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## History in the First Person

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It's not always clear to law firms trying to implement diversity programs how to reach out to the next generation in the community in a meaningful way, when many young people in that community have had little positive experience with the law - and their path to higher education is filled with challenges. Bringing students into the firm for a pizza lunch discussion with attorneys is a popular event that can open the

eyes of low-income minority kids. Mentoring programs and internships are profoundly important. But sometimes, a special event with a historical figure can be transformational.

Filmmaker Abby Ginzberg is a documentarian of social justice heroes. But it's not just the filming of people like Thelton Henderson ("*Soul of Justice: Thelton Henderson's American Journey*") or Arthur Kinoy ("*Doing Justice: the Life and Trials of Arthur Kinoy*"). Ginzberg plans the timing of her documentaries so that the subject can tour with the film to communities across the country once they are completed. For diversity-oriented law firms, this can be an opportunity to bring youngsters face to face with a historical figure who is eager to answer their questions and inspire them to pursue their dreams.

A poignant example of this took place last June with the Orange County screening of the documentary, "*Cruz Reynoso: Sowing the Seeds of Justice*," which was attended by 50 high school students who participate in the UC Irvine Saturday Academy of Law, or SAL. SAL hosts a series of Saturday morning classes for Santa Ana Unified School District ninth graders, focusing on three main objectives for the students: improving their writing and public speaking skills and helping them learn about the law as a profession. Two hundred college-bound students have gone through this program, which was launched in 2009.

Our Diversity Committee's Community Outreach subcommittee organized the event and co-hosted it with the Orange County Diversity Task Force. The Orange County Bar Association, Orange County Hispanic Bar Association, Orange County Asian American Bar Association, Mexican American Bar Foundation, Public Law Center, and the Orange County Bar Foundation all participated. Judge Frances Munoz, the first

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Latina appointed to the State Bar, was there, as was UC Irvine vice chancellor Manuel Gomez. Altogether about 150 people attended, including Ginzberg and Justice Reynoso.

While there are plenty of people creating films that touch on diversity, Ginzberg is an inspired partner for an event of this kind. An attorney who practiced for 10 years, she's documented successes of programs for at-risk and under served youth, AmeriCorps members, and those who have been at the front lines of civil rights and grass roots justice issues.

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**'The people who come to these screenings are people who haven't thought about any of this. They see a Hispanic surname in the title of the film and have enough pride in their community that they want to see who this person is. They leave feeling inspired.'**

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- Abby Ginzberg

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She strongly believes that these screenings are far from opportunities to preach to the choir. "The choir is a handful of people like myself devoted to social justice issues," she emphasizes. "The people who come to these screenings are people who haven't thought about any of this. They see a Hispanic surname in the title of the film and have enough pride in their community that they want to see who this person is. They leave feeling inspired." But, she adds, this film is not simply for Hispanics. "I'm looking for a diverse audience for every film I do. This film has done a really good job of reaching beyond the choir to people who have never heard of him.

And, just in case you haven't heard of him, Reynoso was born into a large Spanish-speaking farm worker family in Brea. Despite his father's insistence that he forego his education and work to help support the family, he stood his ground and attended Pomona College and then UC Berkeley Law School, graduating in 1958. From there he became the first Latino director of California Rural Legal Assistance and then one of the first Latino law professors in the United States, when he joined the faculty of the University of New Mexico Law School. Years later he was appointed to the state Supreme Court by Gov. Jerry Brown and later lost his seat in a divisive recall election that centered around the death penalty. Reynoso returned to private practice and also joined the faculty of the UCLA School of Law until 2001. In 2000, he served as vice chair on the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, which addressed the voting rights abuses in the 2000 election in Florida. Capping his career was receiving the nation's highest civilian honor, the Presidential Medal of Freedom, by President Bill Clinton. Today, he teaches law at UC Davis Law School.

"You take someone whose life has traversed really interesting parts of history and through the prism of biography you can teach history," explains Ginzberg. "And through the lens of history, teach a little biography. They're mutually reinforcing efforts. My job is to preserve their legacy and help create role models."

She believes there's a good reason to select older subjects. "They're not going to be around forever," she notes. "If you pick your people carefully - and I do - that ability of

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an older person to inspire young people is pretty strong. Cruz manifests respect from young people and has a liveliness of spirit that kids can respond to. And many of these kids have never met anyone as successful as him. Cruz has been particularly open and willing to do this. He's humble and he's accessible. It's been an honor to go out with him."

Ginzberg has gone out with Cruz to many community screenings. At a recent Alameda County Office of Education event celebrating "History Day" at a local high school, the question came up about re-establishing civil discourse when there are so many polarized fights going on. Ginzberg says that Reynoso and others of his generation talk to young people about the importance of negotiating. "He told these students that it doesn't mean you can't take your cause to the streets, but you don't make it impossible to communicate with the people you're opposing. That's a message these kids need to hear from someone who fought big battles in his time."

The documentary, of course, is important as an introduction to someone like Justice Reynoso. But the power of the event seems to be cemented in what happens afterwards. For the SAL students, it was a profoundly inspirational connection.

"The students were absolutely captivated," recalls Karina Hamilton, SAL's founding director and now a volunteer with UC Irvine Mentors. "They learned about California history and the civil rights movement through Justice Reynoso. And he was so engaging. He answered all their questions, which ranged all over the place, including the new Arizona law and immigration, his background, and what kind of student he was."

One of the students there was 11th grader Sergio Rodriguez, who participated in SAL's first session in 2009. Both the documentary and meeting the justice made a huge impact on him. "He had an intimate story to tell and I could really relate to it," he says. "He works really hard to succeed and I see that in my mother, who works two jobs to provide my brother, sisters, and me what we need." Sergio asked the justice what helped him most to succeed. "He said it was his outlook of the world," Sergio says. "He wanted to make something important of his life and said that education was the key to advancing and progressing."

It's easy to see what an impact an event like this has on a young person. All these months later, Sergio still thinks about Reynoso and identifies with him. He says, "I think I might have the same fate as him and change the world like him. I'm on the right path and working really hard. He's a great person, a great man. I want to follow in his footsteps. He may have faced adversity, but he overcame it and we all have to do that."

At law firms, we talk about different aspects of diversity all the time but working with Abby Ginzberg to screen her films reinforces diversity as a positive thing. These screenings have the potential to bring together people practicing law to talk about historical events and the things that still need to be done. Most important, it is a powerful way to introduce students engaged in their own struggles to the positive power of the law and give them reason to believe they can succeed in the legal profession and in their lives in general.

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