What do a New Orleans fiction aficionado, a Utah jazz guitarist, a Midwest truck-dock manager, and a Korean economist have in common? All earned degrees at Washington University School of Law on May 16, 2003.

Their varied life experiences, uniquely circuitous paths to the law, and diverse practice interests—ranging from formulating international trade policies to defending indigent criminals—suggest a lively mix of independent thinkers. Their stories also demonstrate that the law and the School of Law itself encompass a broad range of people and ideas.

Khara Coleman, JD '03
Can a love of language translate into a burgeoning law career? The case of Khara Coleman gives evidence that it can.

She first came to Washington University as an undergraduate from New Orleans and majored in French and English. “I liked to read fiction and was a very happy undergrad,” says Coleman. “I wasn’t focused on a career, but just on learning.”

The leap from literature to law wasn’t entirely easy. Even after she decided to enter law school, she wasn’t sure it was right for her. “I came to study law, not to be a lawyer,” says Coleman, who received a Chancellor’s fellowship to attend law school. “I thought I could do other things with a law degree.”

She arrived at law school with a deep appreciation for the law. “For my African-American ancestors, the law shaped everything—from slavery to legalized segregation. It controls our lives,” she says, “and that’s why I was interested in it.”

Ultimately, thanks to her stamina and to the influence of key professors, Coleman came to learn that her destiny lay in the law. She earned a two-year appointment as a clerk for the United States Court of Appeals for the Eighth Circuit in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. After that she has a job waiting for her at the firm of Kirkland and Ellis in Chicago.

The Class of 2003
Four graduates reflect the diversity of the School of Law’s newest class of 254 JDs and 58 LLMs.
Eventually she hopes to practice appellate litigation and, some day perhaps, to teach law.

“Professors Barbara Flagg and Christopher Bracey taught me things I’ve been curious about all my life,” she says. “And I didn’t know federal income tax could be so interesting until I took a class by Professor Peter Wiedenbeck. Some people avoid tax and other hard courses, but I wanted to squeeze everything I could out of law school.”

That philosophy guided Coleman throughout her academic career. During her seven-year tenure at Washington University, while earning her AB and JD degrees, she served in the Student Union, on the University’s Board of Trustees, and in the Black Law Students Association. Coleman worked on the student newspaper, Student Life; she won a law school negotiation competition and a University fiction competition; and she studied dance and picked up Spanish. With a public affairs fellowship from Coro, she researched turning urban riverfronts into greenways and trails. Coleman also helped in alternatives-to-violence workshops at a minimum-security prison.

She still found time to pursue her love of literature and languages. “My closest friends also love fiction. We’re always reading, exchanging books, and going to bookstores together,” she says. “Literature and languages keep me centered.”

Her experience in law school also remains pivotal: “Law school is where I became the person I always wanted to be. After three intense years, I sit here very content,” adds Coleman. “I am happy with who I have become. I have an idea of who I want to be—and I think I’ll be happy with her, too.”

Moses Cook, JD ’03

He grew up “kind of poor” and under difficult family circumstances. His mother sometimes needed public assistance, he and his little sister lived off and on with their grandmother, and he was aware of family members who were in trouble for dealing drugs.

But Moses Cook says he benefited from these early experiences, learning how he wanted to spend his life: “fighting for people who can’t fight for themselves.” And he found that “you don’t need to make a bunch of money to be happy.”

Cook came to the School of Law via the University of Utah, where he studied music and jazz guitar; St. Etienne, France, where he met his wife, Julie, an exchange student like himself; and the University of North Dakota, where he earned a bachelor’s degree in French.

Now, since winning the prestigious Prettyman fellowship to attend Georgetown University, he is studying practical aspects of criminal defense and representing Washington, D.C., clients in criminal cases. In his second year as a fellow, he will also supervise students in a criminal justice clinic.

At Washington University School of Law, this guitar-playing French student encountered professors and, he hopes, lifelong friends who gave him “a tremendous gift. It’s the ultimate tool,” says Cook of his legal education. “With it, you can sculpt your own destiny.”

Though he came to law school “just to see what was out there,” with an eye toward international human rights law, his destiny now seems to lie in defending those unable to pay for their own defense. As a public defender, “I want to be a voice for people whom society has given up on,” says Cook. “I want to effect social change. And I want to change the way people view criminals, the poor, and minorities.”

His enthusiasm for the law and for law school came in part from his law professors. “I tend to be laid back. But I was a teaching assistant for Jo Ellen Lewis [associate director of legal research and writing], who has tremendous enthusiasm,” says Cook. “She focused me and transferred her enthusiasm to me. From her I learned to go full steam ahead and give it my all.”

Professors Karen Tokarz and Jane Aiken—both of whom he describes as “warmhearted, generous, caring, and patient”—also influenced him. “You definitely need to be caring, warmhearted, and sincere to be a good lawyer,” Cook says. “Ultimately, for most lawyers, your success depends on how good you are...
with people, how well you listen and read people. But you also need to be a zealous advocate."

Cook himself demonstrated boundless zeal. "I never had self-doubts," he says. "I took classes that would be interesting, practical classes where I got my hands dirty. It was fun. I never got stressed or worried. I got involved as much as I could and soaked it all in."

