

# PRISM



ALANYC DIVERSITY,  
EQUITY & INCLUSION



## MOVING THE NEEDLE

ASSOCIATION OF LEGAL ADMINISTRATORS, NEW YORK CITY CHAPTER | WINTER 2024 ISSUE

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# MEET AYANA S. LEWIS, YOUR 2023-2025 DEI TEAM LEAD

**JANINE A. NEDD**  
**ALANYC PAST PRESIDENT 2021-2022**  
**NIXON PEABODY LLP**



## **Why is Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Important?**

It is critical that regardless of race, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation, disability, or veteran status - we are all treated with respect and dignity. The same opportunities that are afforded to one should be afforded to all. While these tenets should be as organic as breathing, unfortunately, we live in a world where this is not always the case.

Some people are comfortable with life as we know it, while others use their voice to speak for those who have been minimized or silenced, and they ask, "What can I do to help?"

### **Ayana S. Lewis is that person.**

When joining ALANYC in 2018, Ayana did not immediately get involved with the chapter, however, once she shared her passion for people, it only made sense that she led ALANYC's DEI efforts. From educational sessions to collaborating with other chapter teams to make a difference in the communities we live and work, Ayana has led the DEI Team and its programming to educate and open our eyes and show that we are one race...the human race.

We are all valuable and bring a mosaic of talents and gifts that should be seen, heard, and treasured for future generations. It takes courage, empathy, patience, commitment, and a belief that the work that you are doing is making a difference. Whether the events garner five attendees or 100 – Ayana and the DEI Team believe that if we can educate and open the hearts and minds of one person, who might share their new-found knowledge with another, and they take it to another – the work is never in vain.

PRISM is a combination of the DEI Team's work and objective to move the needle and ensure that DEI remains front and center.

Whether you met virtually to discuss the latest books on DEI, you attended a fireside chat, or started the Hanukkah season with "The Gathering" - your support of these and other programs and initiatives continues to show your commitment to keeping DEI topics in the forefront until it is interwoven into our daily lives. And, until we are in a place where we are interwoven and not just a spotlight – DEI will always be crucial, and people like Ayana and the DEI Team members will be crucial as well.

We hope you enjoy the 2024 Winter Edition of PRISM. And stay tuned for more exciting programming from Ayana and the DEI team during the next chapter year.

# MEET THE 2023–2024 DEI TEAM

In getting to know our team, the question was asked, *Why is Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion important to you?* Check out their responses:



**Andrew Aguirre**  
**iSolved**

Being able to thrive in environments where there is support in molding employees' identity and character is monumental. As a minority, this is important to me because it is imperative that I am treated as an equal and receive the dignity and respect amongst said equals. In addition, it allows us to embrace cultures and draw in new perspectives, all while fostering cohesiveness. Therefore, the purpose of DEI goes beyond myself, and I stand to support all I am surrounded by.



**Oria L. Aponte**  
**Hodgson Russ LLP**

DEI has always been important to me. The work I've done has taught me to lead with empathy and to embrace the differences among all people. It is important that we continue this work so that people are treated equally and with the respect they deserve.



**Tina Carter**  
**Dunnington Bartholow & Miller LLP**

As a proud member of our Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) team, it is crucial to me that every individual, regardless of their race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, gender, or disability, is treated equally with respect and dignity. Even though we are yet to reach a point in the world where this happens naturally, without being forced by laws, I believe it is my responsibility to use my voice and actions to represent those who are underrepresented, disrespected, or unheard. I urge everyone to do the right thing, not just to avoid getting into trouble, but because it is the right thing to do.



**Lisette Clark**  
**Tarter Krinsky & Drogin LLP**

DEI matters to me as I am perpetually cognizant of my privilege, and I want to use my voice and my energy to be an advocate and ally to foster change. As a Woman, LGBTQIA leader, and parent, I want to learn as much as I can about doing my best to cultivate environments that promote equity (racial and otherwise), promote tolerance, and encourage curiosity, which has restorative properties in helping challenge assumptions and biases.



**John Connolly**  
**LDI Connect**

Continuing my knowledge and understanding of the topic of diversity and inclusion allows me to play my small role in encouraging those around me to celebrate each other's differences and understand each other's challenges while at the same time realizing that we are all part of the same race, the human race, and all equally loved in the eyes of God.



**Sarah V. Gillen**  
**Emergency Skills, Inc.**

As a certified woman-owned business owner, I know the challenges women face. I also benefited from recent initiatives to engage with WBEs. I want to learn more about diverse communities and share the knowledge and benefits I have gained through my career to help others excel.



**Matt Frederick**  
**Segal McCambridge**

DEI is important to me because I want to help foster an equitable, productive work environment for all. It is very satisfying to facilitate the interaction of people with different backgrounds, lived experience, interests, and witness how it can change the sense of what is possible for all. I take great inspiration from Dr. King's quote: "Almost always the creative, dedicated minority has made the world better."



**Ellen Hains**  
**First Legal**

As a lifelong New Yorker, I was fortunate enough to grow up, learn, and work with an incredibly diverse community. This has led to my love of travel, immersing myself in different cultures. The melting pot that is the United States is essential because it helps to create an environment of acceptance and respect. We are more alike than different, and I feel strongly that having a different perspective, whether by gender, age, race, or ability, is the path to unity.



**Fritz Galette, PhD**  
**Loeb Leadership**

We live in a culture that has historically restricted and limited opportunity for underrepresented groups. Efforts to ameliorate systemic inequities through awareness-raising and education are essential. Diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives are important in our culture, and we must continue to strive to build the practices, policies, and procedures that will move the needle forward in our organizations.

