

BD Voices of Excellence

The theme for this edition of Voices of Excellence is “Isms: Be Aware” and it focuses on isms (oppressive and especially discriminatory attitudes or beliefs) and how they can be hurtful and disrespectful to our peers. Most people are familiar with racism, sexism, and anti-Semitism. Two articles in this edition, authored by members of Barclay Damon’s Major Market Offices Diversity Leadership Team, explore ableism and colorism. We invite you to consider additional isms of which we should all be aware.

QUOTES OF THE QUARTER

“It’s just really important that we start celebrating our differences. Let’s start tolerating first, but then we need to celebrate our differences.” – Billie Jean King, American tennis player and gender equality advocate

“I believe that we are here for each other, not against each other. Everything comes from an understanding that you are a gift in my life—whatever you are, whatever our differences.” – John Denver, American singer, activist, and humanitarian



Ableism: Words Matter

Amanda Rhodes, Associate

Many people are familiar with different categories of diverse individuals. Although society is becoming more supportive of diverse groups, it is common for people with disabilities to be left out of inclusion

efforts. Ableism is discrimination against people who have physical, intellectual, or psychiatric disabilities. People often perpetuate ableism without even realizing it. Ableism exists in many forms, but a common type of ableism is rooted in the words we use.

Certain phrases, like “That’s so lame,” “I’m so OCD,” or “The blind leading the blind,” have become commonplace. However, people often fail to realize the negativity associated with these expressions. These phrases devalue people with disabilities and imply that a disability is something that needs to be fixed. By replacing ableist terms and expressions in our vocabularies, we can become more inclusive. Below is a table of ableist terms and some alternative phrases to use, courtesy of, in part, the New York State Bar Association Committee on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.

To learn more about the lived experiences of people with disabilities, we recommend watching *Crip Camp: A Disability Revolution*, which is available to stream on Netflix. This documentary follows the young people who met at Camp Jened, a camp for those with disabilities, and went on to fight for their rights, resulting in the Americans With Disabilities Act. It is produced by Higher Ground Productions, the Obamas’ company.

Ableist and Negative Terms	More Inclusive Terms
Handicapped, disabled	People with disabilities
Normal, healthy people	People without disabilities
Disabled community	Community of persons with disabilities
Person with a birth defect	Person who has a congenital disability
Person afflicted with	Person who has been diagnosed with
Down’s person, mongoloid, or mongol	Person who has Down syndrome
Cripple	Person with a physical disability or mobility impairment Person who walks with crutches or a walker
Dwarf, midget	Person of short stature, little person
Retarded, retard	Person with a developmental disability
Dumb, mute, or nonverbal	Person who is unable to speak Person who uses a communication device
Deaf, hearing impaired	Person who is deaf Person who is hard of hearing
The blind	People who are blind People who are visually impaired or have low vision
Attack, spell, or fit	Seizure
Brain damaged	Person with a brain injury
Crazy, insane, psycho, or mentally ill	Person diagnosed with a mental health condition Person diagnosed with a psychiatric disability
Special ed student	Student who has special education Student with a disability Student with an individualized education program (IEP)
Confined to a wheelchair, wheelchair bound	Person who uses a wheelchair
Handicapped parking, handicapped bathroom	Accessible parking or accessible bathroom

2024 DIVERSITY PARTNER COMMITTEE MEMBERS

<p>Sharon Brown, Chair New York City</p>	<p>Naresh Kannan Albany</p>
<p>Danielle Mettler-LaFeir, at Large Rochester</p>	<p>Penny Mason Major Markets</p>
<p>Jen Leonardi, Pro Bono at Large Buffalo</p>	<p>Paul Sanders Rochester</p>
<p>Zach Forward Syracuse</p>	<p>Jerry Mackey, Emeritus Member Rochester</p>
<p>Bob Heary Buffalo</p>	



Colorism Shawn Chowdhury, Associate

Colorism is prejudice or discrimination against individuals with dark skin tones, historically involving the favoring of lighter skin over darker skin. While the most common form of colorism is often observed within the same ethnic or racial group, it can also transcend these boundaries. Since darker skin can lead to perceptions of greater ethnic difference, this other form of colorism can consequently venture into more racist or xenophobic territory.

In recent months, this latter form of colorism was evident in the lead-up to the 2024 United States Republican primaries, in which former Republican presidential candidate Vivek Ramaswamy discovered that some people in Iowa would not vote for him because of his skin color. During an interaction between Vivek’s wife, Apoorva, and a white couple from Iowa, Apoorva asked the couple for reasons why some people in their community might not support her husband. The couple explicitly stated that some individuals would not vote for him solely because of his dark skin tone.

