



## STRENGTH IN DIVERSITY AND A TIME TO REFLECT

*by Stanley D. Klett, Jr.*

Earlier this year the legal community recognized and celebrated the 50th anniversary of the United States Supreme Court's ground-breaking decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*. As most attorneys know from Law School this landmark decision did away with the separate but equal doctrine established in the *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision rendered in 1896.

The ruling determined that separate but equal educational facilities denied black children equal protection of the laws guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment. The *Brown* case featured some notable people. Future Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall argued on behalf of the plaintiff, Oliver Brown of Topeka, Kansas. In 1954, the court unanimously held that "in the field of education the doctrine of separate but equal has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal." Supreme Court Justice Earl Warren wrote the now well-known opinion.

This decision opened the door for many minorities to have better access to education and thus job opportunities. Fifty years later we see the impacts that it has had and should be thankful as to how far we have come. However, we need to be mindful of how far we still have to go.

Recently, I attended the F. Malcolm Cunningham Bar Association Masquerade Ball at the Breakers. For those of you that do not know the F. Malcolm Cunningham Bar is the foremost African-American Bar Association in the County and I believe in the State. The gala affair was both fun and educational. It honored A. Grubbs Court Reporters as the first African-American owned court reporting agency in the County (which I did not know). It honored Judge Sheree Cunningham as the first African-American female to serve on the bench in Palm Beach County (another fact that I did not know). And it honored Patience Burns for her unselfish devotion of time and energy to the bar association and the community (this I did know).

During the event, I had the pleasure of speaking with the new president of the F. Malcolm Cunningham Bar Association, Lisa Quarrie, and I was impressed with her enthusiasm, energy and initiative. One of her stated goals were to continue the growth and recognition of the F. Malcolm Cunningham Bar Association in its membership and the community. This is a goal that I expect this impressive young lady will accomplish.

Our discussion led me to thinking and doing a little research. The most recent federal census finds 65.4 percent of Florida's population is Caucasian that is not of Hispanic or Latino origin, and 16.8 percent are Hispanic or Latino, and 4.6 percent are African-American. Bar surveys show that 89 percent of the bar is now Caucasian, 8 percent Hispanic and 2 percent African-American. Overall, 51.2 percent of the state population is comprised of women. Interestingly, it should be noted that of the States 872 Judges, 86.5 are white, 6.5 percent are black, 6.1 percent are Hispanic and women make up 24.4 percent of the Judges.

This leads me to the observation that we still have a ways to go. As attorneys we should encourage greater diversity in young people going to college, to law school, and into the profession. There is strength in our differences. Greater diversity in the bar should lead to greater diversity on the bench. Different viewpoints and perspectives foster change when necessary, and greater confidence in the public that the system does work equally for all. We should take part in encouraging this diversity in our actions, in our community, in our participation, in our interviews, and in our hires. Sometimes the mere awareness of the issue can lead to action. *Brown v. Board of Education* opened up doorways for African-Americans and for many others. It would seem that 50 years later we should be helping usher more through the threshold.