



Welcoming Remarks: "The Future of Critical Race Feminism"

*Dean Rex R. Perschbacher**

Good morning everyone. Distinguished panelists, guests, and friends of King Hall, on behalf of the faculty, students, and staff of the UC Davis School of Law, thank you for coming and welcome to this symposium on "The Future of Critical Race Feminism," jointly sponsored by the U.C. Davis Law Review, the Consortium for Women and Research, and the Office of Campus Community Relations.

As the symposium brochure notes, Critical Race Feminism is a relatively new field of inquiry that looks critically at the legal status of women of color and the unique ways in which they experience, particularly in the United States, multiple discrimination on the basis of race, gender, class, and sexuality. It is our country's eternal burden and unique opportunity that it has endured a legacy of slavery, genocide, and other forms of racial, ethnic, and sex discrimination, yet retained aspirations of equality, notably in the Constitutional underpinnings of our legal system. Most of the time, the people and government of the United States remain committed to a fairer, more just society, free of the lingering forms of discrimination that have proven most difficult to eradicate. Law, with its professed devotion to equal justice, equal protection, and due process, probably embodies the most concrete and

* Dean and Professor of Law, UC Davis School of Law. Remarks delivered at the U.C. Davis Law Review Symposium: The Future of Critical Race Feminism (April 1, 2005).

well-accepted version of this aspiration, yet the legal profession itself has not usually been found in the vanguard of progress. Both promoting the ideals of real equality and opening the legal profession to all persons in this country is a task that begins in law school. Therefore, I am proud to be involved in a particular law school that, although flawed, and often stumbling, nevertheless genuinely seeks to make its faculty, its students, and its staff a visible embodiment of a hope for true equality. This symposium and its inquiry into and challenge of the assumptions behind the demand for formal rights of equality by both men and women, white and of color, can advance our collective and individual understanding and, again quoting the brochure, “re-evaluate and transform static notions of patriarchy and oppression by critiquing the idea that there is one essential female voice or one essential voice of color.”

As an inheritor of vested privilege, I am not the person to do this, but our panelists and moderators and, notably, the energizing force behind this symposium, Professor Angela Onwauchi-Willig, can. I am particularly proud to note the four panel moderators from the UC Davis School of Law, each of whom brings her and his unique perspective to today’s discussions. We have Professor Evelyn Lewis, an African American woman from North Carolina, who overcame a segregated education and upbringing to succeed at the Harvard Law School and become the first African American woman partner in a San Francisco law firm. We also have Professor Lisa Pruitt, from rural Arkansas, who achieved every honor the University of Arkansas and its law school had available, while weathering attacks on her simply for being a woman, who went on to a prestigious clerkship, a doctorate from the University of London, and a highly successful career with a leading Washington, D.C. firm in international law and international human rights that took her to Europe and Africa (including work for the International Criminal Tribunal dealing with gender-based war crimes in Rwanda), and who came to King Hall from teaching at Northwestern University School of Law. There is Professor Bill Ong Hing, an articulate voice for Asian Americans and other communities of color, particularly immigrant communities, whose parents operated a grocery store in the mining town of Superior, Arizona, and who found his voice teaching at Golden Gate University and Stanford Law School before joining our faculty. Finally, we have Professor Jennifer Chacón, who went from a family in El Paso, Texas, to Stanford University and then Yale Law School, to a Ninth Circuit clerkship, and on to a leading New York law firm, before joining our faculty this year. These colleagues, and the equally distinguished panelists they will introduce, embody the voices of Critical Race

Feminism and bring extraordinary distinction to UC Davis by their willingness to join us today in our discussions and inquiries.

Of course, all this does not “just happen.” Today’s symposium is the product of the hard work of dozens of individuals. Recognizing any given number of them is sure to overlook others. Still, I would be remiss not to thank the Symposium’s co-sponsors, especially for their financial contributions: the Office of Campus Community Relations, Associate Executive Vice Chancellor Rahim Reed in particular, and the Consortium for Women and Research, and its Director, Judy Newton. There is no stronger supporter of this symposium and our Law Review than Associate Dean Kevin Johnson, the academic conscience of the dean’s office and himself a distinguished scholarly voice in the field of Critical Race Studies, particularly its Lat-Crit branch. I want to thank U.C. Davis Law Review Senior Symposium Editors Vicky Choy, Eric Hing, and Natalie Ikhlasi and Publication Coordinator Karen Beverlin; our UC Davis panel moderators; Professors Madhavi Sunder of the law school, Bettina Ng’weno of African and African American Studies, who supported the grant from the Consortium of Women and Research, John Ortiz-Hutson of African and African American Studies, and Rhacel Parrenas of Asian American Studies. In particular, I want to thank the gloriously diverse students of King Hall who remind us every day in our classrooms and offices and hallways that “there is no one essential female voice or one essential voice of color” and that we will never be finished with our own educations, just as our country, and indeed the world, will never finish the work of equal justice and equal opportunity.

Now, let me introduce the moving force behind this symposium, Professor Angela Onwuachi-Willig, whose personal journey has taken her from her family in Houston, Texas, to Grinnell College in Iowa, to the University of Michigan School of Law, to two clerkships and law practice in Ohio, to law practice with a distinguished firm in Boston, and most recently, to King Hall and Sacramento, California. Her daring scholarship on Justice Clarence Thomas has carried her own voice across the United States and is attracting national attention. We only hope she continues to enrich our King Hall community for many years to come. Angela