

bar happenings

By Kathryn Alfisi

D.C. Judicial Conference Tackles Implicit Bias in Decision Making

The District of Columbia Courts will explore the impact of implicit bias on the judicial process when it convenes for its 36th Annual Judicial Conference on June 3 at the Ronald Reagan Building and International Trade Center, 1300 Pennsylvania Avenue NW (see full-page ad on inside back cover).

Linda Greenhouse, formerly a Pulitzer Prize-winning U.S. Supreme Court reporter for *The New York Times* and now the Joseph Goldstein Lecturer in Law at Yale Law School, will be the keynote luncheon speaker.

Centering on the theme "Implicit Bias: Recognizing It and Dismantling It," the conference will explore the neuroscience of implicit, or subconscious, bias and the many decision points in the judicial process that are impacted by it, ranging from jury selection to sentencing (and everything in between) to appellate decision making. Those who have studied the subject have been quite surprised to find that their own implicit biases are much more pronounced than they ever would have imagined.

The D.C. Courts' goal for this conference is to take this newfound knowledge to the next level, giving participants realistic and practical "takeaways" they can use in their chambers and practices. The conference aims to help attendees overcome subconscious thoughts so that their decisions are based on fair and equal treatment that is vital to public trust and confidence in the administration of justice.

One of the conference's highlights is a presentation by Dr. Mahzarin Banaji of Harvard University, titled "Blindspot: The Hidden Biases of Good People," from 9:15 a.m. to 12 p.m. Banaji, a nationally recognized scholar and presenter in the field of implicit bias, maintains an educational Web site, www.implicit.harvard.edu, designed to create awareness on unconscious biases in self-professed egalitarians. Details about her research also can be found at www.people.fas.harvard.edu/banaji.

Greenhouse's keynote luncheon speech will be followed by a second plenary session, "Applying the Principles: Dismantling Hidden Biases and Learning Neutral Assessment of Credibility, Competency, and Evidence," from 2:30 to 3:45 p.m. Kimberly Papillon, senior education specialist for the California Judicial Council, will moderate a panel of distinguished local jurists and lawyers who will discuss how to overcome or "dismantle" problems of implicit bias as exposed by Dr. Banaji's presentation.

Panelists include D.C. Court of Appeals Associate Judge Noël Anketell Kramer; D.C. Superior Court Associate Judge Herbert B. Dixon Jr.; Michele A. Roberts, a partner at Skadden & Arps LLP; and Kenneth L. Wainstein, a partner at O'Melveny & Myers LLP and former U.S. Attorney for the District of Columbia.

Registration starts at 8 a.m. The conference will close with a cocktail reception to enable members of the bench and bar to renew old acquaintances and make new ones.

For more information, please contact Cherylen Walker-Turner at 202-879-9930.