That “soaking” included doing public-defender work for two summers, winning a Golden Quill in the Environmental Law Moot Court Competition, being a regional finalist in the National Trial Competition, working with the AIDS Project at Legal Services of Eastern Missouri, and organizing an AIDS march this past spring. He also served as executive notes and topics editor of the Washington University Law Quarterly, and was a member of the Criminal Law Society and the Sports and Entertainment Law Society.

"I now see things in a different light," says Cook. "I feel very privileged to be where I am."

Pam Howlett, JD '03
Skills learned as a child in her family's Cleveland bar and during a nine-year stint at Midwest truck docks figure prominently in Pam Howlett's journey to her JD degree.

At age 10 she began working for her mother at Pat's in the Flats, which she describes as "a blue-collar and alternative-music bar" near Jacobs Field in downtown Cleveland. From there she went to the University of Chicago to study East Asian languages and civilization—an interest fueled primarily, she says, by a TV cop show set in Chinatown and a high-school paper on Chou En-Lai.

"Undergrad school was a stressful four years. I hadn't been well prepared," says Howlett.

She had always wanted to go to law school, but realized, upon graduating, that she needed more than an ability to speak Mandarin Chinese to get on in that world. "I knew I needed to learn other skills, such as salesmanship and powers of persuasion," Howlett says.

Thinking that a year or two in the workday world might help, she got a job as a dispatcher at a Roadway truck dock in Chillicothe, Ohio. That's when her Pat's in the Flats people skills kicked in. "I'm comfortable with all different types of folks," says Howlett. "You learn to treat everyone alike when you grow up in a bar environment."

That helped her in dealing with the varying demands of management, the Teamsters, and, ultimately, prospective customers, when she was promoted to a sales job in Fort Wayne, Indiana. Her success there led to another promotion—office manager in St. Louis—and another—terminal manager for three docks in central Missouri and Illinois. While she was terminal manager, she met her husband, a driver for Roadway.

But by then her detour had lasted nine years. "I knew it was time to quit when it was no longer a challenge, but just moving boxes," says Howlett.

The skills she had learned in the trucking industry ultimately helped her prosper in law school, she says. "In sales I learned how to go into a situation where I wasn't comfortable—or even wanted—and persuade skeptical people. As an office manager, I learned to multitask and stay on target. My job as a terminal manager was detail oriented, where I had to keep track of shipments, hazardous materials, and manpower. Good attention to detail is critical for a lawyer, where one missed detail could ruin a case."

Yet despite these real-world skills, Howlett was anxious when she entered law school. "Going in I was nervous about whether I would fit into the law school experience and with my younger classmates," says Howlett.

"But I found them mature, hardworking, and fun. I made good friends, who made it a lot more enjoyable than I thought it would be."

She also found professors—like Kathleen Brickey, Frances Foster, and Bruce La Pierre—who challenged and encouraged her.

"I loved the law school experience," says Howlett, "particularly the accessibility of people across the board, from professors—where it's totally open door—to admissions to career services."

"I treated law school like a job, where my work experience was a bonus."

"Law school reminded me that there are no easy answers, that there is always another point of view, and that snap judgments are to be avoided." Pam Howlett
Andrew Dongwook Lee, LLM '03

His wife thought he was crazy. So did his friends.

After all, Andrew Dongwook Lee worked as a senior analyst for the Korean Center for International Finance in Seoul, advising the Presidential House, Ministry of Finance, and Bank of Korea on economic issues. He wrote important articles on international economics for the Korea Times, and he had written books on Chinese banking and international capital markets. After the economic scandal that sent two of his president's top advisers to prison, Lee helped establish new laws to make political donations transparent. And he had good connections in Hong Kong and China, where he had spent 10 years. He spoke Korean, English, Mandarin Chinese, Cantonese, Shanghainese, and Japanese.

Nonetheless, he led his wife halfway around the world to study at Washington University School of Law.

"Whether we like it or not, globalization means Americanization," says Lee, "and U.S. law affects international law. So I decided to learn U.S. law in the United States."

But there was more to it than that. Although Korea is among the most wired nations in the world, says Lee, it has virtually no Internet law. "U.S. Internet law, intellectual property law, family law, and communication law are much more complex and specific," he says. "I studied here to borrow ideas and help enact similar laws in Korea."

Lee spent this past summer getting Weird and Funny Stories of American Family Law published in Korea and working as an intern at the St. Louis County Family Court, with help from a Washington University public interest stipend. After earning his LLM in United States law in May 2003, he decided to enroll in the JD program at Washington University this fall.

But that American talkativeness and inquisitiveness often do not go far enough, in Lee's view. Building good international relations is vital, he says, pointing out that 40 percent of America's gross national product comes through foreign trade.

"Many American students do not understand how important international relations are, nor how unique international students are," says Lee. "These students are the one percent who will be leaders. This is a good opportunity to develop relationships and influence them, but it is not always taken."

Lee, though, feels lucky. He was assigned a mentor, fellow law student Jerome Lubelchek, who taught him more about the United States than he ever learned as an international economist. "He invited us to his home in Chicago for Thanksgiving," says Lee. "I saw the warmth and hospitality of the American family for the first time. This impressed me more than any American diplomacy ever could."

Lee will take his appreciation of Americans and American culture—along with his legal training—with him when he ultimately returns to Korea. He hopes to put his Washington University education to use working for the World Trade Organization, World Bank, or International Monetary Fund.◆