# ALANYC'S DIVERSITY EQUITY & INCLUSION TEAM'S 2023-2024 RECAP

**ELLEN HAINS  
FIRST LEGAL**

The 2023-2024 ALANYC Diversity Equity & Inclusion schedule has been packed with both exciting and educational content that continues the critical work of DEI in society and the workplace. The goal of any DEI program is to be sure that we continue break systemic ideologies and barriers that allow everyone to be recognized, flourish in their identities, and be safe to be our authentic selves. The DEI team has worked tirelessly to meet our DEI chapter's year theme of **Moving the Needle** in the DEI space in NYC's Legal Industry, and we look forward to continuing with fantastic content for our 2024-2025 chapter year. Here is a recap of this chapter's year's events:

## **2023 PRIDE Celebration**

We kicked off the chapter year with our PRIDE celebration, hosting our quarterly book club discussion on ***The Gay Metropolis: The Landmark History of Gay Life in America* by Charles Kaiser**. A NYT Notable Book of the Year and the Lambda Literary Award winner, *The Gay Metropolis* documents the rise and acceptance of gay life and identity since the 1940s. ALANYC's DEI team members Matt Frederick, HR Manager of Segal McCambridge, and Lisette Clark, Director of Human Resources at Tarter Krinsky & Drogin, were moderators of the session.

On June 29, the DEI team hosted **Strength in Solidarity: A panel discussion with our Legal and LGBTQIA+ Community Members**. With the 54th anniversary of the Stonewall riots, the panelists Toni Jaeger-Fine, Principle of Matter of Perfection and Senior Counselor of Fordham University School of Law, Ellen (Ellie) Krug attorney and founder and President of Human Inspiration Works, LLC, and Christian D. Rutherford Litigation Staff Attorney at Paul Weiss shared their unique journeys navigating their personal and professional lives as attorneys and members of the LGBTQIA+ community. From Iowa to NYC, their stories followed a thread of navigating their authentic selves, pushing their way through exclusion that ultimately helped forge their path to become relevant, strong, proud of their identities and leaving their mark on the legal industry.



## **DEI Book Discussions**

Since launching our quarterly book club sessions in 2022, we have continued educating our chapter members and the public by reading books such as ***The Latino Threat* by Leo Chavez, *Black Fatigue* by Mary-Frances Winters, and *The Gay Metropolis***. Our fourth book for September was ***Caste: The Origins of Our Discontent* by Isabel Wilkerson**. In this session, we discussed how castes are a systemic system of social stratification marked by notions of hierarchy, exclusion, racism, and purity. Wilkerson shows the correlation of caste systems in both India and the United States and how the Nazi regime built their own Caste System against the Jewish population during World War II based on the blueprints of India's caste system against the Dalits and the US' caste system of systemic racism against African Americans. Loeb Leadership's Senior Consultant and New York State licensed psychologists Dr. Fritz Galette and Ayana Lewis, Senior Specialist of Davis Polk led the discussion.

## **National Hispanic Heritage Month**

### **Launch of Untold Stories**

On October 12, 2023, as part of National Hispanic Heritage Month, the DEI team launched ALANYC's new DEI initiative, **Untold Stories**. Untold Stories is a new series that brings members of our legal community from diverse backgrounds to share their stories of adversity and triumph and how leveraging their professional and personal journeys has brought progressive contributions to our industry. During National Hispanic Heritage Month, we started the series with our keynote speaker, Myrna L. Maysonet, Partner and Chief Diversity Officer of Greenspoon Marder. Myrna shared how her identity as a member of the LGBTQIA+ Latina community shaped her worldview of family, education, and career. Myrna's story of adversity from an early age inspired her to excel in all endeavors and help to create an individual identity for herself, regardless of the labels that society placed on her. Oria Aponte, Office Manager of Hodgson Russ LLP, Elba Cortes, Office Administrator of Fox Rothschild LLP, both Vice Presidents of ALANYC and DEI team members were moderators of this groundbreaking event.

### **Chapter Member Spotlight of our ALANYC's Latina Chapter Leadership**

We began a new initiative highlighting past and present ALANYC chapter leadership and their diverse backgrounds. This was executed through social media posts spotlighting our past and present chapter leaders of Latina descent during Hispanic Heritage Month. You may visit our social media pages, LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram, and X to see each spotlight.

### **2023 ALANYC Symposium Clothing Drive Supporting Victims of Domestic Violence**

To raise awareness during Domestic Violence Awareness Month, ALANYC's DEI, Outreach/CORE, and Symposium teams partnered to collect clothing for families served by Women in Need (WIN). WIN provides family housing and critical services to unhoused families, helping them gain independence and a brighter future. The request was to donate new or gently used clothing so that individuals could be ready for job interviews or meetings that could help further their desire for independence. Through this initiative, we collected over 12 bags of clothing.

### **Breast Cancer and Breast Health Conversation: A conversation with Dr. Vivian Jolley Bea and Dr. Onyine Balogun**

Partnering with the ALANYC FIT team, the chapter hosted a fantastic virtual event centered on Breast Health and Breast Cancer Awareness. Team Lead Ayana Lewis introduced Dr. Vivian Jolley Bea and Dr. Onyine Balogun, both practicing Oncologists at NY Presbyterian Weill Cornell and Brooklyn Methodist Hospital. The presentation provided an extensive roadmap for everyone to recognize the best path for breast health and invaluable information if you find yourself with a cancer diagnosis. There was a robust Q&A where participants asked about individual situations and share their experiences.

