to who I am. I was with like-minded people in an experience that gave me a chance to be a part of a community I would not have had."

What drew Valdes to Rutgers Law School and the MSP was, "its demonstrated commitment to

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*"I was supported by individuals passionate about law; and I was thrilled to be a part of a program that birth so many 'glass-shatterers.'"*

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social justice and public service. The law school is such a part of Newark history; I grew up in Newark. And, the fact that it grew out of the 1967 riots, that was something I was immediately drawn to."

For Valdes, MSP was an immediate family, "I was supported by individuals passionate about law; and I was thrilled to be a part of a program that birthed so many "glass-shatterers." Many before me were doing an incredible job for our state, I knew MSP would give me the foundation I needed to be an attorney."

One such "glass-shatterer" was Valdes' classmate and friend, Jennifer Velez, former, and New Jersey's longest-serving, human services commissioner, and current SVP for strategy and planning at Barnabas Health. Valdes recalls, "We agreed that if we survive Dean Chen's class together, we'd come back. We were in this together, and we've remained best friends ever since."

Valdes said New Jersey is a better place because of MSP. "It's about the caliber of the dialogue around what it means to be in public service and social justice," she said. "MSP graduates are so influential—Sen. Menendez, Judge Salas, and so many others. When you think of where MSP grads are in N.J., we really have a seat at the table. We are making an impact on policy and social justice in this state. At MSP we celebrate in each other's success. If one succeeds, we all succeed."

In celebrating the MSP milestone, Valdes proudly claims, "I am an ambassador for MSP to the umpteenth degree! I posted the 50th anniversary on social media with the tag: #NoMeWithoutMSP. The hashtag has caught on!"



## Tamara Britt '09

General Counsel, Manhattan College

TAMARA BRITT HESITATED BEFORE applying to the Minority Student Program. Did she need it? She was in her 30s, had graduate school under her belt, would be following in her dad's footsteps as a second-generation attorney, and was doing fine in "majority" environments.

But a friend told her, "It's a family. It'll change your whole law school experience and you have to be a part of it."

"I did apply, and it's the best thing I ever did," she said.

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*"You want to be successful for MSP, for the people that came before you and the people that are coming after you to show, 'look, this can be done.'"*

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The benefits came quickly, as the pressures of job, family, and attending law school at night took their toll on her first-semester grades. "I felt like all of that work and sacrifice was for nothing," she said. "I felt like I let everybody down." That MSP family got her back on track. "They said, 'look, this does not define who you are, it doesn't define your law school career, and it doesn't define what you can do once you leave here. You need to persist and keep going.' So that's what MSP represented to me: people who lifted you up when you were down." She began to excel in class, and said, "I never looked back."

Britt describes MSP as life-changing, and not

only in the classroom. "Being in MSP has you focused on more than just law school," she said. "It's about the community outside of law school. I was always about service and helping others, and mentoring, but with MSP I saw how mentoring worked and how it is supposed to work and how community is supposed to work. So, my ideas and concepts about what I needed to do moving forward in building that community changed. They got bigger and greater, and they were solidified."

As her career developed, Britt took MSP with her wherever she went. She was director of Development/Corporate & Foundation Relations at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, before serving as an associate at Cleary Gottlieb Steen and Hamilton, focusing on regulatory, white-collar defense, and other issues. She returned to Rutgers in the Office of General Counsel, before becoming general counsel at Manhattan College in 2017. "In the law firm environment, I was heavily involved in trying to create what could be called the equivalent of an MSP—in that world," she said. "Because while making it to a Wall Street law firm means you have what it takes, sometimes having what it takes is not enough to survive and to thrive. That's what I take away from MSP"

"It's a weight, but it's not a burden," Britt said. "You want to be successful for MSP, for the people that came before you and the people that are coming after you to show, 'look, this can be done.'"



## Kathleen Conkey '91

Owner  
Law Offices of Kathleen Conkey

HOW DID A MIDWESTERNER go from Kansas and Minnesota, to New York City politics, to the glittering lights of the entertainment industry? For Kathleen Conkey, the path to film and TV ran through Rutgers Law and the MSP.

Eight years out of college, Conkey sought a progressive law school that focused on communities and the opportunity for real clinic experience. She knew she wanted more than basic contracts

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*"Everyone needs an equal opportunity for quality public education or our democracy simply won't sustain itself."*

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and torts, and the Rutgers Law philosophy spoke to her. While she didn't know much about MSP, she read the description and realized that while she wasn't a "minority," she absolutely fit the criteria of being educationally disadvantaged.

