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Trina Grillo—A Passionate Advocate for Justice

Robert A. Stein*

I had the extraordinary good fortune to meet Trina Grillo in 1971 when she began her law studies at the University of Minnesota Law School. I was teaching a first-year course in Property Law, and Trina was a student in my class. Almost immediately, we became great friends—a friendship that continued for twenty-five years until her tragic and untimely death in 1996.

It was apparent from the time I first met Trina that she was a brilliant student—she went on to graduate first in her class. But there was nothing pretentious about her. She always acted as if her academic success was a big mistake, and she seemed shocked by every high grade she received—grade after grade after grade.

Trina had many other attractive qualities—a zest for life, a wide-ranging intellectual curiosity, an infectious sense of humor, and, especially, great care and concern for others. She had many friends—close friends. She always found time to talk to them about their problems, and the issues of concern to them and her. As a result, her friends were very devoted to her, and they also came to care deeply about the same issues that moved Trina.

Trina's most noteworthy quality was her passionate concern for justice and the personal distress she felt about injustices in our society. Even in her student days, Trina was especially concerned about issues of racial injustice. She identified with her African American and Cuban ancestry and became a leader in the Law School's Black American Law Student Association (BALSA). On behalf of BALSA, she organized one of the first academic support programs for students of color, a

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Trina did not motivate others primarily by making speeches. Instead, she talked with others—one on one, over and over, at great length—about the issues of injustice that disturbed her. I recall countless conversations with her, after class, at the end of the day, while jogging, after programs, about the concerns she had and the pain she felt about the injustices that occurred on a daily basis. She had similar conversations with her classmates, other faculty, and all with whom she came in contact. Her concerns caused us all to care more deeply.

Following Trina's graduation from law school in 1974, she clerked for a year for U.S. District Judge James E. Doyle in Madison, Wisconsin, and then returned to her native California. She joined the faculty of the University of California Hastings College of Law in 1975 and remained on that faculty until 1981. After a period of time in private practice and as a mediator, she reentered law teaching in 1986 at the University of San Francisco School of Law, where she taught until her death.

Trina's teaching interests were Constitutional Law, Torts and Mediation. She was most committed, however, to the Academic Support Program that she directed at the University of San Francisco. Through this program she created a learning environment where students who differed from other law students because of race, gender, class, sexual orientation, or physical disabilities could thrive. She became a nationally recognized authority on academic support programs, and received the 1995 Achievement Award for Contributions to Legal Education from the Society of American Law Teachers.

Trina's scholarship reflected her passionate commitment to the struggle against injustice. In *The Mediation Alternative: Process Dangers for Women,* she offered insights about the adverse implications of mediation for women. And, in a co-authored article, *Obscuring the Importance of Race: The Implication of Making Comparisons Between Racism and Sexism (or Other -Isms),* she discussed how racism may be perpetuated by well-intentioned feminist advocacy.

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I visited with Trina from time to time in the years following her graduation from law school. These were always joyful occasions for me, as we brought each other up-to-date on our activities. Especially enjoyable were the marvelous stories she would tell of the experiences and accomplishments of her beloved children, Luisa and Jeff. On these occasions I was impressed that Trina continued to care passionately about injustice, just as she had in her law student days. She did so without anger or bitterness, but with an enduring optimism that people of good will could work together to overcome injustice.

In an article that Trina wrote in the *Minnesota Law Review* less than a year before her death, she described the challenge to overcome racism facing each of us:

One of the most difficult struggles we face today is the struggle to overcome racism. Each person must confront not only his or her own racism but that which is manifested in the surrounding world. This struggle has many faces: It matters not just whether you are black or white or brown, but also whether you are old or young, rich or poor, male or female. But whatever the individual circumstances, the struggle against racism is, or should be, a struggle that involves us all. While there are many honorable ways to confront this struggle, the least honorable responses are also the most common: avoidance and denial. To my mind, one of the chief measures of a person is his or her willingness to accept the challenge of racism—not simply by adopting the face of "political correctness" but also by facing the internal struggle.

By this or any other measure, Trina's was a life well-lived and an example for us all.

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5. *Id.* at 9.