### **Wrapping up 2023**

#### **Legal Career Day for High School Students**

On November 9, the Outreach/Core, and DEI teams hosted the chapter's fourth annual Legal Career Day. Under leadership of Santa Medina, Ayana Lewis, Oriana Aponte, and John Connolly, this virtual event gave high school students from the NYC area parochial and charter schools who are interested in exploring career paths in the legal field the opportunity to listen to and engage with panelists who hold various positions at law firms and have inspirational success stories to share. Our session was the largest yet, with almost 200 students!

#### **The Gathering**

The DEI team, in partnership with Loeb Leadership, hosted and led the session, **The Gathering**, our first intimate DEI discussion over dinner, which included a diverse meal of both catered and pot-luck dishes. Attendees discussed unconscious bias, shared what makes us each unique, celebrated our differences, and our commonalities, and discussed how we can confront and challenge our unconscious bias. Under the facilitation of Loeb Leadership's Dr. Fritz Galette and David Sarnoff, Esq, ACC, the discussion allowed participants to share their thoughts and experiences and created a safe space to explore new ideas of what each participant's identity means to them. The discussion was robust and thoughtful, leading to a further understanding of our commonalities and differences. As a takeaway, participants received a copy of the **Blindspot: Hidden Biases of Good People Paperback by Mahzarin R. Banaji and Anthony G. Greenwald**, which was our January 2024 Book club selection.

**Thank you to our Board, members, and business partners for their unwavering support.**

**We look forward to continuing to move the needle and having more educational opportunities to share knowledge and celebrate the fantastic tapestry that makes up the ALANYC chapter and legal industry.**



# THE 2023 UNITED STATES SUPREME COURT RULINGS AND ITS EFFECT ON DEI

**LAURENCE WINTERS (HE/HIM)**  
**SUREPOINT**

The Supreme Court's term in 2023 has left an indelible mark on the fabric of American society, with a series of rulings that intersect with issues of diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA). The Court's decisions have profound implications for marginalized communities and the pursuit of a more just and equitable society.

## **Affirmative Action in College Admissions: Upholding Equal Opportunity**

In a polarizing decision, the Court's conservative majority struck down the admissions policies at the University of North Carolina and Harvard University, alleging that they violated the Constitution's guarantee of equal protection by considering race in their criteria. This ruling has reignited debates about the role of affirmative action in fostering diversity and equal opportunity in higher education. Supporters of DEIA advocate for affirmative action as a necessary tool in addressing systemic inequalities and enhancing access for underrepresented minority groups. Conversely, critics argue that affirmative action policies perpetuate discrimination and erode the principles of merit-based admissions. The Court's ruling highlights the ongoing challenge of reconciling divergent viewpoints in the quest for diversity and equity in education.

## **Student Loan Debt Forgiveness: Economic Equity and Access to Education**

The Court's rejection of President Biden's student loan forgiveness plan impacts economic equity and education access, especially for marginalized communities—the proposed program aimed to ease financial burdens for millions from low-income backgrounds. The ruling highlights broader challenges in addressing economic inequality and educational barriers for marginalized groups. Advocates emphasize that student loan debt disproportionately affects minorities and low-income individuals, perpetuating poverty cycles and calling for comprehensive solutions to address the crisis and promote economic equity.

## **LGBTQIA+ Rights: Ensuring Equal Treatment and Inclusion**

In cases involving the rights of LGBTQIA+ individuals, the Court's decisions have far-reaching implications for equality and inclusion. The Court's refusal to address the merits of a case concerning an evangelical Christian graphic artist's refusal to provide services to same-sex couples highlights the ongoing struggle for LGBTQIA+ rights and religious liberty.



Supporters of DEIA argue against discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity in businesses, while opponents claim it violates religious freedom. The Court's decision emphasizes the importance of comprehensive anti-discrimination measures to ensure LGBTQIA+ individuals are treated equally and included in all public spheres.

## **Native American Adoptions: Protecting Tribal Sovereignty and Cultural Identity**

In a landmark decision, the Court upheld the Indian Child Welfare Act, which prioritizes Native American children's placement with relatives and tribes. The law was challenged by individuals and states, arguing it exceeded Congress's authority. The ruling reaffirms tribal sovereignty and cultural identity in child welfare, acknowledging historical injustices and the need to preserve Native American heritage. Advocates see it as a crucial step in addressing systemic inequalities faced by Indigenous peoples.

The Court's docket also included cases touching on various issues, from federal election laws and redistricting to online messages and threats. Additionally, the Court weighed in on immigration and deportation policies and the liability of Big Tech companies in cases with far-reaching implications for public policy and individual rights.

Reflecting on the Supreme Court's rulings in 2023, pursuing diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility remains a central challenge for American society. The Court's decisions highlight the complexities of addressing systemic inequalities and advancing social justice. Advocates must continue to engage in robust advocacy and policymaking to confront these challenges and work towards a more inclusive and equitable future for all Americans.

### **About the Author:**

Laurence Winters is the Chief Community Officer at SurePoint Technologies and has more than a decade of legal tech experience. Laurence has served three years on the National ALA Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility Committee and is currently Chair. Laurence received his bachelor's from the University of Tennessee in accounting and finance and his Master's (MBA) in finance from Fort Hays State University in Kansas. Laurence also has a DEI in the Workplace certification from the University of South Florida.

