

Making a Difference, Wherever I Am
By Kimberly F. Medina

Like so many others, I was changed during the summer of 2020. Before then, I knew that discrimination was an issue in our society. I knew that racism, sexism, homophobia, and other forms of bigotry were far from eliminated. I knew that people were hurting and needed help. But I never stopped to consider who exactly they were or what help they might need. As a White, cisgender woman, these issues seemed just far enough away that my participation wasn't urgent, and I was always sure that there was someone closer to the issues and better equipped to help than I was. These things were out of sight, out of mind, and I had more pressing things to worry about.

Then, in May of 2020, a police officer knelt on a Black man's neck for eight minutes, and the world erupted with anger. The world-wide protests demanding justice and the subsequent movements seeking reforms were impossible to ignore. I no longer saw racism as a collection of vaguely defined problems for a distant group of people. I now saw very real problems for very real people, and it became clear that those problems affected everyone, including me.

I began to immerse myself in the issues, and the more I learned about Black perspectives and the systemic challenges that still abound in this country, the more I realized I could no longer sit on the sidelines and let someone else take care of things. And I knew that as a law student, as a scholar and future practitioner of law, I am uniquely positioned to step up and make a difference.

Or am I? Imposter syndrome set in almost as soon as I resolved to join the fight. I may be in law school, but I'm at the bottom of my class. I'm not a leader; half of my class doesn't even know who I am. I'm not innovative; I wouldn't know the first step in tackling an issue as big as systemic racism. Besides, I want to be a corporate lawyer. Being educated about securities or mergers and acquisitions does nothing to qualify me to effect social change. How can I possibly make any real difference?

With these doubts filling my mind and the desire to fight for change filling my heart, I began my 2L year unsure about what my path going forward needed to look like. Should I stick to my original plan to work in corporate law? Should I instead go into politics, where I could be on the frontlines of changing policy? Or perhaps I should take all the social justice and litigation classes and be a civil rights litigator? Nothing felt quite right.

I finally found my answer in the law school's Employment Discrimination course. As we spent week after week exploring the provisions of various anti-discrimination statutes and their application in everyday employment situations, it hit me. Discrimination and bigotry are so pervasive in every aspect of society, so we should be working to effect change in every aspect of society. I don't need to be a US senator or public policy advocate shouting for change at the Capitol. I don't need to be a Supreme Court justice or an eloquent litigator fighting for justice in the courtroom. I can make a difference wherever I am.

That realization gave me the confidence I needed. Notwithstanding my doubts about my qualifications, I have jumped with both feet into the SBA board's newly created Diversity, Equity, and Belonging position and into a position as student representative on BYU Law's new council with the same title. I have paid closer attention to the messages shared at Wednesday law forums and club events focused on diversity and belonging and have found that the principles discussed are universal and applicable to any sector of law I choose to practice in. Even in my corporate law classes, I have searched for ways the doctrines taught in those classes can be applied to social change and have found that the opportunities for enacting change in the corporate world are innumerable.

I still don't know exactly what the future holds for me, but I do know that I will not be on the sidelines of the push for social change. I may not be the perfect advocate for such change, but my experiences at BYU Law have given me the skills and confidence to go out and do my part. And I know that because of that, I really can make a difference, wherever I am.