



Brooklyn Law School

ESTABLISHED 1901

ONE HUNDRED & SEVENTEENTH
COMMENCEMENT CEREMONY

BROOKLYN ACADEMY OF MUSIC

MAY 18, 2018

REMARKS



COMMENCEMENT PROGRAM

Presiding.....	Stuart Subotnick '68 Chairman of the Board of Trustees
The National Anthem.....	Regina L. Williams
Invocation.....	Reverend Adriene Thorne Senior Pastor First Presbyterian Church of Brooklyn
Valedictorian.....	Jamie Michelle Freilich '18
Student Graduation Speaker.....	Maria Esperanza Ortiz '18
Conferring of Honorary Degree.....	Stuart Subotnick '68
Address to the Graduating Class.....	Hon. Dora L. Irizarry Chief Judge, U.S. District Court Eastern District of New York
Special Presentation to Stuart Subotnick.....	Frank Aquila '83 Vice Chairman of the Board of Trustees
Remarks to the Graduating Class.....	Dean Nicholas W. Allard
Conferring of Degrees.....	Stuart Subotnick '68
Closing of the Ceremony.....	Dean Nicholas W. Allard
Music.....	The Broeklundian Quartet Naomi Graf, Viola Rachel Hauser, Violin Jennifer Jahn, Cello Sandra Schipior, Violin



Jamie Michelle Freilich '18

VALEDICTORIAN

Honored guests, esteemed faculty, and my fellow graduates: Good morning! Today is quite a day. It is a day to celebrate our accomplishments and to thank the many people who helped us get to this point. I am thrilled, and honored, to be standing with you today to do exactly that and speak about our experiences as Brooklyn Law School students.

Though many law students and lawyers alike bemoan the absence of reality and the inaccuracy of the law in shows like “Ally McBeal,” “The Good Wife,” and “Suits,” or even classic works like “My Cousin Vinny” and the incomparable “Legally Blonde,” all are accurate in one respect. In each, the protagonist’s success was possible only when they relied on the support of those around them, seeking out and finding a community of peers to help them achieve their goals and to assist when things went off track. These fictional stories resonate because they are emblematic of what each of us has found at Brooklyn Law School—a community.

When we began—regardless of which program we entered—LL.M., 2-year, 4-year, or the regular old 3-year J.D. program—we knew very little about the journey ahead of us. We heard rumors of professors’ merciless cold-calling of students in class, but knowing what was coming did not make the experience any less difficult. It feels like just yesterday that I had no words in my head when I got cold-called in Civil Procedure to answer the apparently very difficult question of “What are lawyers useful for?” a question that, today, I feel more confident in my ability to answer.

As we recovered from the shock of those first cold-calls, we started to figure things out. We found our favorite study spots and then found new ones after the library revamp. We discovered where to find free non-pizza lunches, and as we sat through our first semester, we learned that a tort is far more than an Italian dessert, but an area of the law helping people recover when they jump into a lake, forgetting they don’t know how to swim.

We realized that while we each came to law school for our own personal reasons, we would not survive if we went through it alone because the intricacies of the law were best learned with others. We found study partners or groups, not only to give the non-lawyers in our lives a break from our incessant ramblings, but to help ourselves—and to help each other. We were a true team, learning from each other, challenging each other, and pushing each other. Without a doubt, I would not be standing before this room today if not for the incredible people I met over the last three years, people who were amazing classmates, and who also became amazing incredible study partners and some of my closest friends.

Together, we excelled, not only in the classroom but in all facets of our law school experiences. We won Moot Court competitions. We won writing competitions, and we figured out how to master the “Bluebook,” the surprisingly nuanced bible of legal citations. We participated in pro bono projects run exclusively by us—the students. Brooklyn Law School’s four journals produced thousands of pages of scholarship filled with student-written notes and articles selected and edited by, you guessed it, the students. Beyond that, we involved ourselves in the larger Brooklyn community, stepping away from abstract theory and casebooks to apply our legal skills and passion to the important debates of our time. We marched to end gun violence; we spoke up for women’s equality; we gathered together to effect change in the wake of the first travel ban; we combatted discrimination, such as that highlighted by the Black Lives Matter movement; and that is just the tip of the iceberg. This class accomplished so much because we set goals. We worked hard, and throughout it all we worked together to achieve what we set out to accomplish. Class of 2018, while we might not want to admit how much these last few years have aged us, they certainly have matured us. What we have been able to achieve together is incredible.

