

**WIELDING THE POWER OF A LEGALLY TRAINED MIND  
WITH VIRTUE, CIVILITY, AND COURAGE**

**BROOKLYN LAW SCHOOL  
ONE HUNDRED AND SEVENTEENTH COMMENCEMENT CEREMONY  
REMARKS BY  
NICHOLAS W. ALLARD  
PRESIDENT, JOSEPH CREA DEAN, AND PROFESSOR OF LAW  
BROOKLYN ACADEMY OF MUSIC  
HOWARD GILMAN OPERA HOUSE  
MAY 18, 2018  
11 A.M.**

Good morning! I add my congratulations to Stuart Subotnick and to his fellow members of the 50<sup>th</sup> reunion great Class of 1968.

Today I will speak about wielding the power of a legally trained mind with virtue, civility and courage.

For starters, I will share something I learned only last night. It is very much on my mind on this very special day for our great Law School, for all of you, and I believe for our community, nation, and the world. Last night, your classmate Janis Dizon introduced me to her three daughters: Fatima, Ayesha, and Salima. Janis explained to me that the reason she studied law was not for herself, but, instead, to prove to and show her three daughters what they can accomplish; to inspire them. And she has. One aspires to be a judge, one a successful lawyer, and one of the young firecrackers is thinking about running for high office. Janis asked me to mention our part-time students today. I will not do that because, as you know, I do not like the term “part-time.”

Students like Janis, who earn their degree in four or more years, more accurately could be described as “double timers,” given how hard and long they work at home and on jobs while studying law.

But I will say this: Janis and her daughters represent what is special, unique, and great about our Law School. What truly sets us apart, and has since it opened its doors, is the breadth and depth of its excellent education and opportunity that it provides to people from every walk of life and circumstance. I ask Janis and her daughters to please stand to receive our applause as surrogates for what the entire class has accomplished.

I am sure that for our graduates, 50 years from now seems like several lifetimes away. However, I promise you, your 50th reunion year – in 2068 – will arrive in a flash. Time has a way of slipping our grasp. I am sure that as you sit here today, it seems to you as though your time at Brooklyn Law School has passed at warp speed.

Were you at the Convocation Ceremony three years ago when I sang to you? Remember I used a huge boom box and then the lights went out? I learned a lesson...we made sure the lights will stay on today, and I will not use a boom box. Your classmate James Allen said: "lose the boombox -- it is so '80s!" Ouch.

Another of your classmates, who I will not embarrass by naming, but is a true Brooklyn native, helpfully suggested, using the local vernacular, that I sing "arkopelago!" Our LL.M. from Columbia, Giselle Mateus, politely asked me to show a movie instead. Be patient and you may be pleasantly surprised.

At your Convocation, I told you that "if you do the work of law school, and life does not throw you an unexpected curveball, you will graduate before you possibly can imagine. It will seem faster than the blink of an eye. Trust me on that."

Did you believe me at the time—as you were sitting in the federal courthouse, probably anxious about what lay ahead and unsure whether you had what it took to earn a law degree? Well, here you are today, ready to take on the world as new lawyers.

I mean it. The education you have received and the quality of your achievements are better than most and second to none. Two days ago, in St. Petersburg, Russia, Professor David Reiss and I were present for the awarding of a new Nobel-like prize for law. Our own professor Neil Cohen was prominently recognized as a semi-finalist. Your school was praised as one of the **80** great educational institutions around the world invited to nominate candidates. I mention this as just one very recent proof point about the quality of education you received. If you want further proof you need look no further than at my colleagues, your faculty, who are here on stage with me. Not a day goes by when I am not deeply impressed by their stature as scholars and have the privilege of observing their dedication to outstanding teaching.

Join me in giving the Brooklyn Law School faculty a well-deserved round of applause.

Today, you likely are flooded with memories—thinking of your accomplishments, the friends you made, the challenges you met successfully, and, perhaps, as Maria recalled, a few failures along the way that you learned from, and that will make you a better lawyer.

