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# THE CRISIS AND OPPORTUNITY IN PUBLIC INTEREST LAW: A CHALLENGE TO LAW STUDENTS TO BE REBELLIOUS LAWYERS IN THE '90s

LUKE COLE\*

I have a simple message for law students: this country is in crisis, and it needs your help. In this commentary, I will discuss that crisis, including the crisis in legal services, and then focus on how law students can create opportunity from that crisis. I conclude the article with a practical component, where I explore how to survive law school and how to get a job. My comments are based on my own experiences as a poverty lawyer, but they are relevant to other public interest law disciplines as well.

## THE CRISIS

Things are getting worse in the United States. Many communities across this country are in crisis today, reeling under the continuing blows of poverty, disinvestment and redlining,<sup>1</sup> plant closings, drug addiction, racism, unemployment, crime, environmental degradation, and police misconduct. The gap between the rich and the poor continues to grow wider. At the same time that the rich are getting richer and the poor, poorer, we are seeing a shift in the tax structure away from progressive taxes such as property and income taxes, and toward sales and consumption taxes — regressive taxes that disproportionately burden the poor. The tax monies raised are not being used to address the pressing social problems in low-income communities, however, as whole communities and sectors of our society have been written off by the government and politicians as hopeless, intractable problems.

For many law students, wrapped up in the insular law school environment, it may be hard to imagine that these problems still exist. But sometimes the signs of the crisis are so strong and powerful that they cannot be ignored. The recent uprising in Los Angeles, for example, entered our living rooms through radio and television. It was not just an echo of the 1960s, either — it was the

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\* Staff Attorney, California Rural Legal Assistance Foundation; General Counsel, Center on Race, Poverty & the Environment. This article is adapted from the keynote speech given at the Stanford Public Interest Law Conference, October 15, 1993. I thank Nancy Shelby for her insight and patient editorial comments on earlier drafts.

<sup>1</sup> "Redlining" is the practice by banks and insurance companies of not providing loans or insurance coverage to certain neighborhoods — of drawing a red line on the map around certain areas within which the corporations will not provide capital or insurance. See John Dubin, *From Junkyards to Gentrification: Explicating a Right To Protective Zoning in Low-Income Communities of Color*, 77 MINN. L. REV. 739, 752 n.57 (1993).

worst urban unrest in the history of the country. The conditions of racial inequality and class stratification that provided the tinderbox which the Rodney King beating verdict ignited exist today in dozens of other cities across this country. As Martin Luther King said, "[A] riot is at bottom the language of the unheard."<sup>2</sup> More people need to start listening.

Things are getting worse in the poverty law profession as well. The number of poor people has continued to rise in the last fifteen years,<sup>3</sup> while the number of poor peoples' lawyers has declined by about one-third since 1980,<sup>4</sup> largely as a result of Ronald Reagan's attempts to completely eliminate legal services for poor people.<sup>5</sup>

The problem is not just about *numbers*, however, it is also about *goals*. In the 1960s, poor peoples' lawyers were visionaries, imagining legions of poor people taking control of their own lives and moving out of poverty. In the 1970s, poor peoples' lawyers confronted the bureaucratization of poverty law,<sup>6</sup> and many ended up bogged down in routine service work. In the 1980s, we literally fought for the very life of legal services. As a result of these struggles, many poor peoples' advocates chose the path of least resistance by focusing on low-profile, non-controversial legal work, such as divorces, that rarely challenged the systemic nature of poverty.

A few legal services offices around the country, including California Rural

<sup>2</sup> MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR., *WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE: CHAOS OR COMMUNITY?* 112 (1967).

<sup>3</sup> See UNITED STATES GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE, *POVERTY TRENDS, 1980-88 CHANGES IN FAMILY COMPOSITION AND INCOME SOURCES AMONG THE POOR* 2, 33 (1992).

<sup>4</sup> See, e.g., Rosalind Resnick, *Looking at Alternative Services The Lawyer/Non-Lawyer Wall Continues to Erode*, NAT'L L.J., June 10, 1991, at 1; Randall Samborn, *Low, Moderate Incomes ABA Study: Legal Needs Not Met*, NAT'L L.J., Feb. 14, 1994, at 3.