As previously noted, colorism is most commonly observed within the same ethnic or racial group. An example of colorism within the same racial group was highlighted in a case involving a Barclay Damon attorney who defended an employer in a race discrimination trial. The plaintiff, a Black woman, claimed she was terminated due to her skin tone. The defendant’s vice president of human resources, who is also Black, was accused of discriminating against the plaintiff because she is “Blacker” than he is. During the trial, the vice president testified that his wife is “Blacker” than either of them. The jury ultimately rejected the plaintiff’s colorism claim. However, this matter illustrates the complexities of colorism or perceived colorism and how it can manifest within similar communities.

These examples demonstrate the prevalence of colorism and its impact. An awareness of colorism can offer insight into the covert hierarchies and biases that permeate our diverse and complicated society. By understanding these biases, we can continue working toward creating a more inclusive world.

Office Updates

FIRM UPDATES

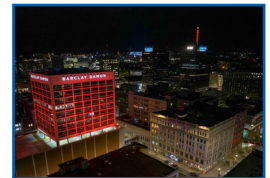
Report From the NEBSA Annual Regional Convention

[Sharon Brown](#) and [Kyra Ganswith](#) attended a job fair at the Northeast Black Law Students Association’s (NEBSA) 56th Annual Regional Convention in Buffalo to interview 1Ls for the Summer Associate Program. Sharon and Kyra also attended NEBSA’s awards gala, accepting a sponsor award on behalf of the firm. Sharon noted that the event was well attended, and she and Kyra saw law clerk Amie Mbye and incoming 2L summer associate Joshua Maddox. Another way we’re involved: Kyra judged NEBSA’s two-day Thurgood Marshall Moot Court Appellate Competition in 2023, and [Earl Storrs III](#) was a judge this year. This year, the Syracuse University College of Law’s trial team, which includes Amie, won first place in the Constance Baker Motley Mock Trial Competition.



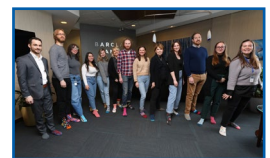
We <3 Heart Health

In honor of National Wear Red Day, the American Heart Association’s annual campaign to raise awareness of women’s heart disease, Barclay Damon colleagues across the firm donned red! Barclay Damon Tower in downtown Syracuse was also decked out in red to show heartfelt support.



Celebrating World Down Syndrome Day

Attorneys and staff in many offices across our platform celebrated World Down Syndrome Day (WSDS) by donning mismatched, brightly colored socks as part of the Lots of Socks campaign. March 21—3/21—was selected for WSDS because people with Down syndrome have three rather than the usual two of their 21st chromosome. Lots of Socks plays off the sock shape of all of our chromosomes to raise awareness about Down syndrome and honor people who have the syndrome in a lighthearted and colorful way. Barclay Damon Tower was lit up blue and yellow in honor of WSDS.



Pro Bono Corner

[Jen Leonardj](#) and [Sharon Brown](#) were interviewed for a Law360 Pulse article titled “Barclay Damon Partners Talk 100% Pro Bono Participation.” The article covers the firm’s seven-year streak of 100-percent pro bono participation by full-time attorneys and this year by all full-time paralegals, how the firm is able to achieve this level of participation, and the evolution of the pro bono program. Read more about it on our website, [here](#).

The American Bar Association (ABA) Standing Committee on Pro Bono and Public Service recognized the firm as an ABA Free Legal Answers Pro Bono Leader for 2023. [David Solimeno](#) was also recognized as an individual ABA Free Legal Answers Pro Bono Leader for 2023. Click [here](#) to read the firm’s press release about this honor.

Office Updates

ALBANY

Sharing Experience

[Sharon Brown](#) gave a presentation to the Black Law Students Association at Albany Law School, “Breaking Boundaries and Shattering Barriers: Black Women in Law.” After the event, the president of the organization wrote, “A heartfelt thank you for taking the time to speak with our members and sharing your invaluable insights on navigating the legal field as a Black woman.

Your perspective and experiences provided immense value and inspiration to everyone present. . . . Your wisdom and guidance have undoubtedly left a lasting impact on our organization’s members, and we are immensely grateful for your contribution.”



BUFFALO

Acknowledging Black History Month

At the invitation of [Bob Heary](#), the Buffalo office Diversity Leadership Team attended a talk sponsored by the Michigan Street African American Heritage Corridor celebrating Black History Month. The talk, part of a free series, was held at the Frank E. Merriweather Jr. Library in Buffalo. “Uncovering the History of the Underground Railroad in Central New York” was presented by Gerard Aching, a retired Cornell University professor, who discussed several of the Underground Railroad research projects he led that focused on Central New York and the Finger Lakes Region. It was followed by a discussion on the importance, challenges, and limits to creating Underground Railroad projects, comparing experiences with work around the St. James AME Zion Church in Ithaca and the Michigan Street Baptist Church of Buffalo. Here’s a photo of some of our attendees with the speaker.



