

LYNN WALKER HUNTLEY: *COLUMBIA LAW REVIEW*
ALUMNA AND CIVIL RIGHTS ADVOCATE

On Behalf of the Columbia Law Review

What a time it must have been to be alive in 1968. The United States was deep in the throes of the Vietnam War, with public support drastically waning after the Tet Offensive and the My Lai Massacre.¹ One of the modern era's founding fathers, Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., was assassinated, and cities were ablaze as riots ensued across the country.² Then-presidential candidate Robert F. Kennedy was assassinated just two months later, further deepening the national air of tragedy.³ In many respects, it was a year of tragedy.

But there was also triumph. That year, two African American men—Tommie Smith and Jon Carlos—won the gold and bronze medals, respectively, in the Olympics in Mexico City for the 200-meter dash.⁴ They raised their fists as a symbol of resistance against racial discrimination and pride in their blackness while the national anthem blared. The Fair Housing Act was signed into law by President Lyndon B. Johnson, prohibiting race-based discrimination in the sale, rental, and transfer of property, and opening the gates for African Americans to begin to enter into the middle class.⁵ And Lynn Walker Huntley had the strength and courage to accept a position on the *Columbia Law Review*, making her the first African American woman to do so.

It might be tempting to understate the courage and fortitude this required, but it was certainly no small feat. Out of a staff of sixty-two editors, Ms. Huntley was one of only five women on the *Review*. The fear that she might submit a below-average assignment, which could reflect poorly on both women and minorities; the subtle and sometimes unintentional assault on her personhood by well-meaning peers; and the recognition that to some, her very presence on the *Review* was a per se reduction in the standards and integrity of the journal and would

1. Vietnam War History, History.com, <http://www.history.com/topics/vietnam-war/vietnam-war-history> [<http://perma.cc/38X9-P5XS>] (last visited Apr. 3, 2016).

2. Martin Luther King Jr. Assassination, History.com, <http://www.history.com/topics/black-history/martin-luther-king-jr-assassination> [<http://perma.cc/J9DV-7XEE>] (last visited Apr. 3, 2016).

3. Kenneth T. Walsh, How Robert F. Kennedy's Death Shattered the Nation, U.S. News (June 5, 2015), <http://www.usnews.com/news/articles/2015/06/04/how-robert-f-kennedys-death-shattered-the-nation> [<http://perma.cc/X9CK-J5DL>].

4. E.g., Ben Cosgrove, The Black Power Salute that Rocked the 1968 Olympics, Time (Sept. 27, 2014), <http://time.com/3880999/black-power-salute-tommie-smith-and-john-carlos-at-the-1968-olympics/> [<http://perma.cc/3PBF-4P8E>] (describing athletes' salute).

5. Fair Housing Act of 1968, Pub. L. No. 90-284, § 804(a)-(b), 82 Stat. 73, 83 (codified as amended at 42 U.S.C. § 3604) (2012).

undermine its prestige—it was 1968 after all—were part of her everyday life. As the first African American woman on the *Review*, Ms. Huntley had support from the communities and identities she embodied, but integrating that hallowed space meant the burdens rested on her shoulders alone.

Ms. Huntley had a penchant for tackling these burdens, and she made a career of representing some of the most burdened among us. As an attorney at the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, she worked on behalf of people convicted of capital crimes, successfully litigating *Furman v. Georgia*, a case in which the Supreme Court ruled the State of Georgia had unconstitutionally imposed the death penalty in several cases.⁶ She went on to work in the Civil Rights Division of the Department of Justice, where she became the first African American woman to lead the Special Litigation Section and ultimately went on to become the deputy assistant attorney general.

“We must continue to struggle against racism, sexism, and other forms of oppression . . . We must continue to struggle because to give in and give up is to . . . betray what we stand for. We struggle ultimately in order to affirm our values and who we are,” she said.⁷ Ms. Huntley participated in this struggle not only in courtrooms and as a legal advocate, but in as many arenas as she possibly could, confronting structural racism and crashing through its gates at every opportunity. She became the first female president of the Southern Education Fund and worked to provide equal opportunities to students of color as well as low-income students in the South through a range of advocacy efforts and pipeline programs, ultimately raising \$44 million during her tenure and doubling the Fund’s endowment for its programmatic efforts.⁸ Furthermore, as she toiled to break down barriers to opportunity, she worked to ensure that the stories of how those obstacles had been torn down for her were not forgotten. She helped launch the creation of the *Eyes on the Prize* television series,⁹ the preeminent television account of the Civil Rights Movement.