<sup>5</sup> Ronald Reagan's animosity towards legal services to poor people stemmed from his experiences with (and attempts to eliminate) California Rural Legal Assistance when he was governor of California in the late 1960s. See generally Michael Bennett & Cruz Reynoso, *California Rural Legal Assistance (CRLA): Survival of a Poverty Law Practice*, 1 CHICANO L. REV. 1 (1972).

Once he became President, Reagan "zero-budgeted" — that is, provided no funding for — the federal Legal Services Corporation ("LSC") in seven out of the eight budgets he sent to Congress. Congress resisted the elimination of legal services entirely, but cut approximately one-third of the budget of LSC, which is used to provide grants to three hundred and twenty-five programs with 1800 offices serving poor people nationwide. See generally Roger C. Cramton, *Crisis in Legal Services for the Poor*, 26 VILL. L. REV. 521 (1981); Gregory Goldin, *Legal Aid After Reagan*, CAL. LAW., Dec. 1987, at 35.

<sup>6</sup> The "bureaucratization of poverty law" refers to the mind-numbing proliferation of rules and regulations — and their consequent bureaucracies to make, enforce, ignore, and break them — that characterizes several poverty law fields, particularly public benefits.

Legal Assistance ("CRLA"), did not tone down their work, but continued forward in spite of government harassment.<sup>7</sup> When Ronald Reagan proposed eliminating legal services entirely, our attitude at CRLA was, "If we are going to be eliminated, so be it, but we are going to aggressively represent our clients' interests up until the day they shut us down." We knew from experience that in the political struggles for money to fund programs for the poor, maintaining a high profile meant that we could generate significant moral and political support from our client communities and other allies, support that was crucial to our survival. Unfortunately, CRLA's aggressive posture, which included suing the federal Legal Services Corporation on more than one occasion, was the exception rather than the rule, as many programs retreated into "safe" legal fields and strategies.

Such a retreat is understandable. Our own stunted aspirations in legal services are in large part a reflection of the constraints imposed on us by society. Take, for example, the evolution of housing law advocacy on behalf of poor people: twenty years ago, housing attorneys worked to bring substandard housing up to code. Ten years ago, those same lawyers labored to get *any* housing they could for their clients. Today, housing attorneys are trying to fight laws which criminalize homelessness.<sup>8</sup> It is difficult to be a visionary when your clients are locked up simply because they are homeless.

I realize I am painting a bleak picture. I do so for two reasons. First, because the picture *is* bleak.<sup>9</sup> Second, the situation demands action, the action of law students nationwide. Never has there been a time when we more desperately needed bright, idealistic young activists to enter the poverty law field and reinvigorate it.

The Chinese character for crisis is two lines, one symbolizing danger, the other opportunity. The crisis we face in the United States, and in the poverty

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<sup>7</sup> This government harassment included restrictive regulations, hostile monitoring visits, and funding cutbacks. See, e.g., Luke W. Cole, *Empowerment as the Key to Environmental Protection: The Need for Environmental Poverty Law*, 19 *ECOLOGY L.Q.* 619, 659-660 (1992); Claudia MacLachlan, *An Unclear Future*, 14 *NAT'L L.J.*, Oct. 14, 1991, at 1, 42 (reporting that the 1991 national legal services budget was \$327 million, just \$6 million more than the 1981 appropriation, and that the budget would have to be \$500 million just to keep pace with inflation).

<sup>8</sup> San Francisco, for example, now cites people for sleeping in public. Furthermore, the city's mayor has decided that one way to lessen the city's homeless problem is to take away homeless people's shopping carts. If this unenlightened response is happening in San Francisco, one of the most liberal cities in the country, one can imagine what it is like elsewhere. *Editorial, Shopping Carts*, S.F. *CHRON.*, Sept. 23, 1993, at A24.

<sup>9</sup> There is no other way to characterize the situation when the Governor of the State of California advocates that certain children born *in the United States* should not be United States citizens, simply because of the undocumented status of their mothers. In addition, a statewide ballot proposition in California, Proposition 174, which would have created a voucher system for education and thus threatened to ruin public education as we know it, stood a serious chance of passing in the November 1993 elections.

law community, is an opportunity for law students and young lawyers. It is an opportunity to create new approaches to social change, to dream up new visions of social justice, to inject new blood into public interest law.

How does one take advantage of this opportunity? I have some advice as to how to realize the opportunity, based on my own journey through law school and into the poverty law profession. Some of the advice is about law school, and some is about finding, and then enjoying, a job.

