

William Wolfe First Generation Essay

Growing up on the west side of Chicago, like in many inner-city communities throughout the United States, a common belief holds that the only paths to success are either through playing a sport, becoming a rap star, or participating in illegal activities. While I confess to having had dreams of making it to the NFL, I knew that this was not only implausible but also impossible. Upon reflecting on what it means to be a first-generation law student, I feel it is best to first reflect on being a first-generation college student. No one in my immediate family, on either my mother or father's side, was fortunate enough to attend college. My father had to drop out of high school to help his family, whom were sharecroppers, on their land in Utica, Mississippi, and though my mother finished high school, she never had the opportunity (or funds) to attend college.

While my academic success throughout high school indicated a smooth progression to college, the fact was, both my mother and I understood the chances of being able to afford this next step were almost impossible (financially). Undeterred, I applied to many different scholarship programs, including the First-Generation Initiative Scholarship. In order to receive this scholarship, both my mother and I were interviewed and following the interview I was required to take a test, including a writing component. I was 1 of 6 chosen to receive the full scholarship to a university in Winona, Minnesota and began classes in the fall of 2012 and graduated in 2016. I know of few people from my neighborhood who were fortunate enough to attended college and even fewer who graduated.

When I got my first acceptance letter to law school, my mother hugged me and cried in my arms, telling me how proud she was that I made it and have further my education more than anyone in our family, but again funding was an issue. With the help of a partial scholarship offered by my school, a partial scholarship from my donor in undergrad, and applying for a lot of loans, I enrolled in the Class of 2020 at Syracuse University College of Law. Even with pre-law as part of my major in undergrad, it did very little to prepare me for how intense and rigorous studying the law would be. In my school, it seems as though I am one of the few students who does not have a family member that practices law. Ironically, I seem to be one of the few with family members who are incarcerated and in need of someone who practices law. This contributed to my wanting to become a lawyer and I realize that I have known as far back as seven years of age that this was my calling.

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My earliest memories of how the law could be used to right injustices came from times with my father watching television programs such as *Matlock* and *Perry Mason*. There is no doubt in my mind these programs formed my frame of reference for what a lawyer, who held a sense of social awareness, ought to be. At that time, I was unaware of the racial barriers that would soon be placed before me, or that many people of color do not have the opportunity to see dreams being realized.

Drugs were an integral part of my community and family life, culminating in the death of my beloved father when I was twelve. Although my father struggled with addiction, he did everything in his power to provide for his family. Stories like mine are far too common in my neighborhood and my father's death was an example of unfulfilled hopes and dreams of people of color in my neighborhood. This event, occurring as it did so early in my life, served to reinforce in me the desire to obtain and use my legal training and skills with a commitment to help those in need and to be a voice for the underrepresented and oppressed in today's society. With less than five percent of attorneys being African American, I wanted to be an example to those from my neighborhood and similar areas of where hard work and opportunity could take you. I cannot wait until the day I *am* qualified to give legal advice and can help the less fortunate by providing adequate legal help.

Unlike many of my peers, I come from one of the most poverty stricken and crime riddled neighborhoods in Chicago. No one in my family ever attend college, let alone ever imagined attending law school. Every day of law school I get closer to my dreams; every day I get closer to becoming the change in my family tree from generational poverty, to generational wealth, and; every day I get closer to becoming the change I want to see in my community. As I mentioned earlier, in my neighborhood, all the role models are either on television or dabbling in activities in which likely result in death or jail. By my attending law school, I am providing hope to those who come from similar areas, because I am not only a first-generation law student in my family, but I also one of the first (if not the first) from my neighborhood.