# LEGACY ADMISSIONS IN HIGHER EDUCATION AND THE EFFECTS ON MARGINALIZED GROUPS

**DR. LISA JENKINS BROWN**  
**CULTURAL STRATEGIST**

On June 29, 2023, the United States Supreme Court ended affirmative action at colleges and universities across the country. The argument given by Chief Justice Roberts, who wrote the decision, said that the nation's colleges and universities must use colorblind criteria in admissions. And while an entire book can be written on affirmative action, the subject of legacy admissions has now taken center stage in the theater of society.

For those unaware, legacy admissions are the extra boost for students applying to competitive colleges. It is a boost based upon their connections — namely parents, grandparents, or another close relative who attended the college or university. And if a student is related to someone famous — a political figure, a celebrity, or, better yet, someone who has contributed a large sum of money — their boost to the front of the admissions line is more like a rocket launch. So, while the Supreme Court ruled against affirmative action based on what was deemed discriminatory practices against those who were not a part of traditionally marginalized groups, legacy admissions are under scrutiny as a discriminatory practice against those who are first-generation college students whose parents or relatives were never able to attend an elite, competitive college or who have no connections to anyone wealthy or famous enough to prop open the door to the admissions department.

It is a fact that marginalized groups in general, such as African Americans, Hispanics/Latinx communities, as well as those who are socioeconomically disadvantaged in the United States, do not have the same familial or social connections that others have. We tend to think that Jim Crow and slavery happened eons ago and that the reverberating effects could not possibly impact students entering college today. Let's take an average citizen like, er, uh...me. I'm old enough to have a son or daughter entering college. While I am indeed college-educated, it was a cumbersome journey to navigate after attending a public urban school with an uninterested guidance counselor and parents who had never even finished high school. Don't get me wrong, they were not average high-school dropouts. Being born in 1918 and 1921 outside of the Macon, Georgia county line...let me just say that every Jim Crow movie that you saw about black sharecroppers picking cotton and other crops long after slavery was abolished applied to my parents.



And do the math. There are only 53 years between the abolition of slavery and my father's birth. This meant that he grew up in a family that not only experienced slavery but who were uncultured into a society with certain norms expected of them for the sake of survival. And an education was not one of them. Of course, this is not the case with every single person of color. But it is, to a large degree, the reality. Time will not permit me to go into the discriminatory practices in the North, even though segregation laws were not on paper.

Suffice it to say, legacy admissions are not just unethical and unfair to those without the connections. But they do a disservice to the academic integrity of institutions of higher learning; they end up short-changing society and the workforce by cycling family lines into the mill rather than seeking fresh, new, and diverse talent that can only add to the creativity and innovation that is needed in our country and our world. So, while many individuals who are members of marginalized groups are restricted from accessing college seats that are occupied by students benefiting from legacy connections, the chain effect on our workforce and our economy is weakened due to inadequate access and an inability and missed opportunity to cultivate academic and holistic growth to those who were overlooked.

In short, everyone loses.

Dr. Lisa Jenkins Brown is a cultural strategist helping organizations increase creativity, productivity, and employee retention through presentations addressing diversity and inclusion. Clients include Shiseido Cosmetics, Oracle NetSuite, Takeda Pharmaceutical, Proofpoint, and many more. The author of 3 books— including *Millennials' Guide to Diversity Equity & Inclusion* — Dr. Lisa's presentations are engaging, fun-filled, life-changing, and passionate.

If you are interested in contacting Dr. Brown for your DEI training, contact:

Email: [ldj@lisadjenkins.org](mailto:ldj@lisadjenkins.org)  
Website: <https://lisajenkinsbrown.com/>

# THE MANY HATS OF LEGAL ADMINISTRATORS: ADDING DIVERSITY, EQUITY, & INCLUSION TO THE PLATE

**DR. FRITZ GALETTE**  
**LOEB LEADERSHIP**

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives in the workplace have slowly evolved over the last century, with gains made during the civil rights movement of the 1960s. Generally driven by broader societal upheavals, such as those stemming from social justice movements, variable political climates, and changing cultural norms, there has been an increasing recognition of the need to create more inclusive and equitable workplace cultures across many professional disciplines. Early DEI efforts in the legal field focused on initiatives that fostered diversity with recruitment efforts targeting women and minorities. Later initiatives focused on attracting a broader range of underrepresented and undervalued communities. Historically, there has been an oversight in these efforts, as the focus was more on overall numbers, with little to no attention given to the status or power proffered with those opportunities. While rank-and-file demographics may have shown an increase in diverse talent, leadership positions could have been more present. While the events of 2020 sparked a surge in the amount of attention, effort, and resources given to DEI, the once widespread attention and energy for DEI initiatives has faded in the last few years.

## **DEI Fatigue**

The term “DEI Fatigue” has been used to describe the feeling experienced by those DEI practitioners who, after repeatedly encountering resistance, inertia, and apathy, have become profoundly exhausted. Some have described it as “soul-weary.” DEI fatigue has also been used to describe leaders who were once more motivated to commit institutional resources to addressing long-term social inequities. This enthusiasm for equity was strongest during the pandemic, particularly after the social upheaval in 2020 following the public death of George Floyd. Now, after the “Great Resignation” and the onset of the post-pandemic “new normal,” leaders are cutting the programs they once sponsored. In many instances, this has happened before the DEI gains could get rooted in organizations’ practices, policies, and procedures. DEI professionals often worked in isolation with limited resources, time, and power to make a lasting impact.