### SCHOOL

School first. I have three overlapping messages: start in school, support each other, and speak out. I hope that each message will become more clear as I explain it.

Start in school.

To maximize your opportunities, you must start in school. This means not only taking classes in public interest law, but doing internships during the summers and the school year, making contacts in your desired field, doing your homework on that field, and being active in campus groups.

Whatever you want to do to change the world, you can start in school. You will never have a better or easier opportunity to learn organizing and strategizing around a problem than in law school. You have an incredible luxury in law school, to think about and take on issues of your choice, rather than having them thrust upon you. And the stakes, while they seem important to you while you are in the struggle, are relatively low: you won't be arrested, be beaten by police or by company thugs, lose your job, endure death threats, be deported, or be evicted for your organizing in law school. These are all obstacles, however, which our clients face when trying to organize — or simply live — in their communities.

There are many social justice issues right in law school. If you want to work on labor issues, most universities have horrendous labor policies. Local unions could use your support. If nuclear issues interest you, the nuclear weapons research on campus could be challenged. If you want to work on the abuses of corporate power, there are some very interesting licensing agreements between universities, graduate student researchers, and major U.S. corporations, especially in the high technology area, that could be investigated and exposed. If housing law and ferreting out slumlords is your calling, many universities are atrocious landlords. Within the law school itself, students could continue to push for diversity in the faculty and the student body, or try to prevent organizations which discriminate against gays and lesbians, like the Judge Advocate General's ("JAG") Corps of the U.S. Armed Forces, from being allowed to interview on campus.

You can do some of the organizing in pursuit of economic self-interest. If

you strengthen your Public Interest Law Foundation ("PILF"),<sup>10</sup> it will be wealthy enough to give you a generous grant for a summer job or for post-graduation employment. If you work to raise funds for the law school's loan-forgiveness program, the ability to take a public interest job after law school will become a realistic option rather than economic suicide.<sup>11</sup>

All of the work you do in law school is crucial training for when you leave school. It is much easier to try tactics and strategies, make mistakes, and learn from them, while in law school, than to make those mistakes when client lives are at stake. And, I guarantee, you will never have an easier community to organize than a law school: you will never again have such a concentrated group of well-educated, politically aware people, relatively homogeneous in age and socio-economic background, *who all happen to have mailboxes within thirty feet of each other*. Seize the opportunity.

Support each other.

At its most basic level, supporting each other means raising your hand in class to echo or support a fellow student who has taken a courageous stand. It means finding a group of like-minded students with whom you can share your fears and aspirations. It means having a group of people who can help you realize when the law school experience is starting to change you.

A personal anecdote may help you understand this point. When I was in law school we had a small band of progressive students who hung out together. Our section mates called us the "Peace Corps," we called ourselves the "counter hegemonic front" or "chf." We put out an underground newspaper, the *Reptile*. I was the cartoonist.<sup>12</sup> Through the *Reptile* we had a great deal of fun, got political work done, *and* supported each other. This experience had an important effect on us: it helped us retain our values through law school. In law school, one of my friends asked me whether I really felt I could change any of our classmates' thinking through my cartoons. I told her, "No, but it sure keeps them from changing me." Our support group helped us all get through law school without being changed too much by the institution or our

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<sup>10</sup> Public Interest Law Foundations exist at many law schools nationwide, and are student-run, student-financed organizations dedicated to providing public interest grants. Students who are taking lucrative summer or full-time jobs pledge some percentage of their salary (one day's pay, or one percent of their salary) to the PILF, which then pools the money raised and disperses it to students who are undertaking low- or non-paying public interest law internships.

<sup>11</sup> This is an important point, so let me be clear about it: *every* law school that has a strong loan-forgiveness program has one *only* because of active students. The idea for loan forgiveness programs did not spring up in some benevolent dean's head; law schools are not looking for new expenses in this era of budget deficits. It takes student initiative, student pressure, and student perseverance to create, build, and sustain loan forgiveness programs.

<sup>12</sup> See *infra* cartoon by Luke Cole, *So You Want To Be a Lawyer*, reprinted in Appendix.

fellow classmates.

But supporting one another also has broader implications. It means building unlikely coalitions. When the dean of the law school receives a letter from the Environmental Law Society, the Law School Fencing Team, and the Law School Veterans Association supporting increased faculty diversity, it will get his or her attention. Similarly, when the La Raza Law Students, the African-American Law Students and the Asian/Pacific Islander Law Students Associations support a new environmental clinic, that will attract attention. All students have an interest in a more diverse faculty, and all have an interest in expanding the clinical offerings at the law school. These seemingly unlikely coalitions can also be important opportunities for students to talk with each other across racial, gender, and other boundaries and see the commonality of many issues.