Our achievements are noteworthy, but I would be remiss to not mention our professors. They are the people who encouraged us to work together, the people without whom this day would not exist. On a personal note, as a 1L, I literally ran into Professor Janger during a race. I was struggling, and as Professor Janger shot past me, he yelled out “you look strong—keep going.” That moment stuck with me because his encouragement was what I needed to make it to the finish line. Just as Professor Janger encouraged me during my run, it was the esteemed Brooklyn Law faculty that helped each of us cross the proverbial finish line of law school—cheering us on, encouraging us when we most needed it, and providing us the education and knowledge to take on what comes next. We have had the exceptional opportunity to learn Criminal Procedure from former federal and state prosecutors, to learn Evidence from a future Israeli Supreme Court Justice, and to learn Constitutional Law from the President of the ACLU. Our professors have been instrumental in shaping us into the lawyers we dreamed of becoming, and they have aptly prepared us for what lies ahead. And, so to our esteemed faculty, as well as to the administrators and staff: thank you.

It goes without saying that law school entails more ups and downs than I think anyone here cares to count or remember. But knowing that we were not going through this experience alone—that we had people in our corner, people who would listen, made all the difference. And, it is why our families and friends are the true guests of honor today. To you, our friends, family, and support systems: we are so grateful for all that you have done over the last few years. Though you may not quite be free from our ramblings yet—rumor is, studying for the bar is no picnic—thank you for being there, for helping us become who we are today, and for continuing to encourage our successes.

Specifically, thank you to my mom and dad for teaching me the value of humor and for always encouraging me to think outside of the imaginary lines. To my brother, Ross, thank you for never hesitating to help me out, and thank you for funneling your endless stream of podcasts in

my direction, making you the best unofficial research assistant out there. To my grandparents, thank you for showing me how to handle a challenging situation with grace and elegance, and grandma, for being the best hype-woman money can't buy. And to my fiancé, Eric, your unyielding encouragement is what helped me make it here today. Thank you for being my most reliable sounding board and my biggest supporter.

To my classmates and fellow graduates, today is a day to reflect, to celebrate, to thank others, and, most of all, a day to be immensely proud. We've banded together; we've helped each other; and so, congratulations to the Class of 2018, because together, we made it.





Maria Esperanza Ortiz '18

STUDENT GRADUATION SPEAKER

I actually didn't tell my parents I would be speaking today, so SURPRISE guys! Thank you for all your love and support; I couldn't have gotten here without you.

Good morning Dean Allard, administrators, families, special guests, and of course, Class of 2018.

In the movie "A League of Their Own," a wise man said, "It's supposed to be hard. If it wasn't hard, everyone would do it. The hard is what makes it great." For those of you who haven't had the pleasure of spending time in our library, this quote is posted above the stairwell, and can be seen as you come down the stairs exiting the library. I passed this quote multiple times a day, multiple times a week during my studies here, and for those of you who haven't deliberately forgotten the experience, this quote even made a guest appearance during the writing competition.

I had not seen the movie, but for me, an overwhelmed and underprepared college grad with a fresh shovel of student loans, this quote, from the beginning, resonated so well. Because for me, maybe like you, the choice to come to law school was not easy. Maybe you also heard that law school would be boring, it'd be expensive, and it'd be challenging, and how you wouldn't have time for anything or you would have no life. And in thinking about the people who told me law school is going to be tough, I can't help but think, well, duh.

For those of you who have not seen the movie "A League of Their Own," the movie is about the rise of a professional all-female baseball league. That quote that I mentioned earlier happens when one of the star players, Dottie, tries to quit the team, and Tom Hanks, her coach in the movie, stops her and tells her that it's supposed to be hard. If it wasn't hard, everyone would do it. The hard is what makes it great. That's why this is so important.

