

The Remarks of U.S. Supreme Court Associate Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg

Dedication of the Thomas Jefferson School of Law

February 7, 2013, The Balboa Theater

"I am glad to be with you this evening to celebrate Thomas Jefferson's brand-new facility. To make a fine law school, of course, it takes more than just legal state of the art housing and equipment. It takes a dedicated creative faculty – determined to educate students to regard law not simply as a trade but as a public calling.

Law and lawyers, one cannot avoid acknowledging, have fared rather badly in many a song and story. In grand opera for example lawyers are barely there. In Johann Strauss's "Die Fledermaus", a lawyer has a bit part. But his assistance is so ineffective, he manages to get for his client three extra days in jail. In Janacek's "Makropoulos" case, an entire act takes place in a lawyer's office. The performance attendees generally agree it is the dullest act in the opera. The lawyer in "Porgy and Bess" ups the price to get Bess a divorce. When she tells him she was never really married before. The presiding judge in Gilbert & Sullivan's "Trial by Jury," sings of how he became a judge. It was managed by a job and a good job too.

Celebrated writers like Shakespeare, Dickens, to Sandburg have harbored a lingering distrust of lawyers, but the legal profession of which I am proud to be a member, has among its practitioners brave men and women who strive to dispel the perception of lawyers as an unworthy lot. Women and men devoted to and that work for the public good are the very best of lawyers and judges – the most dedicated – the least selfish. It is lawyers of that kind that Thomas Jefferson strives to train. And to the school's great credit, its students are drawn from all who compose "we the People." Women, I'm told, account for 50 percent of the student body. Students of color over 40 percent.

Shortly after leaving law teaching, my occupation for 17 years, I wrote that legal education is a shared adventure for students, teachers and alumni. The adventure, as I hope my presence tonight shows, also includes jurists who have traded academic gowns for judicial robes. The good people assembled here, students, faculty, staff, alumni, community leaders, members of the legal profession, and public supporters of the Thomas Jefferson Law School, all of you have contributed in meaningful ways to the creation of a finely designed building.

As you rejoice in the spacious new quarters and take pride in the innovative education that occurs here, may each of you participate and thrive in the shared adventure of legal education. And may that adventure, led by a talented and caring faculty, flourish in the grand facility we dedicate this evening.

Every good wish."