Having grown up switching schools almost every year, Conkey was the first in her family to go to college. The MSP orientation program "was deeply moving and made me want to be the best student I could be," she recalled. The collaborative and caring approach instilled by MSP is something she has carried with her throughout her legal career.

"I also realized during my time at Rutgers that law is not just about the law and the facts. It is also about who is reviewing the facts and deciding how to interpret them," she said. "That's

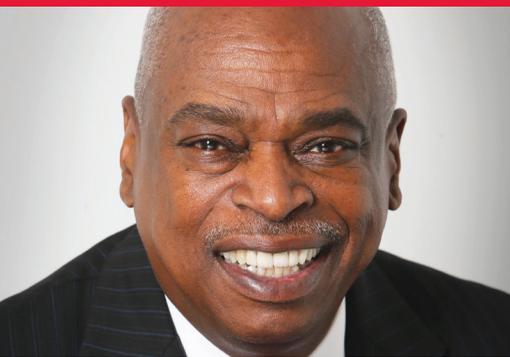
why it's so important to have a diversity of voices in the legal profession."

Conkey's career, which before Rutgers included stints working for New York Mayor David Dinkins and consumer crusader Ralph Nader, has taken her into media and entertainment law. For more than two decades, she has helped authors, filmmakers, producers, playwrights, and other creative people tell their stories—while protecting them from legal pitfalls. Having worked in-house at MTV Networks and CBS, she has had her own firm for the past decade, and in 2010 co-authored the influential "Counseling Content Providers in the Digital Age: A Handbook for Lawyers."

While her career has taken her down a business path, her passion for public interest first seeded as a child growing up in a working class home, and then cultivated by MSP, remains close to her heart. Today, she sees two areas of society where the MSP values of empathy and social justice are vitally needed to make a difference: education and mass incarceration.

"Everyone needs an equal opportunity for quality public education or our democracy simply won't sustain itself," Conkey said. "My home state of Kansas is an unfortunate case study. It virtually stopped funding public education and the results have been disastrous."

Thankful for the grounding in law and policy she received at MSP, Conkey looks forward to the next generation of Rutgers Law alumni continuing to make a difference.



## Wade Henderson '73

Retired President  
The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights

WHEN RUTGERS LAW LEGEND Arthur Kinoy argued a case on behalf of Adam Clayton Powell before the U.S. Supreme Court in 1969, Wade Henderson tried but couldn't get inside the chamber. The young Howard University undergrad stood at the Court steps and watched as Kinoy emerged with two African-American lawyers. In that moment, his desire crystalized to pursue a career in the law.

Two years later, while applying to the law school "born out of the Newark rebellion of 1967," he was able to speak to one of those lawyers, Rutgers Law School Professor Alfred

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*"Rutgers gave me the tools and understanding about how to use the law creatively for change."*

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Slocum. "It was very inspiring," Henderson recalled nearly a half century later.

It would be hard for any alumnus to embody the mission of MSP more directly than Henderson. Retired in 2016, after more than 20 years as president and CEO of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, he has spent his entire career in pursuit of social justice.

"I was steeped in the great tradition of historically black colleges," said Henderson. "For law school, I was attracted to Newark, a city of real hidden beauty, and Rutgers, as a place where I could truly experience clinical education."

Soon after graduating, Henderson became the school's first assistant dean and director of the MSP and later continued his activism through positions at the ABA, ACLU and the NAACP.

"Rutgers Law School gave me the tools and understanding about how to use the law creatively for change," he explained. "I learned that victories are rarely permanent victories—and we need to advocate for enduring values with a real vigilance."

One of Henderson's proudest achievements was his instrumental role in passage of the Fair Housing Amendments Act in 1988, upgrading a relatively toothless law enacted shortly after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King 20 years earlier.

Still, Henderson lamented that many of the problems that brought him to Rutgers in 1970 are not yet solved. For example, he was a central figure in achieving reauthorization of the federal Voting Rights Act in 2006. Then, in 2013, "the Supreme Court blew a hole through the law." And for all the successes in his storied career, Henderson regretted that his work has not yet brought full federal representation to the citizens of Washington, DC.

Looking to the next 50 years, Henderson encouraged students to embrace the "incredible journey of change and transformation" that Rutgers Law School offers.

"We are on a path to becoming a country as good as its ideals," he observed, emphasizing that MSP alums have played a crucial role in charting that course. "But we are not there yet."