Now, I will yield the floor and let you speak for yourselves. Giselle, as promised, here is a short documentary film featuring several of your fellow graduates sharing what their time at Brooklyn Law School has meant to them.

**[video plays]**

Recently, I have been thinking a great deal about time, and the uses of time. Today, as you look back and ahead, and, as you

rightly celebrate your achievements; please take a moment to think about the uses of time by your legally trained mind. Now, I am not speaking about billable hours—although for many of you that will become a daily reality. I am speaking of a more fundamental question. How will you use your time on earth? When you return for your 50<sup>th</sup> law school reunion, what will you look back on with pride? What will you regret? The concept of a “bucket list” is a cliché now, but we can go beyond the usual list of places we want to see, or adventures we want to have, and create a bucket list of how we want to use the power of our legal education and the law to make a positive difference.

As you consider those questions, and think about what you want your legacy to be over time, I offer three seemingly old-fashioned words that I believe are more relevant to us than ever as lawyers, as citizens, and as human beings: virtue, courage, and civility.

The writer David Brooks talks about two kinds of **virtues**: the résumé virtues and the eulogy virtues. The résumé virtues are the skills you bring to the marketplace. The eulogy virtues are the ones that are talked about at your funeral. Now, I know you all have impressive resumes—the breadth of your accomplishments, including the sparkling new jewel of your J.D. and LL.M., is simply astounding. Someday, when you are feeling blue, walk around Times Square and look at all the people who would want to be in your shoes, who respect you and need your help.

But, what will be your eulogy virtues? What are the virtues that you will embody and to which you aspire? How will your legally trained mind, your skills, and your talents, and your determined effort, help you stay true to your virtues and enable them to flourish?

We also must strive ceaselessly to be **civil**. By that I mean being “civil” in the true sense of the word in both our public and private

lives. Civility has come to be synonymous with “courtesy” and “good manners,” not raising our voices in argument as though we are on a cable news panel. Yet, the Latin root word for civility, *civis*, means much more, because it literally means being a “citizen.” To be civil is literally to engage in a deeply important activity. It is to behave conscientiously, fulfilling the duties of a free citizen by committing oneself to speech and action, duly sensitive to the needs of your fellow citizens.

Finally, you must have **courage**. This word, too, has multiple meanings. You can have physical courage, which as we have seen in countless examples, can come to people when they least expect it.

You can have social courage; the courage of your convictions and your willingness to stand up for the right thing even though you may be criticized or ostracized. We see too often these days people of good faith who are excoriated on social media—but

they persist nonetheless in their dedication to creating a better future for all.

Perhaps the most powerful is existential courage—the courage to act, to move forward, and to hope in the direst situations. To stare open eyed into the possibility that one’s life might be meaningless. In fact, the author Barbara Ehrenreich coined this term writing about her own battle with cancer. This is to face the abyss, the prospect that what you do or feel may not matter, and to keep going. It is the famous “to be or not to be” question. Many of us have seen this courage in loved ones facing serious illness. And we see it daily in stories about refugees and immigrants who risk their lives to give their family a better life. Throughout history, we have seen lawyers stand up for the unpopular, the outnumbered, the different and the disadvantaged. It is the kind of courage that can change history.

The class of 1968 graduated in a year full of tumult here at home and around the world, uncertainty about the future, and a rise in activism among young people. Sound familiar?

Future generations will look at how you acted in this pivotal moment in history. Or, in the words of a song from a certain popular Broadway musical you may be familiar with: “History has its eyes on you.”

As newly minted lawyers, you are just in time—like the cavalry arriving in a Hollywood Western—you are needed to make a difference in the harsh and disruptive struggles played out every day before our eyes and ears. All across America, and throughout the world, people are fighting over nothing less than the future of democracy, and the future of humanity. The outcome of fundamental disagreements, indeed epic fights over justice, equality, globalism and the environment, for example, will determine whether the values and institutions that have proven to

be vital to empowering and serving people will continue to evolve, improve, and endure.

