

U.S. Supreme Court Associate Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg

Remarks for Thomas Jefferson Dedication

February 7, 2013

I am glad to celebrate Thomas Jefferson's grand new facility. To make a fine law school, of course, it takes something beyond LEED Gold 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 a few extra days in jail. In Janáček's

*Makropoulos Case*, an entire act takes place in a lawyer's office. But, 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 from Shakespeare to Dickens to Sandburg have harbored a lingering distrust of lawyers.

But the legal profession has among its practitioners brave men and women who strive to dispell the perception of lawyers as an unworthy lot, women and men

devoted to, and at work for, the public good — people who are the best of lawyers and judges, the most dedicated, the least selfish. It is lawyers of that kind that Thomas Jefferson seeks 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% of the student body, and students of color, over 40%.

Shortly after leaving law teaching (my occupation for seventeen years) for a judicial career that began in 1980, I wrote that legal education is a "shared adventure" for students, teachers, and alumni. (The adventure, as I hope my presence here 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 have contributed in meaningful ways to the creation of this 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. May that adventure, led by a talented and caring faculty, flourish in the grand facility we dedicate this evening.

All good wishes.