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NEW HAVEN

Learning More About Racism in Our World

[Penny Mason](#) represented the firm at a Racial Equity Institute training webinar, “The Groundwater Approach to Racism,” sponsored by the Greater New Haven Community Foundation. Penny said, “This meaningful presentation used statistics to demonstrate how the many systems in our world—[like] health care, education, incarceration, housing, and wealth—are impacted by racism.”

LEAPing in New Haven

Penny also represented the firm at an annual fundraising event for LEAP (Leadership Education & Athletics in Partnership), an organization that



provides tutoring, after-school, and summer programs for children, teens, and young adults of color in the New Haven area.

Downtown Evening Soup Kitchen Fundraiser

Penny represented the firm at a fundraiser for Downtown Evening Soup Kitchen, where colleagues from the New Haven office volunteer for their community day.



NEW YORK

Stonewall Award Updates

As reported in the last issue of Voices of Excellence, [Janice Grubin](#) received an American Bar Association Commission on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Stonewall Award. To read Janice’s acceptance speech, click [here](#).

Janice was featured in a Law360 article about her Stonewall Award, “ABA Honors Three Who Made Law a Safer Place to Be LGBTQ.” Read more about the article [here](#). She was also interviewed by the American Bar Association for a video with the other 2024 Stonewall Award recipients. Watch the video and read more on our website News page, [here](#).

ROCHESTER

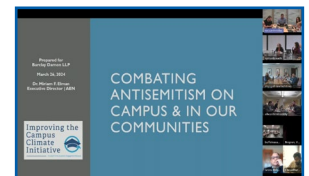
WOIS Senior Capstone Project Participation

On behalf of the Rochester Diversity Leadership Team and as part of the DLT’s continuing pipeline initiative, Patrick Burke, Rochester office manager, and [Terry Emmens](#) participated in the senior capstone project at the World of Inquiry School. During the capstone project, pre-graduation high school seniors complete an in-depth exploration of a topic of interest to them. They then develop a project around that topic that contributes to the community, which they initially present to a volunteer committee for review and approval. Barclay Damon will continue our involvement in the World of Inquiry School capstone projects as they develop throughout the school year, culminating in the students’ final presentations in April.



Rochester DLT Lunch ‘n’ Learn: Anti-Semitism

The Rochester Diversity Leadership Team hosted a diversity, equity, and inclusion lunch ‘n’ learn on the topic of anti-Semitism with speaker Miriam Elman. Miriam is the executive director of the Academic Engagement Network, an independently run not-for-profit organization headquartered in Washington DC that mobilizes networks of university faculty and administrators to counter anti-Semitism, oppose the denigration of Jewish and Zionist identities, promote academic freedom, and advance education about Israel.



Office Updates

DEI Potluck

The Rochester office hosted a DEI spring potluck feast. The food theme focused on cultural diversity, and colleagues brought ethnic dishes to share with everyone. Patrick Burke said, “Foods with origins from all over the world (and some from Wegmans) were sampled, stories were told, and recipes were shared.”



SYRACUSE

Mentorship at Syracuse Law

[Zach Forward](#) gave a presentation on behavioral interviewing, prepping for interviews, and opportunities at Barclay Damon to Syracuse University College of Law.



The firm is again offering the Syracuse Law 1L Diversity Mentor Program, which pairs our attorneys with 1Ls during the spring semester.

Attorney mentors this year are [Danielle Katz](#), [Zach Forward](#), [Kayla Arias](#), [John Cook](#), [Jon McSherry](#), [Margaret Talt](#), [Karina Shahine](#), [Buster Melvin](#), [Genevieve Halpenny](#), [Ross Greenky](#), [John Langan](#), [Denis Sullivan](#), [Nick Constantino](#), and [Jeff Davis](#).

Competing in Houston

The Syracuse University College of Law Black Law Students Association Mock Trial Team, which includes law clerk Amie Mbye, competed at the National Constance Baker Motley Mock Trial Competition in Houston, Texas.



Major Markets Diversity Leadership Team

[Penny Mason](#)

Major Markets Diversity Partner
New Haven

[Sharon Brown](#)

Diversity Partner Committee Chair
New York City

[Shawn Chowdhury](#)

Associate
New York City

[Keith Costa](#)

Partner
New York City | New Haven

[Carolyn Marcotte Crowley](#)

Partner
Boston

[Dan Elliott](#)

Partner
New Haven

[Anthony Esdale](#)

Legal Assistant
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[Megan Glynn](#)

Senior Legal Assistant
New Haven

[Janice Grubin](#)

Partner
New York City

[Stacy Hernandez](#)

Legal Assistant
New York City

[Amanda Rhodes](#)

Associate
New York City

[Martine Wayne](#)

Associate
Boston