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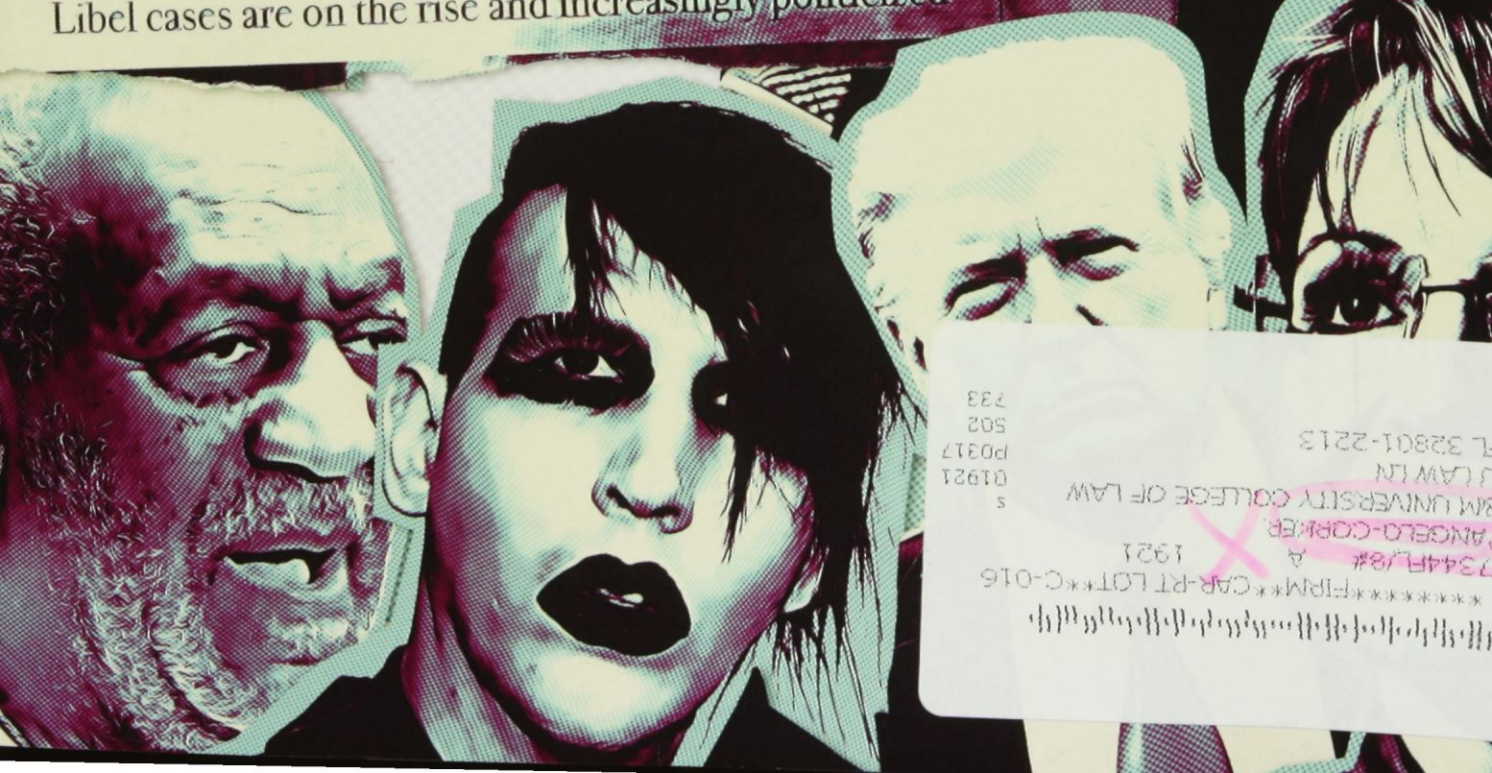
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The Defame Game

Libel cases are on the rise and increasingly politicized



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MY PATH TO LAW

Making Mentors

Okoye Morgan Jr. creates the role models he didn't have through a children's book

#MyPathtoLaw celebrates the diversity of the legal profession through stories detailing attorneys' unique and inspiring trajectories.

BY JULIANNE HILL

Growing up in St. Petersburg, Florida, Okoye Morgan Jr.'s elementary school teachers thought he had a little too much energy.

After he disrupted the class one too many times, a clinical psychologist was brought in. Her conclusion: Morgan was very smart but had processing issues. He learned quickly and became bored. On her recommendations, he was moved into a gifted program but would need an individual educational plan with accommodations.

"My parents taught me to advocate to teachers that, 'Hey, I may need more time on tests, or I may need to reread this paragraph again,'" says Morgan, who went on to become founder and general counsel of The Black Law Company in Tampa, Florida.