Talking with each other is, if nothing else, good training for your future as a public interest lawyer. If you cannot talk to people who are different from you in law school, chances are you won't be able to talk to people different from you once you graduate, either. And, as Mari Matsuda points out, "We don't learn by only talking with ourselves."<sup>13</sup>

This is difficult work, and it is difficult for white people to discuss. It hurts emotionally for us white folks to be personally challenged on issues of race and gender — and in this work, one gets challenged a lot — but that hurt cannot be even a fraction of the psychic pain of those who must face racism, sexism, and homophobia on a daily basis. So I appeal to future lawyers: challenge yourself and allow yourself to be challenged. The rewards are well worth it. We have to take every opportunity to fight racism, sexism, and homophobia, even if it, uncomfortably, means confronting that racism, sexism, and homophobia in ourselves.

### Speak Out.

My last, and perhaps most important, piece of advice for surviving law school is to *speak out*. I mean this primarily in the context of the classroom, but it applies in a variety of contexts. What do I mean by speaking out? I mean constantly challenging the status quo in your classes, continually calling the professor and other students on oppressive statements, and generally being a rabble-rouser. Duncan Kennedy calls it "speaking off the wall."<sup>14</sup>

Speaking out is important for at least five reasons. First, when you speak out in class it breaks the cycle of silence. If a professor or student says something you know is wrong, or offensive, and you do not speak out, it doesn't feel good. You feel disempowered, and you are less likely to speak out the next

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<sup>13</sup> Mari J. Matsuda, *Voices of America: Accent, Antidiscrimination Law, and a Jurisprudence for the Last Reconstruction*, 100 YALE L.J. 1329, 1389 (1991).

<sup>14</sup> Duncan Kennedy, *Notes of an Oppositionist in Academic Politics* 7 (1982) (unpublished manuscript, on file with the author). I credit Duncan with introducing me to the idea of speaking off the wall and refining my theory and practice of it.

time. Conversely, if you speak out, you feel empowered, and are more likely to take the chance at the next opportunity. By speaking out, you are being true to yourself.

Second, speaking out is an important way to expand the boundaries of the debate. If the debate in the classroom is between the neo-liberal Democratic party line and the neo-conservative Republican party line, that debate is excluding most of the global political spectrum that spans from anarcho-syndicalist groups like *Sendero Luminoso*, to fascist military dictatorships. By simply speaking out and injecting another perspective, you can broaden the terms of the debate. You also allow others who may not be as far out as you are — but who may still be outside the narrow dominant paradigm — to speak out.

By speaking off the wall, you can also change the *terms* of the debate, which is often important when you are trying to inject reality into the law school classroom. An example of this from my own law school days involves the long-arm doctrine, as embodied in a case called *World-Wide Volkswagen v. Woodson*.<sup>15</sup> This case dealt with long-arm jurisdiction, which determines whether or not a person can sue another party located in some other state. When we were discussing this in my civil procedure class, the discussion focused on whether or not there was enough “minimum contact” between the company and the state in which the injury occurred to allow the state court to have jurisdiction over the suit. Needless to say, it was all very dry and technical. One of my friends, speaking off the wall, reminded the class that we were not just talking about “minimum contacts” and “in personam jurisdiction,” but whether a woman and her two children, who were horribly disfigured and almost burned to death in a car fire, would be able to recover anything from the multi-national company which was responsible for the design defect that caused the fire. His speaking off the wall reminded us that we could think like people, as well as like lawyers.

The third benefit to speaking out is that it helps you identify allies. When someone says something in class that seems outrageous, there is that moment's hesitation when you think, “Is it just me?” However, when the person three rows down raises her hand and says, “Excuse me,” then you know that you are not alone. Other students can then raise their hands and say, “That offended me too.”

This ties back to supporting each other. When I was in law school, when our small group of progressive students knew a subject was coming up which we did not trust our professors to handle with sensitivity, such as rape or slavery, we would meet before class and strategize about how to present our position in class by supporting and building on each other's points.

