

Thank you so much for this honor. I feel terribly humbled to receive this award. I would like to thank the Sax family and the Prize Committee for recognizing the accomplishments of Berkeley's clinical students. I want to acknowledge Diana Rashid. I'm so pleased to be sharing this honor with you.

When I think about the Death Penalty Clinic and the East Bay Community Law Center, I think about some of the men -- Jeff Selbin, Ty Alper, and Dave, who graduated last year -- but mostly I think about the community of women that I've worked with over the last two years.

To Leila, Monkia, and Anisha, the clinical students with whom I worked most closely: I have so much affection for each of you. But I want to do more than acknowledge my love for you today. I want to acknowledge your leadership and labor.

It should surprise no one that women direct or co-direct every single one of Berkeley's clinics. I have had that privilege to work with two of those directors. No one works harder than Lis Semel. She sets the standard for tireless advocacy and professionalism. And no one is bolder, braver or more creative than Tirien.

During my second year at Berkeley, I worked with Kate, Tirien, and other students to develop the Youth Defender Clinic. The Clinic is particularly meaningful to me because I spent most of my twenties thinking about the impact of a criminal conviction. When I was nineteen, my father pled guilty to health care fraud and to selling prescription drugs, both felonies. He lost his medical license and a federal judge sentenced him to a year in a halfway house in Detroit.

I don't think I appreciated then how much my father's conviction would touch so many areas of his life or that the criminal justice system would impact my family even ten years after his release. That my own freedom was bound up in my father's unfreedom. That what happens inside in a cage haunts the lives of those who live outside of them. That I could no more walk away from my father than I could any of the millions incarcerated in this country.

These are experiences that I carry with me as I represent my own clients. And I am so very humbled to see how far my own life has come since I was a nineteen-year old boy feeling what so many of our clients feel: very, very scared.

We live in a country where race and class profoundly shapes who dies, who lives, and under what conditions. The Death Penalty Clinic taught me just how literally this is the case. In this country, you are eleven times more likely to receive the death penalty if the victim is white than if the victim is black and twenty-two times more likely to receive the death penalty if the defendant is black and the victim is white.

Our legal system is complicit in these deaths. The Supreme Court once declared: "There can be no equal justice where the kind of trial a person gets depends on the amount of money he [or she] has." If that is the case, then there is no equal justice in this country. This is the fiftieth anniversary of *Gideon v. Wainwright*, the Supreme Court case that established the right to appointed counsel for poor people. And yet the difference between freedom and prison, a death sentence and a life sentence still depends on how much money you have.

We need an army of dedicated public defenders to fight these injustices. Instead, we have a broken and underfunded public defense system. In Louisiana, where I worked before coming to law school, indigent defense is funded through fees imposed when a criminal defendant is convicted. If the public defender's client is not convicted, the public defender's office is not paid. When I worked in the Death Penalty Clinic, Georgia funded only one attorney to represent all of the capital defendants on direct appeal. Alabama still does not fund post-conviction counsel in capital cases.

The clinics not only represent indigent clients, but they are transforming our system of public defense. They do so by teaching students, like myself, the privilege of representing indigent clients. As a clinical student, I found a community of students dedicated to justice and to providing the high quality representation that most public defenders don't provide in Georgia or Alabama or, even here, in California. Quite simply, the clinics taught me how to be a lawyer.

I learned things that are less tangible, but important life lessons, too. In the Death Penalty Clinic, I visited our client on death row multiple times. I can remember him singing to us through bulletproof glass. As he did this, I learned in a deeper way than that our clients are more than the worst thing that they have done in their lives – but also how much grace I need as I move through my own life. At EBCLC, I had to comfort mothers weeping for their children. As I did this, I learned just how much our criminal justice system degrades and dehumanizes, but also how much my own humanity depends on paying attention to the suffering, degradation, and injustice that permeates this country --- that crisscrosses Oakland and Berkeley, Berkeley and Richmond, not two miles from the law school doors.

In law school, I sometimes lose perspective. The debt is high and the uncertainty is great. There are moments when I don't feel up to the challenge. I am not even sure that I have all that much to offer. But I am committed to showing up everyday. And I know that I can give some small things. I can give my time. I can give my labor. I can bring to my work a seriousness of purpose that stems from the understanding that the need is great and the time is short and that our own freedom is tied to the freedom of everyone else.

I think most of the time this will suffice. When it does not, I take solace in something Dr. King once said: "the arc of the moral universe is long but it bends toward justice." For those on the fence: dig a little deeper. The work of social justice is possible. It is necessary. It is vital. You will touch, as you have already, countless lives.

I could praise so many of you for the lives I have seen you touch. But I'm going to end with just one person. Kate, you single-handedly transformed my experience at Berkeley. I have never had a teacher or supervisor as invested in my own learning or as fair or as kind. I am so grateful for your mentorship and your guidance. Simply, succinctly: my heartfelt appreciation.