This has caused them to experience disappointment, frustration, and burnout. The impact has been most keenly felt among professionals of color and historically underrepresented individuals who have been disproportionately singled out for roles in DEI.

## **The Complexity of Multiple Roles**

The role of the legal administrator in performing DEI responsibilities is quite complex. The administrative role requires adherence to established procedures, practices, and policies. This is essential to the efficient running of the firm. The DEI role strives to advance the culture through raising awareness, knowledge sharing, training, and challenging the status quo. These roles inevitably clash as the ‘status quo’ is created within those same policies and processes that the job description requires adherence to. This often places the legal administrator/ DEI professional in a conflicted position. They must maintain a precarious balance. The added burden of new technologies, multiple work environments, and changing priorities further exacerbate the stress under which frontline legal administrators/DEI professionals must operate. Aspirations to create a more diverse and inclusive work culture have become more complex as societal, political, and legal pushback and recent world events continue to unfold. We live in polarizing times where even saying “DE&I” can spark debate and attack.

For administrators and DEI professionals, these conflicts can adversely affect health and well-being, especially one’s sense of optimism, meaning, purpose, and outlook on the future. As professionals who simultaneously serve the needs of organizations and the individuals who comprise them during times of volatility, complexity, and uncertainty, this work can take quite a toll. It can be stressful to consistently be the professional face of the organization while also providing genuine empathy to individual employees in need of a safe space to express themselves. One DEI professional described it as “living as a double agent.”

Maintaining this reality without sacrificing one's voice and mental health is a significant concern. Being able to genuinely express oneself while straddling a limited line of autonomy, power, and control is critical. Adding to the stressors is the frequent disappointment over the lack of progress and the organizational reticence to stay the course, especially when conversations become uncomfortable.

Many enter this work enthusiastically, hopeful that they will be able to enact real, impactful change in a short period. The reality is that this work is painstakingly slow and highly complex, with multiple layers of conscious and unconscious, explicit, and implicit, rules and laws, customs, and practices, making change hard. It is woven into our culture, behaviors, beliefs, and institutionalized practices, and it will take a generation or more of DEI practitioners to change it. In a culture where rewards and gratification are expected instantaneously, the momentum of change can feel like it's moving backward. Moving the needle will only happen if our efforts become part of the permanent culture through our organizations' policies, procedures, and practices.

The DEI professional/administrator wears many hats and occupies multiple personas, constantly code-switching to meet the needs of the organization and the individuals they serve. The frontline professional is exposed to various experiences, some of which can be traumatic to witness and then process alone. Often working in isolation, the frontline DEI professional may need more time, awareness, or internal resources to carry and process all they are exposed to. Passive or vicarious trauma can mount, resulting in chronic feelings of overwhelm, distress, and exhaustion.

### **Self-Care for DEI Professionals**

In the interests of developing self-care best practices for administrators, we must continue developing spaces within our workplace to share thoughts, ideas, feelings, and diverse experiences. Spaces safe for discussion, debate, and dialogue take time, effort, practice, patience, support, and persistence to create. We must increasingly build it into our organizational structures. It takes an ongoing collaboration of all stakeholders within our professional communities. It also takes strategically thinking forward, inspiring leadership within our sponsoring organizations to stay the course and continue investing in its most valuable resources - people. We must continue to engage in ongoing educational programs that build knowledge, raise awareness, enlist collaboration, and develop action-oriented cultures, even when it's no longer trending. Each microcosm of authenticity we foster builds trust and understanding, strengthening our muscle memory to handle the more complicated and messy aspects of fighting for change. We must find the faith to recognize that change is happening, and the struggle must continue - even if we can't see the end of the battle. And just as there is strength in numbers, finding wellsprings of energy and power in the camaraderie of others in the legal admin community can help rejuvenate one's soul.

### **We have to get comfortable with being uncomfortable.**

We must work to become familiar with uncomfortable issues, conversations, and realities. Many do not have the privilege to ignore it. Too often, when conversations become intense or uncomfortable, someone changes the subject. ***"Staying in the uncomfortable long enough to see another's reality can touch a heart and mind."*** We just have not collectively 'stayed there' long enough. Real change occurs when we are motivated long enough to change our thoughts and actions. We have seen this before following the murder of George Floyd. Public sentiment, wanting to change, is fed by people's internal motivations. People were outraged by what they saw on television, which motivated many to act. Four years later, as we become more used to such tragic events, we become less outraged at the next atrocity. We dissociate from the painful realities that others carry. Often, we even disconnect from our own.

The mere mention of an uncomfortable topic can trigger a tendency to change the subject. Some of us have the privilege to do so, and some of us change the subject because of uneasiness, anxiety, and fatigue.

Underrepresented and undervalued people cannot. This is more difficult. For those who must endure daily micro and macro aggressions, it is profoundly disappointing when the motivation to do this work wanes. Sometimes, the fatigue manifests itself in those who once called themselves allies. That breach of trust makes it increasingly more complex to believe in the next wave of good intentions. We must be able to talk about this. We have to say, *"I noticed when I brought up how difficult it is for me in my lived experience...you changed the subject."* We have to develop trust and rapport with one another to have those uncomfortable conversations.

### **Summary**

We are leaders striving to advance our culture. We are working hard to improve the humanity of our workplaces. Let us stay focused on the excellent work we have been doing and not fall prey to fatigue, resistance, or distraction. We must build upon the gains of the past by moving forward. At ALANYC, we have made great strides in this direction through our scheduled social events, educational programming, workshop seminars, speaker series, book club, and essential committee work. The DEI committee, for example, through its annual publication PRISM, exemplifies the work being "one." Moving the needle forward" requires ongoing support and engagement of all willing to continue being open and vulnerable and willing to continue having "uncomfortable conversations" whenever and wherever possible. While the legal industry lags others in Diversity, Equity, **AND** Inclusion, it also has the reputation of historically leading all past social justice movements.