Certainly, there is ample reason for concern. But, I am determined to be optimistic—for many reasons. A major one is what I see when I look out at all of you gathered here today. You will walk in the footsteps of generations of outstanding lawyers who have preceded you, including our distinguished speaker today, the **Honorable Dora I. Irizarry**; our esteemed former dean who also is here on stage, the **Honorable I. Leo Glasser**, a member of the Class of 1948, and U.S. District Court judge of the Eastern District of New York; the **Honorable Jeanette Rodriguez-Morick**, who was mentioned earlier; and many other graduates of our great Law School.

Now, this is your time. This is your opportunity to step up and take on responsibility for the imperfect world in which we live, and that your children will, in turn, inherit. You can remind us of the classic

qualities—the virtues—of the heroes we long have admired, such as selflessness, courage, modesty, respect, and adherence to core principles.

There are many causes begging for action—world health, poverty, oppression and violence, bigotry, ignorance, and intolerance.

Without doubt there is plenty of work to be done. When you think about it, it is almost heroic getting involved at all when you consider the magnitude and intractable nature of these problems. So, it may help you to consider Sir Edmund Burke's observation that the biggest mistake one can make is to do nothing, because one believes they can do only a little.

You are also needed to teach. All of us, young and not so young, witnessing the grand, forced civics and legal lessons brought daily to you via breaking news, are engaged in a teaching moment that links generations with a mutual chance to learn from one another.

As lawyers, you are now in an essential and enviable position of advancing understanding of the law and our legal system at a time when that is needed more than ever.

Your achievements and your dedication to the law fuels my optimism for the future. I only wish, selfishly, to live long enough to see how you make the future better for my six grandchildren, and their children.

So, be virtuous, be civil, be courageous. Start by doing what is necessary; then do what is possible; and suddenly you are doing the impossible. In doing so, you will change the world.

Congratulations!

**Linda Feldman '83 Tribute**

Now it is my bittersweet responsibility to acknowledge a transition at the Law School: the retirement of Professor Linda Feldman.

Linda Feldman, a member of the Class of 1983, is the heart and soul of Brooklyn Law School. As founder and director of the Academic Success Program, her extraordinary dedication to student success has done nothing less than transform the lives of generations of our students, who earned their law degrees and went on to successful careers. She personifies the principle that if students don't learn the way you teach, then you should teach the way they learn.

Professor Feldman's tireless work and endless innovation have made her a nationally recognized leader in the field of academic success. But it is her selfless commitment to her students and to Brooklyn Law School that has made her one of the most respected and loved faculty members in the school's history. She is, in fact, an official Brooklyn Law School icon. A well-deserved honor we bestowed on her at our Gala on Ellis Island three years ago.

As Professor Feldman has found joy in her career, I know that she also will embrace the next chapter of her life with her trademark exuberance, energy, and intellectual curiosity. We thank her immensely for her many contributions to her students and colleagues at Brooklyn Law School over the last 30 years. We will greatly miss you.

Professor Feldman, please come forward so that we can recognize you with a round of applause and a small token of our esteem and affection.

## **Conclusion**

The 117<sup>th</sup> Brooklyn Law School Commencement has now concluded. Congratulations on this extraordinary accomplishment. With your law degrees comes a great and sobering responsibility to be the guardians of the law, and, in the words of the preamble to the Constitution: "Secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity." The future is in your hands. You are empowered with the tools honed by your legal education to make the world a better place.

At your Convocation, I encouraged you to “dream big, experiment, engage with purpose, and make us as proud of you tomorrow as we are today.” You have indeed made us proud, and now we expect great things from you. I have every confidence you will go forth to add your own impressive and distinctive achievements to the Brooklyn Law School legacy.

Remember, you are now officially alumni of the best law school in Brooklyn. That is, the best law school in the most vibrant borough in the Big Apple of the great Empire State, in the most enduring, successful democratic republic on the planet. Let us once again applaud our remarkable graduates.

I look forward to seeing each of you and your guests at the picnic at the Law School immediately following this ceremony. Enjoy your celebration.