

Commencement Speech
May 18, 2013

I am deeply honored by being included as an honorary degree recipient of the Thomas Jefferson School of Law. I join each of us as you celebrate your status as a graduate of the School of Law. This is an especially meaningful occasion for me, because I am leaving a position that I have been privileged to hold, here, but also at three other schools over the last 32 years. It is a privilege to be able to shape the future direction of an institution to prepare it for dealing with the very challenging times in legal education. And these will be challenging times.

Having experienced difficult times at three times during my years as Dean, I am confident that we will see an upswing in the legal markets. This current downturn has been more severe and it is taking longer to recover. But we will recover. We are already seeing the start of that recovery. And, there are changes in the ways that lawyers deliver their services. We may never go back to the way services have been delivered in the past. We are seeing the development of smaller delivery units, with a more limited area of expertise being offered. We are seeing expectations that lawyers be more practice ready at the time they graduate. And, yes, you are better prepared in this respect than the earlier graduates of the school. Programs implemented during the past few years have introduced you to more practice skills and practical experiences, whether through externships, exercises in traditional courses, or in the clinical, live client programs. I am proud to have seen this faculty change their orientation to embrace and include more practice orientation in their classes.

To the graduates today, I offer you some special thoughts:

- (1) The only limitations on what you can accomplish are those that you impose on yourselves. You have been given very special problem solving skills that can be used in so many settings. As you sit here today, some of you may have been told that you would never achieve a law degree. Well, you have succeeded. Don't let anyone put up barriers on what you can hope to achieve. Serendipity will play a role in what you ultimately achieve, but you must always be ready to accept challenges and opportunities and seize them. You can make your own luck or at least take advantages of the situations that are presented to you. Be willing to change the script that you have written for your life when those special opportunities arise.
- (2) Remember from where you have come and help someone else achieve what you have achieved. In St Louis, I met a lawyer who had been part of the Harlem Renaissance movement. He was a poet and an artist and a lawyer and a judge. He was a 1912 graduate of the Yale Law School and one of the first African American graduates. He had come up from Florida to attend Yale Law School. I arranged for him to address our entering orientation classes at Saint Louis University for about five years. He was in his 90s and yet he still had a strong

voice and mind. He described the speaker at his orientation at Yale as an elderly gentleman, not too dissimilar from him, who proceeded to welcome the class to the law school and to the noble legal profession that he was about to enter. He remembered the message from that orientation throughout his career. To one who has received much, much is expected. Reach back and help someone else from your community to achieve what you have achieved. It will pay countless dividends.

- (3) Don't forget those people who have made the sacrifices or the special efforts to enable you to be here today, celebrating this graduation. They could be your teachers who believed in your talents. They could be your friends who were willing to give you the space to pursue your studies. They could be your parents, grandparents, siblings, spouse or significant other, or other relatives who were always there to give you that special encouragement or support when you needed it most. For each of you, there is a group of people who need to continue to be in your memory and thoughts. Take the time to reach out to them in a very special way, today and in the future.

I would be remiss if I did not follow my own advice. I am fortunate today to have in the audience today my wife, Julie, and my children, Kyler Hasl Wright, Philip Hasl, and Melanie Harris and her husband, Hudson, also a graduate of the School, and my grandchildren, Walker and Olive. Their sacrifices made my career possible. I think of the many nights out at various law school events; the missed activities and school events; the weekends engaged in ABA Accreditation, Council, and Standards Review meetings; and long nights drafting memos or responding to the demands of others. They permitted me to do those things, which helped me in my career. This is my chance to say thanks to them for that permission.

I thank the Board of Trustees for giving me the opportunity to serve as Dean, for my faculty colleagues who tolerated and embraced my vision for the future of the School of Law, to the staff who spent countless hours implementing the endless stream of initiatives that I developed, and finally to the students for whom we all do what we have done.

To the graduates, one last congratulations and God speed for your journey as a member of the legal profession.