No kidding, it was hard. And no kidding, there were times I wanted to quit after a bad day, after not receiving the grade, job, or result I wanted after months of working so hard. After messing up, feeling stupid, saying the wrong things. And between myself and from what I've seen from this class, challenges were not always in the classroom, but also in balancing a job and going back to school, balancing families, or losing a loved one. Perhaps you felt like quitting too.

But that's why I am so happy I came to this law school, because I have been surrounded by encouraging mentors, in the form of alumni, classmates, and professors who believed in me when I couldn't believe in myself. For me, this was a community where a cold call became a nickname. Where technology has truly broken at the worst possible time, only to work with friends to rebuild what you lost, or cheer you up. Where changes, challenges, and being told "no" were faced with determination and aplomb, from protests, marches, walkouts, taking the bar exam with a newborn, and even braving the new bathroom sinks. The hard is what made this so great and I wouldn't be a part of the Brooklyn Law School League without it.

So let me sum up this Brooklyn League, the Class of 2018, which is one awesome team to walk away with: award-winning writers, public service leaders, innovators, clinician superstars who work tirelessly for the underserved, walkout organizers, immigrant rights marchers, appellate arguers; we also have O'Keefe's lobbyists, Dodgeball Champions, and some very good karaoke-ists and mediocre comedians. Less well-known and equally as important to the league are the trial-ad enthusiasts, who will sit in the Moot Court room until midnight, thinking we came up with something brilliant, only to trash the idea the next morning. And finally, the personal tutors and heroes, people who will teach you corporations, what a tort is, and the rule against perpetuities; or lend you their laptop when you forget it for your exam—thank you, Craig.

The "League of Our Own" is something that will carry over into our next phase as young lawyers. Because perhaps you, like me, are leaving Brooklyn Law School a different version of the lawyer than you anticipated. Maybe you became a leader, an advocate, a negotiator, or a student speaker because of the support of the people around you. And going into our careers, I hope you remember and continue to look out for each other, because today was a team effort from our league in this room, and even the people who couldn't be here today. From Mississippi, to New Mexico, to the distant boroughs of Queens and The Bronx. Because from what I've seen, especially from alumni, once on the Brooklyn League, always on the Brooklyn League.

So thank you to my team. The simple acts throughout the years really made this experience great. Running into people in Starbucks, the weird closed-mouthed smiles, the elevator talk, the Sterling wine next mornings, all these mini experiences, though so simple, have made my experience extraordinary, and I look forward to the greatness to come.

Thank you everyone for having me.





Hon. Dora L. Irizarry

HONORARY SPEAKER

Good morning, Dean Allard, Board of Trustees, faculty, parents, graduates, and guests of Brooklyn Law School! Thank you Mr. Subotnick for that very kind and generous introduction. I am thrilled to have the opportunity to speak at your commencement. I particularly am honored to have been granted an honorary degree from Brooklyn Law School. I was very touched and nearly speechless when Dean Allard gave me the news. You see, I came very close to attending Brooklyn Law School upon graduating from Yale as it had (and still has) a very robust public interest curriculum and active student body, but Columbia gave me more money. I think you all can understand why I went in that direction! It is my good fortune that, as a judge sitting in the federal court just a few blocks away from the school, I have had the privilege and joy of participating in Brooklyn Law School's various academic, bench, and bar programs, including judicial internships. I look forward enthusiastically to a continued partnership with Brooklyn Law School to supplement the school's curriculum with judicial internships, advocacy programs, and access to court proceedings and judges as learning vehicles.

I am proud and pleased to say that a number of my former student interns and law clerks are Brooklyn Law School graduates, and all of them have distinguished themselves in their legal careers. Indeed, I am particularly pleased and grateful that one of my first law clerks, Jeanette Rodriguez-Morick, is part of today's procession on this stage. She currently is a Judge of the New York State Court of Claims, sitting in both the Court of Claims and as an Acting Supreme Court Justice in the Criminal Term. I am so very proud of her.