**Let us find the faith to continue the work we need to do to the lead in the workplace.**

# NEW YORK CITY'S MIGRANT CRISIS

**SARAH GILLEN**  
**EMERGENCY SKILLS**

**ANDREW AGUIRRE, HCM**  
**ISOLVED**

Around the world, individuals and families are fleeing their homelands. Many people move for economic reasons, to escape persecution (becoming refugees), or because of the ongoing violations of human rights. According to the International Rescue Committee (IRC), a refugee is a person who is “forced to flee their homes, that cross an international border to flee war, violence or persecution.” The UN defines an international migrant as any individual who has changed their residency record outside their country. Today, more people than ever live in nations other than where they were born. While most people migrate out of choice, others must move out of necessity. In 2020, approximately 281 million people had migrated from their country of origin. Explicitly speaking, 48% of them were female. In addition, Europe and Asia occupied 31% of the total tallied migrants in that poll. Meanwhile, Caribbean and Oceania countries had less than 5% of those total migrants.<sup>1</sup>

In 2021, over 100 million people have been displaced. People are fleeing war and economic disasters in Afghanistan, Syria, Yemen, Somalia, Ethiopia, Venezuela, and the Ukraine. This influx is a 20% increase from the previous year. In addition to war, the climate crisis has increased the number of people leaving their homes.

In New York City, there has been an influx of over 100,000 refugees and migrants in the last year. Individuals with refugee status are given international protection under the law and lifesaving support. The individuals fleeing Ukraine, for example, are designated refugees until it is safe once again for them to return home. Asylum seekers, on the other hand, are also seeking protection from dangers in their country, but their local situation does not meet the international definition of refugee. Asylum seekers must prove they are worthy to remain in the receiving country.

This influx has created multiple challenges for New York City and many large cities around the United States. The challenges include housing, education, and finding work.



According to the *New York Times*, New York City is the only major US city required to provide a bed for every homeless person who asks for one. Due to the high housing costs and the large number of families entering the city, Mayor Eric Adams has imposed a 60-day limit on the duration a family may stay at any shelter. Under the new policy, single adults must reapply after 30 days in a shelter. Critics oppose this plan, stating it would cause an interruption in schooling and work opportunities. For example, in a recently opened shelter at Floyd Bennet Field in Brooklyn, NY, most migrants left after they arrived. The new location is not accessible to public transportation, which would inhibit their childrens' ability to attend the schools in which they had already been registered, as well as commute to the jobs they had found in other boroughs, especially the Bronx.

Schools have had to evolve to meet the needs of school-aged migrants. According to CNN, nearly 30,000 students have been added to the New York City public school system. PS 111 in Manhattan, for example, had over 100 new students registered over a few days in July 2022.

New York City's Department of Education has hired new staff to address the increased population and their unique needs. Specialized English teachers and social workers have been hired to support their language development and personal food security and clothing needs.

To succeed in New York City, newcomers will need to find work to support themselves. Unfortunately, federal law makes finding work legally difficult. Currently, asylum seekers must wait 150 days to apply for employment authorization. While this is a reduction from the previous 365 days, it makes it impossible for migrants to support themselves before losing shelter housing. Recognizing this, in September 2023, the Biden administration offered Temporary Protection Status (TPS) to over 450,000 Venezuelans. TPS protects deportation and work authorization. United States Customs and Immigration Services (USCIS) is also accelerating the processing of work authorization applications; however, it will still take time to integrate the volume of refugees into the labor market.

The NYC Government has reported data that there are 476,000 undocumented workers. The NYC Comptroller, Brad Lander, states that he sees this as an opportunity. His perspective is that immigrants help benefit the economy in many capacities.<sup>2</sup> Undocumented immigrants support economic growth, pay taxes, and serve as essential workers. Some view this as keeping our economy running. The American Community Survey estimated that immigrants contributed \$30.8 billion in annual taxes for 2021 (including state, local, and federal). It was estimated in the same survey that New York State received 3 billion in payment from undocumented workers.<sup>3</sup> If we talk about opportunity, this is a symbiotic benefit for both the United States and our undocumented workers.

Furthermore, let's delve into immigrants' roles in economic expansion and workforce development. In 2022, the Department of Labor reported that approximately 18% of the US workforce comprised immigrant workers.<sup>4</sup> But in NYC, they occupy 43% of the workforce.<sup>5</sup> The US Chamber of Commerce reports that in NYC, most immigrant workers are entrepreneurs. They are not taking away jobs but creating jobs for themselves.<sup>6</sup>

In summary, New York City is one of the largest immigrant hubs the world has ever seen. As we date back to the history of Ellis Island, the History Channel reports that 40% of US Citizens can trace an ancestor that made it through the island.<sup>7</sup> Despite the challenges, New York City is a strong and welcoming city. Immigrants have always made the US better. The US is a country made of immigrants, and that is why it is a country with the mantra of "We the People."

If you would like to help, please visit the NYC website for resources to support asylum seekers. Specifically, they seek monetary donations and new clothing, toiletries, and hygiene items.

For donation locations, please visit:

<https://www.nyc.gov/site/fund/initiatives/nyc-stands-with-asylum-seekers.page> for donation locations.