The fourth reason to speak off the wall is that you educate each other. By sharing your own perspective and life experience, you show people that there are other points of view in the debate. If you have a class of 120 people talking about ways to solve social problems for poor people, such as revamping wel-

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<sup>15</sup> 444 U.S. 286 (1979).



fare, and not a single one of them has ever been on welfare, one can imagine the discussion is going to be rather uninformed unless you, the one person who has been on welfare, are willing to share your experiences about it.

Finally, by speaking out, you might just convince somebody of the correctness of your position. But don't count on it.

So, you get through law school being active, supporting each other, and speaking out. Where does this leave you in the job market?

### GETTING A JOB

Getting a job is the hard part. The bad news is that the entire legal profession is still recovering from the recession, and many public interest firms have cut way back on their hiring, which was already competitive. The good news is that if you are creative, persistent, willing to take chances, and willing to relocate to Fargo, North Dakota, there are jobs out there.

Based on my own experience, I've come up with Luke's Seven Simple Steps to Satisfying Self-Employment.<sup>16</sup>

#### Luke's Seven Simple Steps to Satisfying Self-Employment

1. *Be persistent.*

2. *Assess your opportunities.* What exactly do you want to do? Who is doing it, if anyone? Where? *Don't reinvent the wheel.* What works? How do you affiliate with the group doing what you want to do, or how do you replicate their success? Where do such groups get their money?

3. *Do your homework.* This operates on two levels.

First, on your *job*:

- Interview the people you've identified in Step 2.
- Determine the need in your chosen community.
- Write a big, long, tedious paper for school about your ideas so you learn all about your chosen field.
- Figure out whose support you need to be successful.

Second, on the *money* angle:

- Determine if your school has funding sources (such as a Public Interest Law Foundation).
- Check out the Foundation Center nearest you. Most major urban areas have Foundation Centers (look in the phone book) which are a wonderful resource for people trying to raise money.
- Contact the National Association for Public Interest Law ("NAPIL")<sup>17</sup> and get their *Fellowship Guide*, listing dozens of post-graduate fellowships.
- Look at grantseeker's guides in your library or bookstore.

<sup>16</sup> There are actually eight, but it wasn't appropriately alliterative.

<sup>17</sup> 1118 22nd Street, NW, Third Floor, Washington, D.C. 20037.

- *Talk with people who have done it before — don't reinvent the wheel.*

4. *Sell it.* Sell your idea to organizations doing similar work, to foundations, to your chosen community. Be creative: why is your project/idea so nifty? What niche does it fill? How will it revolutionize the delivery of legal services in the United States in the next two to four years?

5. *Be flexible.* Don't be afraid to change your mind, plans, or career.

6. *Start early.* Summer work in your target field is one way to understand what the field looks like and who the players are. Work with your school's Public Interest Law Foundation — the stronger and richer your school's PILF is, the more money they are going to have to give when you graduate. This is called "enlightened self interest." You might also work with NAPIL or other public interest networks to discover funding ideas and sources.

7. *Be realistic.* Include in your action plan a self-assessment piece, where you determine how things are going. Don't over-commit or over-expand.

8. *Have fun.* Doing important, innovative legal work for those who are traditionally underserved by our legal system should not only be challenging, fulfilling, and sustaining, it should be something you enjoy. You're designing the job, so if it's no fun, you're the one who can change it.

### Where to Get a Job and How to Do It

There are plenty of jobs in legal services if you are willing to work outside of the big cities. Take a chance. Work in rural Kentucky in the coalfields. Work on the Navajo Reservation. Work at Idaho Legal Services. Maybe you'll only work out there for a couple of years, but I guarantee that those years will be filled with incredible experiences. It is one thing to move to San Francisco and become the forty-fifth low-income housing attorney in the city. It is quite another thing to move to Alabama and be the *only* legal services attorney in the entire state representing its sizeable migrant farmworker population. Talk about responsibility!

In addition to my Seven Simple Steps, I have this advice: go to legal services, and go rural. From the crisis of lack of jobs in San Francisco and New York, students have the opportunity to really challenge themselves and go to Fort Collins, Colorado; Apopka, Florida; or Del Rio, Texas. There is a desperate need for lawyers in these and other rural areas.

But more important than where you work, is how you do it. We need *visionary* young lawyers, what Jerry López calls rebellious lawyers.<sup>18</sup> These are lawyers who are interested in their offices being more than simply places to service an endless chain of poor people without ever addressing any of the reasons why they are poor, and without ever challenging the system that keeps them poor. We have enough timid lawyers today.