There are two other people on this stage who I want to acknowledge with heartfelt thanks, the Hon. I. Leo Glasser, Senior District Judge of the Eastern District of New York, a dear mentor and friend to me and so many of our colleagues in the EDNY, and a professor and former Dean of Brooklyn Law School, who graduated from Brooklyn Law School 70 years ago, in 1948. A member of the Greatest Generation, he studied under the GI Bill after serving in the Army during World War II. I also want to thank my friend and colleague who also is here, the Hon. Ramon E. Reyes, U.S. Magistrate Judge of the EDNY, another distinguished graduate of Brooklyn Law School.

Indeed, Brooklyn Law School has produced many illustrious attorneys and jurists, some of whom studied at night while working full time and raising families, like Senior District Judge Sterling Johnson Jr. of my Court. Many of them broke barriers in the profession as women and minorities. So, congratulations, Class of 2018! You now have the opportunity to follow the example of those who came before you who have made their mark as attorneys in the private sector, as public servants, and as academics, and put your own stamp on the world.

Most importantly, you should resolve to go forth and use your newly minted skills, energy, and intelligence to do good. As you go forth, you will be challenged to step out of your comfort zone and face uncharted paths. Perhaps you might feel a little afraid or nervous to do so. Go forth anyway. Break new ground! That nervousness and fear, if channeled correctly, can keep you sharp and force you to be prepared. Do not fear failure. Welcome it. As Abraham Lincoln said, “My great concern is not whether you have failed, but whether you are content with your failure.” Colin Powell, who, like me, grew up in the South Bronx, said this about success: “There are no secrets to success. It is the result of preparation, hard work, and learning from failure.” I learned these lessons early in my career as a relatively new prosecutor trying my first Class A-I felony against seasoned, highly regarded defense attorneys. I prevailed and won the case because I heeded the advice of my supervisor, “Don’t be intimidated. Just be prepared and do your best.”

Think about one of the giants of the legal profession, Justice Thurgood Marshall. Early in his career, he was trying cases for the NAACP in areas where he and his colleagues risked being lynched. He must have been afraid and concerned for his life. But he went forth anyway, and see what great things he accomplished. Make no mistake, there will be many challenges that await you. That’s the excitement of it all—what makes the journey interesting. We live in tumultuous times. Schoolchildren must engage in active shooter drills to insure a proper response in the event a classmate decides to bring a firearm to school. People have questioned why our criminal justice system incarcerates more people than any country in the world, most of them poor, Black, and Hispanic. There is widespread concern over the protection of our constitutional rights, immigration issues, and the spread of terrorism. The events of 9/11 have made us willing to accept the presence of armed soldiers in our train stations and to increase the level of scrutiny as we travel from one place to another. Some may view this as a discouraging picture. However, George Washington, one of the architects of the Constitution and this great experiment called the United States of America said:

“We must never despair; our situation has been compromising before, and it changed for the better; so I trust it will again. If difficulties arise, we must put forth new exertion and proportion our efforts to the exigencies of the times.”

I agree with Washington. We should not despair. There is hope. If history has taught us anything, it has shown us that, since the time of the American Revolution, lawyers have been at the forefront of social change and protection of our civil liberties. When the judiciary has come under attack, it has been the lawyers who have come to its defense, to underscore the importance of the rule of law, the separation of powers, and the checks and balances of three separate and equal branches of government. They have been true to their oaths, the oaths that each of you soon will take, and every judge here has taken, to protect and defend the Constitution against all enemies foreign and domestic.

There is hope for the future and it lies in you, today’s graduates from great academic institutions like Brooklyn Law School, with its emphasis on the importance of public service.

Your many pro bono projects and clinics like the Safe Harbor Clinic for asylum seekers, the LGBTQ Advocacy Clinic, the Public Defender Clinic, and the Community Development Clinic, to name a few; fellowships; and internships with judges, government offices and non-profit organizations have inspired a large portion of the graduating class to enter public service.