As a kid, those skills spilled over to fighting other kids' injustices. "If people would pick on people who were disabled, that's something that runs my temperature hot because they are defenseless," he says. "They are oftentimes in positions where they can't protect themselves. So how dare we take advantage of those groups?"



But as a youth, Morgan didn't see role models who showed him how to make a living while helping people. In cartoons, television and books, people who looked like him were athletes, rappers or entertainers. Lawyers in stories were almost never Black and almost always cast in a negative light.

Along his journey to law, that lack of role models stuck with Morgan, now a member of the ABA's Young Lawyers Division who serves on the Commission on Youth at Risk. Over time, he has been motivated to seek out mentors for him-

self as well as to find ways to inspire Black youngsters to become attorneys. He's done so by writing an illustrated book for kids. Morgan was also a speaker at an event for singer-songwriter

Usher's New Look nonprofit, which is focused on underserved youth.

"It's been my goal to try to change the imagery of what attorneys look like to kids," Morgan says.

Okoye Morgan Jr., founder and general counsel of The Black Law Company, says he lacked role models while growing up.

His ultimate goal is to change policies that impact people of color—and that requires having more Black attorneys. “You have to have people at the table whose rights were violated, were not heard [and] who were looked over to be able to have systemic change—because they’ve been the greatest beneficiaries of the wrongfulness of how some of the laws and policies have played out in America,” he adds.

Major change

Heading off to the University of Tampa and yearning to help others, Morgan aimed for medical school. He quickly became discouraged, however; he was tripped up by the basic chemistry requirement. His tutor pointed out that Morgan’s strengths lie outside of science and math, in reading and writing.

“He’s like, ‘What about law school?’” Morgan says, “I said, ‘OK, that’s still helping people.’” He switched his major to political science. After graduation and an internship at the Office of the State Attorney 13th Judicial Circuit, he headed to Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University College of Law.

While in law school, he joined Pipas Law Group as a legal assistant, but he knew having a mentor would help his chances of success. With only 5% of lawyers being African American, according to the ABA, that person was hard to find. So Morgan Googled “successful Black attorneys” and found Willie Gary, a Stuart, Florida-based civil litigation attorney and cold-called him several times until he agreed to meet.

“My dad and I went down to Stuart, and we talked to him for about two hours,” Morgan says. “After that, I was like, ‘I’ve got to do something to give back like this guy has done for the legal community and our people.’” For years, a photo of Gary served as Morgan’s screensaver.

Also while in law school, Morgan tore a tendon in his left leg while playing a pickup basketball game. He needed to use a wheelchair for the remainder of his second year, and the experience showed him firsthand the struggles of the disabled.



“They have so much against them, and then they still have to come to school and study,” he says.

Creating the inspiration

Then COVID-19 hit. Bored, Morgan searched the internet to see if there were now more characters in TV shows and books showing kids Black attorneys who were inspirational. There weren’t.

“The only way that you can cause a system to change is you have to be represented,” he adds. “The only way to be represented is you’ve got to go to school and become an attorney.”

He decided to be the change he wanted to see, writing the children’s book *The Boy Who Went to Law School*. In November 2020, he self-published the simple illustrated book featuring a boy who wants to be a superhero and who, Morgan admits, looks a lot like he did. Ultimately, the boy enters law school and becomes an attorney.

Shortly after *The Boy Who Went to Law School* came out, Amazon promoted it as a hot new release for kids interested in careers, and he was interviewed by several local media outlets.

After graduation in 2021, Morgan became general counsel for Florida Advanced Spine and Orthopedics, and he still holds that position.

In April 2022, he opened The Black Law Company, now with four attorneys. Morgan handles personal injury cases as well as civil rights litigation for prisoners.

His book continues to make an impact. In November 2022, Florida 6th Judicial Circuit Judge Steve Berlin, dressed in his judicial robe, read the book to elementary schoolchildren.

Berlin also introduced Morgan to Careshia Moore, president and CEO of Usher’s New Look. That led to Morgan being asked to speak at the nonprofit’s Legal Career Spark Academy in January 2022.

As much as Morgan wants kids of color to become lawyers, he also wants them to know there will be challenges.

“You’re going to face adversities, you’re going to face partial treatment from co-counsels and judges who may not be used to hearing somebody young or [with] your skin color speak in an educational way that could change policy or law,” he says. “It’s definitely an uphill battle, but it is worth it. What’s living if you have nothing to fight for?” ■

Morgan wrote an illustrated and self-published children’s book to inspire Black youngsters to become lawyers.