Poverty lawyers have to rededicate themselves to the initial vision of legal

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<sup>18</sup> See generally GERALD P. LÓPEZ, *REBELLIOUS LAWYERING: ONE CHICANO'S VISION OF PROGRESSIVE LAW PRACTICE* (1992).

services, which was to help poor people move up and out of poverty. Let's go back to the beginning. In 1966, Clinton Bamberger, the very first director of the Legal Services Program in Lyndon Johnson's Office of Economic Opportunity, said that the goal of legal services was to "design new social, legal and political tools and vehicles to move poor people from deprivation, depression, and despair to opportunity, hope and ambition . . ."<sup>19</sup> Somewhere along the line, we've lost that vision. But law students can recapture it.

In addition to legal tools, Bamberger called for poverty lawyers to use *social* and *political* tools to move poor people, to organize them, to have them take control of their lives. We need to look to the past to reclaim this vision and look to the future for ways to realize it.

This vision is one of the reasons we set up our environmental poverty law project at the CRLA Foundation. We do environmental justice work for two reasons. The first, and most obvious, is the impact of environmental hazards. Every environmental hazard that affects humans, from air pollution to lead poisoning, from the siting of toxic dumps to pesticide poisoning, from rat bites to contaminated groundwater, affects poor people and people of color more than it affects wealthy people and white people.<sup>20</sup> So, to respond to our clients' needs, we began taking on these types of cases, beginning with a pesticide case in 1969. That case, brought on behalf of six migrant farmworkers, challenged the use of the pesticide that farmworkers told us was most dangerous, DDT.<sup>21</sup> The suit ultimately led to the banning of DDT. So, when you watch the brown pelicans and peregrine falcons,<sup>22</sup> thank those six farmworkers, and thank their attorney, CRLA's Ralph Santiago Abascal.

We do environmental justice work because of the impact of environmental hazards, but we also do it for the *opportunity*. Environmental cases serve as great organizing tools, unlike most of the standard legal services fare, such as housing law, immigration law, or public benefits law. For example, a housing law client being evicted sees herself as having an individual problem. An immigration law client being deported experiences his deportation as an individual problem. A public benefits client experiences her denial of Social Secur-

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<sup>19</sup> HARRY P. STUMPF, *COMMUNITY POLITICS AND LEGAL SERVICES: THE OTHER SIDE OF THE LAW* 143 (1975) (quoting E. Clinton Bamberger, Jr., Director of the Office of Equal Opportunity Legal Services Program, Address to the National Conference of Bar Presidents (Feb. 19, 1966)).

<sup>20</sup> See, e.g., Luke W. Cole, *Empowerment as the Means to Environmental Protection: The Need for Environmental Poverty Law*, 19 *ECOLOGY L.Q.* 619, 621-31 nn.3-34 (1992) (listing dozens of anecdotal and empirical studies of the disproportionate impact of environmental hazards).

<sup>21</sup> See *Environmental Defense Fund v. Environmental Protection Agency*, 510 F.2d 1292 (D.C. Cir. 1975); *Environmental Defense Fund v. Hardin*, 428 F.2d 1093 (D.C. Cir. 1970); *Environmental Defense Fund v. Dep't of Health Educ. & Welfare*, 428 F.2d 1083 (D.C. Cir. 1970).

<sup>22</sup> These are two species who were in radical decline because of DDT and which have bounced back since its banning.