Those of you who enter private practice also have a duty to defend the principles embodied in the Constitution. Wherever you work, you and your colleagues should adhere to the professional rules of ethics, conduct yourselves professionally and courteously, and ensure that opportunities are available to all equally, without favor to any person based on gender, race, religion, ethnicity or other classification. These duties we all, judges and lawyers, share equally. I cannot emphasize enough the importance of conducting yourselves courteously and professionally with devout adherence to the attorney's code of professional responsibility and ethics. As you zealously defend your clients and their lofty goals, do not lose sight that this is a profession and not a job, or that a court of law is a place where all parties, regardless of their status, should be treated with respect and dignity. As a judge, I expect no less from the attorneys who appear before me. Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg reminds us that "reacting in anger or annoyance will not advance one's ability to persuade." I could not agree more. Great lawyers connect with people, understand them, sympathize and empathize with them, and I will add that they conduct themselves as true officers of the court.

Ultimately, this great American experiment, while not perfect, has succeeded because of our collective respect for and adherence to the principles embodied in our Constitution. Many countries around the world admire it and seek to replicate it. Supreme Court Justice David Davis, writing for the Court in *Ex parte Milligan* in 1866 said, "The Constitution of the United States is a law for rulers and people, equally in war and in peace, and covers with the shield of its protection all classes of men, at all times and under all circumstances." However, as Justice Ginsburg has cautioned, "A constitution, as important as it is, will mean nothing unless the people are yearning for liberty and freedom."

As you go forth and forge your careers as attorneys, you must be determined to be heroic, to remember and be true to your dreams and ideals. You must advocate zealously for those ideals within the bounds of the law, adhering to the Rule of Law and the Constitutional principles we hold dear, never allowing failure to overtake you, but rather learning from it so that you will be stronger. Above all else, always strive to do good in all things. By doing so, you cannot help but become a success and ensure that this Great American Experiment will continue to thrive and inspire the world.

Congratulations to all our graduates and your families! Go forth bravely and do great things! The world awaits you!





Frank Aquila '83

Vice Chairman of the Board of Trustees

Good morning and congratulations to the graduates. I first would like to recognize the members of the class of 1968 here on the stage, who are marking their 50th reunion year: Joseph Catanzaro and Danny Greenblatt. Also celebrating his 50th reunion year is the Chairman of the Board of Trustees, Stuart Subotnick.

Stu has been Chairman of the Board of Trustees since 2004 and a member of the board since the 1990s. In that time, he has led our great Law School into the 21st century and to the forefront of legal education, where it is now nationally and internationally recognized for innovation and excellence.

His extraordinary philanthropy to create the Subotnick Center has invigorated the intellectual life and the social engagement of the Law School community for generations of students, faculty, employees, and alumni. He made an extraordinary gift to the residence hall, Feil Hall, and he established the Stuart and Anita Subotnick Foundation Scholarship, which for 30 years has helped to support students attain a Brooklyn Law School degree in the part-time program, as he did 50 years ago.

As President and Chief Executive Officer of Metromedia Company, Stu has distinguished himself as a successful longtime leader in business and media, and he has served on boards of major arts, education, health, and cultural organizations.

Stu, please come up to the podium. Stuart Subotnick, we honor you today for your many decades of outstanding leadership, dedication, vision, and unparalleled service and support to Brooklyn Law School. We look forward to your continued leadership in further advancing the Law School nationally and internationally.

It is my privilege today to bestow upon you this honorary degree, which, as you know, is the highest degree granted by Brooklyn Law School.

Please accept our heartfelt thanks for all that you do.





Nicholas W. Allard

PRESIDENT, JOSEPH CREA DEAN AND
PROFESSOR OF LAW

Good morning! I add my congratulations to Stuart Subotnick and to his fellow members of the 50th 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 I 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.

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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 50th 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 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 fuel 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 117th Brooklyn Law School Commencement has now concluded. Congratulations on this extraordinary accomplishment. With your law degrees come 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.



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