Footnotes:

1. <https://www.un.org/en/global-issues/migration>
2. <https://comptroller.nyc.gov/reports/facts-not-fear-how-welcoming-immigrants-benefits-new-york-city/>
3. <https://www.history.com/topics/immigration/ellis-island>
4. <https://www.nyc.gov/assets/immigrants/downloads/pdf/MOIA-2021-Report.pdf>
5. <https://immigrationimpact.com/2023/03/22/how-undocumented-immigrants-pay-taxes-itin/>
6. <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/forbrn.pdf>
7. <https://www.uschamber.com/workforce/america-works-data-center>



# THE EVOLUTION OF MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS IN SOCIETY AND THE WORKPLACE

**JOHN CONNOLLY**  
**LDI CONNECT**

According to the US Department of Labor, “Approximately one in five Americans experience some form of mental health condition each year.” In the past, the topic of mental illness was often subject to harsh stigma and misunderstanding, leading to gross discrimination and marginalization. Some examples of stigmas include ideas that people with mental health issues are dangerous, have physical health conditions and are unable to contribute to society. Others suggest that people of a certain race, ethnicity, religion or ideology are more prone to mental illness than others. Both society and the workplace have been tainted with bias. This has perpetuated a cycle of silence and isolation for those individuals suffering from mental health challenges.

Fortunately, there has been a significant shift in recent years, with increasing awareness and efforts to address mental health discrimination, such as depression and anxiety. People are becoming more accepting of mental health illnesses and more supportive of people with issues. Here, we will explore a bit of the history of mental illness discrimination and the strides being made to provide a more supportive and inclusive environment today.

Historically, mental illness has been so unfairly stigmatized, and those who suffered often faced prejudice and discrimination. Misconceptions about mental health created and perpetuated a culture of fear and ignorance, contributing to the marginalization of individuals with mental health conditions. In the workplace, employees dealing with mental health challenges were frequently subjected to discrimination, as employers and colleagues lacked the knowledge and empathy needed to provide a supportive environment.

Discrimination reveals itself in various forms, such as exclusion, demeaning language, and even termination of employment. The fear of judgment by those suffering from mental instability led many to try to conceal what they were suffering from, which only intensified the problem and perpetuated a culture of silence.

In recent years, there has been a significant change in our society regarding understanding mental health. Increased awareness campaigns, advocacy, and further scientific research have contributed to a more informed and compassionate outlook. In the workplace, progressive organizations recognize the importance of fostering mental health-friendly environments, understanding that the well-being of their employees directly correlates with productivity and their company's overall success.



Here are several examples of how mental health is being addressed and supported in the workplace:

- Many workplace environments now implement education and awareness programs to destigmatize mental health issues. These programs provide employees with information, reduce unfair stereotypes, and encourage open conversations about mental well-being, which are essential.
- Employee assistance programs are becoming more common in the workplace, offering confidential counseling and support services to employees dealing with mental health challenges.
- Progressive workplaces are implementing policies that prioritize mental health. This includes flexible work schedules, remote work options, and more mental health days.
- Anti-discrimination laws are being strengthened to ensure that employees can't be unfairly treated or terminated based on their mental health status.
- Leadership plays a crucial role in setting the example that establishes the tone for the culture in the workplace. Senior leadership must continue to be mental health advocates by implementing needed policies and encouraging open discussion among employees regarding their mental health experiences.
- Anti-discrimination laws are evolving to ensure that employees can't be unfairly treated or terminated based on their mental health condition.

The tide continues to turn, and the narrative is changing despite a long history of discrimination against mental illness in society and the workplace. Through efforts in education, cultural transformation, and policy reform, more compassionate and supportive environments are revealing themselves. The journey to improve things continues, and ongoing advocacy, awareness, and policy development are essential in breaking down the remaining barriers that foster genuine inclusivity and change for everyone, regardless of their mental health status.

For more information on this important topic, visit:  
<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/17716044/>  
<https://www.dol.gov/agencies/odep/program-areas/mental-health>

# TEAS FROM AROUND THE WORLD

**ORIA L. APONTE & MEAGHAN MALDONADO  
HODGSON RUSS LLP**

In past PRISM issues, we have had the pleasure of writing to you on diverse foods from around the world. In this issue, we felt it was time to present you with a section on a popular beverage – tea! Tea is very versatile and can be made with so many different added ingredients. We once again took a virtual tour around the world to find you some amazing teas that are sure to fill your hearts with warmth and comfort, along with some incredible health benefits. We hope to continue to inspire you to add diversity to your palates and your tables!



**Africa: Touareg Tea** – This tea is rich with mint and sugar which is sure to satisfy anyone’s sweet tooth! It uses green tea leaves which can be a little bland to most palates but mixed with the mint makes it an extraordinary everyday beverage. It also has exceptional health qualities as unlike the other teas mentioned, Touareg Tea is beneficial to hormone balance and controls acne.



**Asia: Noon Chai** – The most unique and beautiful of teas is made from a mixture of Kashmiri green tea leaves, spices, saffron, cinnamon, and star anise. It is mixed with baking soda and milk to give it a distinct pink color then garnished with crushed pistachios. This is a sweet and salty tea that can be enjoyed multiple times a day.



**Europe: Black Tea or Afternoon Tea** – If you want to relax and feel like a royal, steep yourself a cup of black tea and enjoy it with some finger sandwiches and small cakes. This simple tea is full antioxidants and provides other health benefits such as improved heart and gut health. Black tea is probably the strongest tasting of teas.