During the 2015 to 2016 year, some of the values Ms. Huntley held dear guided us as we chose a new class of editors: The many tributes written about Ms. Huntley tell the story of a person who was ebullient, but demanding of excellence; intelligent, yet humble; full of humor, yet

6. 408 U.S. 238, 239 (1972) (per curiam).

7. Press Release, Leadership Conference on Civil & Human Rights, The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights Mourns the Loss of Lynn Walker Huntley (Sept. 5, 2015), <http://www.civilrights.org/press/2015/lynn-walker-huntley-passing.html> [<http://perma.cc/W26C-6C3P>].

8. David Stout, Lynn Walker Huntley, Lawyer in Prominent Civil Rights Issues, Dies at 69, N.Y. Times (Sept. 6, 2015), <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/07/us/lynn-walker-huntley-lawyer-in-prominent-civil-rights-issues-dies-at-69.html> (on file with the *Columbia Law Review*).

9. Id.

serious about her vision and goals. She was also an invested mentor willing to elevate the untested to higher positions, trusting them to rise to the occasion. These are the very characteristics we seek in the *Review's* editors. Beyond that, Ms. Huntley was fiercely committed to the ethos of duty and service to others. Today, law reviews across the country—including our own—are assessing what diversity and inclusion mean and how to promote it. In doing so, we ask ourselves a question Ms. Huntley posed to a group of community philanthropists: “What will our message and narrative be about who we are as a [*Review*]?”¹⁰ With every incoming class of editors, we strive to ensure that our narrative reflects our efforts to be more inclusive, representative, and attuned to matters of racial justice than the year before. Ms. Huntley’s recognition that the fight for inclusion is ongoing and takes place on many fronts, not just in courtrooms, guides this mission.

A story recounted by Barbara R. Arnwine, former executive director of the Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, captures Ms. Huntley’s tireless efforts to create inclusivity and racial justice no matter where she was. Ms. Huntley was part of a team that conducted a comparative study of race and inequality in the United States, Brazil, and South Africa. Due to Ms. Huntley’s fairer complexion, she often was not considered “black enough” in Brazil, meaning Arnwine had to take the lead in discussions about racial dynamics like the “one drop” rule. That did not prevent Ms. Huntley from creating spaces and bringing people together to discuss race-based discrimination: She arranged visits with all of the major Afro Brazilian lawyers, scholars, and advocacy groups in Bahia, Brasilia, Sao Paulo, and Rio de Janeiro. And in typical fashion, her humor provided the necessary levity to keep them “from crying or burning up in outrage at the racist treatment of Afro Brazilians by the government and society.”¹¹ Ms. Huntley’s organizational efforts culminated in a meeting with Nelson Mandela, where all of the study’s participants presented their findings about the subjugation of African peoples. That was Ms. Huntley’s style. She was never fatigued by roadblocks, and no obstacle could rid her of her humor. No matter the odds, when she had a goal, it was difficult to prevent her from reaching it.

Dr. Emmett Carson, who worked under Ms. Huntley at the Ford Foundation, recalled her love of poetry and that one of her favorite poems to recount to him was “In Flanders Fields,” by John McCrae.¹² One stanza reads:

10. cinvideo08, Lynn Walker Huntley—2008 Community Investment Network Conference, YouTube, at 02:34 (Feb. 26, 2009), <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=homKWxE74BE> [<http://perma.cc/R5X7-TWDW>].

11. Email from Barbara R. Arnwine, Lecturer in Law, Columbia Law School, to Kevin Opoku-Gyamfi (Mar. 24, 2016, 8:32 PM) (on file with the *Columbia Law Review*).

12. Emmett Carson, Picking up the Torch, Laff Soc’y, <http://laffsociety.org/News.asp?PostID=877> [<http://perma.cc/3PS8-MYD2>] (last visited Apr. 12, 2016).

Take up our quarrel with the foe:
To you, from failing hands we throw
The torch; be yours to hold it high.
If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
In Flanders fields.¹³

Yes, 1968 was truly triumphant for the *Review*. It was the year we took up our quarrel with the foe. And in return for our victory, we were honored with Lynn Walker Huntley. May we remember that these battles must be continuously fought, and may the rewards always be as bountiful as the life and legacy of Lynn Walker Huntley.

13. *Id.*