

*Kathryn Birks Harvey** <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6602-8688>

**DEO, E. MEERA. 2019. *UNEQUAL PROFESSION:
RACE AND GENDER IN LEGAL ACADEMIA*
235. STANFORD: STANFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS**

In the United States, the law, both as a profession and in the academy, are well-known for being resistant to change. However, as American law schools attempt to become more committed to diversity in their student makeup, it is only natural that they would want to strive for the same changes in their legal faculty. Meera Deo, a sociologist and law professor at Southwestern Law School in Los Angeles, California, elucidates the state of the legal academy in the United States, including what law schools have done and also what they have not done to address the lack of diversity among their faculty in America, and, in particular, the overwhelmingly disparate impact that female faculty of color experience. The recently published *Unequal Profession: Race and Gender in Legal Academia* is the first empirical and qualitative study to examine the experiences and trajectories of law school faculty in the United States.

The book contains six chapters, as well as an appendix that describes Deo's methodological approach. Chapter 1, entitled "Barriers to Entry," demonstrates how women and women of color often face multiple obstacles when attempting to enter the field of legal academia. Chapter 2, "Ugly Truths Behind the Mask of Collegiality," details the various women of color face when interacting with their colleagues, including resistance to opinions from those who are of a different race or gender. Chapter 3, "Connections and Confrontations with Students," expands on the various issues often experienced by Deo's subjects, and outlines the conflicts female faculty and female faculty of color have with their students, which is demonstrated to be more than the conflict experienced by a white male professor. Chapter 4, "Tenure and Promotion Challenges," demonstrates how

* PhD candidate in the history department at Northwestern University, Evanston, IL. She has a law degree from Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN, and was a practicing lawyer for six years before returning to academia. She is licensed to practice law in seven American jurisdictions, kathrynharvey2023@u.northwestern.edu

female faculty in general, and female faculty of color in particular, tend to receive lower marks on student evaluations than male professors. The challenges of obtaining tenure are also outlined, as women faculty are often tapped for more service positions at their school, leaving them little time to accomplish projects that are actually evaluated for tenure. Chapters 5 and 6, “Leading the Charge” and “In Pursuit of Work/Life Balance,” discuss how women are often thwarted when it comes to pursuing positions of leadership, such as a dean role, and also how women are the ones who end up taking on the responsibilities at home, as well as at work, leading many into two full-time jobs. Deo’s appendix includes a detailed explanation of the women who made up her sample, the questionnaire the subjects received and the interview script they were subject to, and the statistical methods employed.

Now, Deo’s book is only addressing the experience of law faculty in the United States. But, in America, women of color are quite underrepresented in legal academia, while white men generally make up the bulk of the professoriate, and Deo’s book illuminates some of the reasons for this. Women of color are more likely to take a job in a law firm because of the high salaries, and are often trying to use that money to support themselves, as well as many other members of their extended family. Not only is the money a powerful incentive, many of the women in the book stated that they had never considered entering academia because it was never presented to them as a possible profession while they were in law school. However, the white men in the sample often entered law school planning to go into academia and were often encouraged to do so once arriving at school. This is yet another example of the disadvantage faced by women of color when striving to become a member of a law school’s faculty. However, this also presents some encouraging ideas about how to improve upon the diversity of law faculty. If women of color were encouraged to consider academia early on in their careers, and afforded opportunities to work with mentors who support those goals, law schools may receive a more diverse pool of applicants.

Not only does the book provide a unique mixed method approach to studying the hiring process and the experience of law professors, it also illuminates the effects that race, gender, and the interaction she terms “raceXgender” can play in hiring, advancement, publications, teaching, and the overall law school experience for both faculty and students. Deo’s book highlights where American law schools often fall short in their efforts to meet benchmarks for diversity on their faculty, but she also presents suggestions for how to mitigate the deleterious effects that many women faculty of color experience.

Relying on her mixed-method approach, the book uses raw numerical data as well as extensive interviews with both male and female law faculty of all races and backgrounds. Not only does this give the reader the opportunity to hear the voices of the faculty members, but it also reveals how intersectionality can result in oppression and different experiences. Through the interviews with faculty, the

reader learns the state of the American law academy as it currently stands, as well as insights into the progress that has been made and the long road that still lies ahead.

The qualitative aspect of the book makes it extremely relatable, particularly for those who are members of traditionally underrepresented groups in the legal academy. Interviews with both white women and women of color detail instances of “mansplaining” and “hepeating.” Female readers will most definitely be able to nod their heads and think of a time when a similar instance has happened to them, and, hopefully, the male readers of Deo’s book will read the stories and be able to put a stop to such instances on their own faculty.

While the book indeed demonstrates the clear inequality that has existed in the legal academy, particularly for women of color, the reader also leaves with the uplifting news that underrepresented members often detail instances of support, as well. Several stories highlight valuable mentoring from fellow faculty members about how to handle the challenges presented by the interaction of raceXgender, as well as administrators making some overall progress in recognizing the need for diversity and the evolution not only in legal faculty, but in legal pedagogy. These small steps that are noted provide hope that not only will we start to see more women of color retained as faculty, but also an environment that makes them want to stay. More women of color in leadership positions within American universities could also help drive the changes to occur at a more accelerated rate.

Deo’s book is a must-read for anyone in legal academia, and even academia in general. Not only does it call attention to issues that are real and important for diversity in the legal academy and the legal profession, it provides suggestions for how members of all groups can work to correct the issue. Men, and white men in particular, can recognize that both white women and women of color are often uncomfortable and left out in law school administration as a whole, and often face barriers in teaching that others may not. Women in the academy can recognize that the next generation of law faculty may need some special encouragement to pursue academia and they can provide advice and mentoring on how to do so. If pieces of Deo’s book are slowly implemented in law schools, we will gradually begin to see the faculty look more like the tapestry that law schools often want to portray in their student guides, but are unable to.