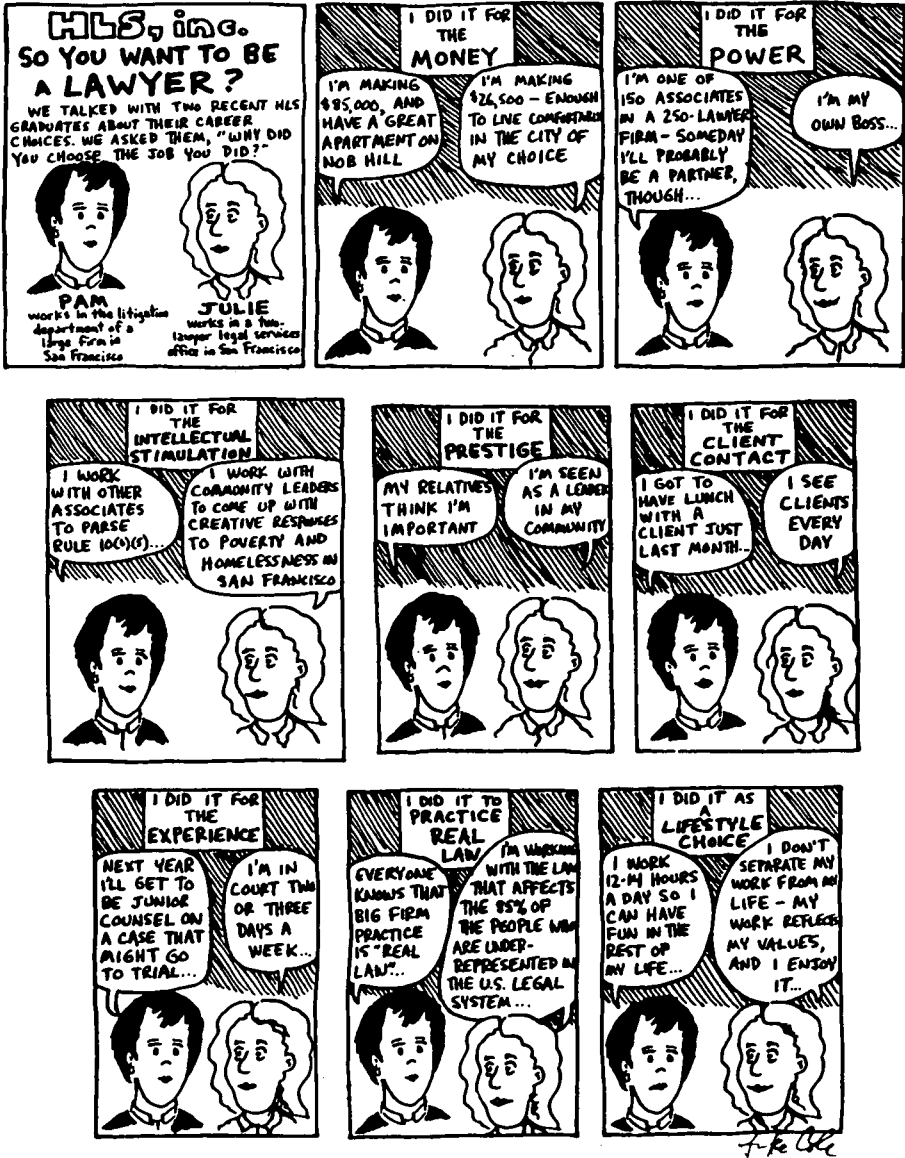
ity benefits as an individual problem. This is the case even if the real problem is a community or even national problem, such as lack of affordable housing, overly restrictive immigration laws, or pernicious Social Security regulations. If someone, however, is going to put a toxic waste incinerator into a poor neighborhood, it is easy for residents to see that as a community issue. Our client groups use environmental cases as an organizing tool, to bring poor people together to realize, and hopefully exercise, their collective strength.

And it's working. The communities with which CRLA has worked have responded to the crises thrust upon them and have used the opportunity to organize themselves in a way that lasts beyond the crisis. In rural California, we have worked with the people of Kettleman City, a tiny farmworker town of 1,100 people, to force Chemical Waste Management, the largest toxic waste dumping company in the country, to abandon its plans to build a toxic incinerator near Kettleman. The people of Kettleman City have organized, run for, and won all five seats on the local water board, the only elected offices in that unincorporated area. In Buttonwillow, California, activists with whom we have worked to block the expansion of a toxic waste dump have gone on to demand a bilingual education program for the Buttonwillow Elementary School. And on the Los Coyotes Reservation in San Diego County, one of our client groups has moved from its initial success at stopping a garbage dump on the reservation, to working with other Indian groups across Southern California fighting environmental hazards, as well as setting up low-income housing on several surrounding reservations. We are working with people in low-income neighborhoods to build their communities, to empower themselves. This is exciting work. It is what being a poor peoples' lawyer is supposed to be all about.

#### CONCLUSION

In this time of crisis, today's law students have an incredible opportunity to come out of school and join the new generation of rebellious lawyers as we reshape the world into a better, more just, place.

Because, as the cliché goes, "If not us, whom? And if not now, when?"



From: LUKE COLE & KEITH AOKI (1989), CASUAL LEGAL STUDIES: ART DURING LAW SCHOOL.