**North America: Cold Brew Iced Tea** – This method makes the tea naturally sweet, clean tasting and refreshing. It is the preferred way to drink it by the younger generations in the United States. It is quite simple to make just by placing your choice of tea leaves (usually black) in water, refrigerate for 5 hours and you’ll have yourself a whole pitcher of goodness!



**South America: Yerba Mate** – This tea plant only grows in specific parts of South America such as Brazil, Peru, and Argentina. It is known for its super health benefits such as higher energy and properties to lower cholesterol. The tea is served at many social and cultural gatherings.

# BLACK HISTORY MONTH RECAP

As ALANYC's DEI programming continues to grow, in 2024, we want to use our city's resources to continue educating our members and business partners with the hope they will share the knowledge and resources gained with their firms and communities. With this in mind, we launched our Black History Month observance with three in-person programs where we had outings in NYC, allowing participants to learn and celebrate Black History and commune with one another.

On February 15, our first outing was to see *Origin* at the Village East by Angelika Theatre. Directed by Academy Award nominee Ava DuVernay (SELMA), **ORIGIN** stars Academy Award nominee Aunjanue Ellis-Taylor (THE COLOR PURPLE) as a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist, Isabel Wilkerson who, while grappling with tremendous personal tragedy, sets herself on a path of global investigation and discovery. Inspired by Wilkerson's *New York Times* best-seller "Caste," **ORIGIN** explores the mystery of history, the wonders of romance, and a fight for the future of us all. *Deadline Hollywood Daily* raves, "Ava DuVernay continues to establish herself as one of the most vital voices in contemporary cinema." Movie and Concessions were courtesy of the chapter. After the movie, participants went to *Awash*. Celebrating its 25th anniversary, *Awash* is a Black-owned Ethiopian restaurant featured in *The New York Times*, *New Yorker*, *Food and Wine*, and *Bloomberg*, bringing New York City the rich history of Ethiopian cuisine.

The call was made asking chapter members and business partners to meet us at The Metropolitan Museum of Art (The MET). On Sunday, February 18, members and business partners met at The MET to explore the **Africa Byzantium, Before Yesterday We Could Fly: An Afrofuturist Period Room, The African Origin of Civilization**, and, for good measure, the **Women Dressing Women** exhibition. The trip to The MET allowed participants to see the many contributions of people of African descent. After we visited The MET, we traveled to Harlem, where we enjoyed lunch at *Miss Mamie's Spoonbread Too*, where owner, caterer and former Wilhelmina model Norma Jean Darden, served comfort food based on family recipes from her mother, Miss Mamie Jean Sampson Darden's, Alabama kitchen.

Our final outing was held on Wednesday, February 28, when we returned to Harlem to watch the Documentary Screening and Panel Discussion: "**Preschool to Prison**," at *New York Public Library – Harry Belafonte 115th Street Branch*.

According to the *University of Virginia*, an estimated 17,000 preschool students are suspended or expelled, and Black boys make up 8,000 of those suspensions and expulsions. Dr. Karen "Dr. K" Baptiste, founder of *Preschool to Prison, LLC*, along with filmmaker Edwin Walker's film, explores how the United States public school system is built and operated like a prison. Zero-tolerance policies are used to justify suspensions and arrests that set up a pathway to send children of color and children with special needs from school to prison. This riveting documentary spotlights personal accounts of people affected by the school-to-prison pipeline and examines the generational impact of these conditions on society. Dr. K has served on the International Board of Directors and the Education Committee at the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, where she advocated to Congress and developed national education policy points to address systemic barriers. She is also a co-author of ***The New Classroom Instruction That Works***.

We ended the evening with a great discussion and food at *Amy Ruth's*. *Amy Ruth's* has been a staple in Harlem and will celebrate 25 years of bringing Southern Comfort Cuisine to New York City. With dishes named after former President Barack Obama and other pillars of the Black Community, it was a dining experience we won't forget.

Thank you to all who attended our events. We hope that you found them both educational and inspiring.



# THANK YOU TO OUR TEAM AND OUR SUPPORTERS



Thank you to our 2023-2024 Board for the banner year and for supporting our DEI initiatives.

Thank you to the Outreach/Core team, *fit*ALANYC, and the 2023 Symposium team for collaborating on initiatives that benefit members, business partners, and the local communities in which we work.

Thank you to all our 2023 collaborators and speakers for sharing your stories and being subject matter experts. Your contributions furthered our goal of educating the legal industry on equity and inclusion.

Thank you to all our participants who have attended our events, whether virtually or in person. Your presence and added value are always greatly appreciated.

Thank you to Lauren Allen, the chapter's consultant, for your fantastic work and collaboration. The chapter's work and the DEI's team vision of inclusion are never lost upon us, and we appreciate the patience and time that you have dedicated to our teams.

Thank you to LDI Connect for your continued support of PRISM and for ensuring that our publication is beautifully printed each year.

Lastly, thank you to our 2023-2024 Diversity Equity & Inclusion team for your ideas, supporting initiatives, and co-facilitating events. We gained new members, and with your dedication to keeping DEI at the forefront, we had another successful year!

Cheers to our 2024–2025-chapter year!



THANK YOU TO OUR VALUED AND RESPECTED  
BUSINESS PARTNERS FOR SUPPORTING OUR  
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EMPIRE

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KONICA MINOLTA

TIMES SQUARE

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GRAND CENTRAL

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## FLATIRON

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## PENN STATION

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# PRISM



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