

Good morning.

Last year, Dean Erwin Chemerinsky of UC Irvine spoke here, and at the start of his talk, he told the story of a woman named Carrie Buck. I want to open with the same.

In 1906, Ms. Buck was born in Charlottesville, Virginia. Carrie Buck was a typical young woman of average intelligence. But at the age of 16, Carrie Buck discovered that she was pregnant. Ms. Buck was unmarried. Only many decades later would evidence reveal that her pregnancy was the result of a rape. Ms. Buck's foster parents had her committed to the Virginia Colony for Epileptics and Feeble-minded. The grounds for her commitment were feeble-mindedness, incorrigible behavior, and promiscuity.

While she was committed, the colony's head physician performed surgery on Ms. Buck to forcefully sterilize her. The procedure was legal under Virginia's then-recently-enacted Eugenical Sterilization Act.

After her sterilization, Ms. Buck's challenge to the Sterilization Act eventually reached the Supreme Court, where, by an 8-to-1 majority, the Court upheld the Act as constitutional. As part of the opinion of *Buck v. Bell*, which for a few of us was the first case we read in law school, Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes penned an avowal that will forever be enshrined in our casebooks: "three generations of imbeciles are enough."

It has taken nearly ninety years for scholars and researchers to uncover the true details of Carrie Buck's story, and to begin the process of re-molding her legacy.

In the study of law, the individuals who are the legal system's participants become something less than flesh-and-blood human beings and something closer to mere case identifiers. Carrie Buck of *Buck v. Bell*. Fred Korematsu of *Korematsu v. United States*. Oliver Brown and the other plaintiffs of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*. Edie Windsor of *United States v. Windsor*.

And this makes sense, and it is right, because that is how the legal system is organized and can continue to operate. An essential piece of our role is to extract the threads of the rules those cases stand for, and then to knit those threads into what we define the law to be. And that is how we advocate, and that is how we advocate effectively.

But I would argue that there is another piece to our role—that if extracting the rules is the mind of our work then this other piece is the heart—and that is recognizing and honoring the human beings whose daily lives generated the opinions we read, to act as stewards of their stories whenever possible, and to recall the details that make them who they are.

I began law school writing a speech, and I am ending law school writing a speech. The latter speech is, of course, this one. The former speech, the one I had to write at the start of these three years, was a eulogy. It was a eulogy for my middle sister, Christine,

who died by suicide at the age of 23, the week before we began classes here. And I struggled in writing her eulogy to communicate who she was. So I clung to the details of her. I ended up talking about how when she was a child, her favorite animal was a Dalmatian, and how as an adult, she loved hiking in Yosemite. She was unequivocally brilliant, with a humor so problematically contagious that she got us kicked out, for laughing too hard, from everything from the performance of a high school play to a Tai Chi class.

I suspect, though, too, that I focused on those details because at some level I wondered whether, as much as we loved her, Christine had felt that the world didn't see her, had felt that the world didn't know her, and that that was part of the reason she chose to leave it.

This was the lens through which I experienced law school. And on the days when legal study left us mired in reading and papers, I wondered how one goes about practicing law in a way that declines to reduce its players to the surnames in case titles. Because we have been forced—asked—to read *thousands* of cases, which means that we carry, collectively and individually, one of the greatest aggregations of knowledge of the people whom the legal system has touched. And that is a powerful privilege, but because of the scale of that knowledge, and the demands of our lives, because we're human beings too, it's a privilege that's difficult to wield.

But this brings me to our class, the class of 2016, because what I saw when I entered law school, what I have been so struck by, is how frequently so many students here genuinely came to know those with whom they worked as *people*, whether the matter involved structuring a deal with business leaders or representing someone seeking out Social Security benefits.

One of our classmates this year represented a man who spent six years in jail simply *awaiting* trial. Here are some things she learned about that man: his name is Charles. He used to work as a power washer. He loves work. He has five kids. He is spiritual and soft-spoken.

And because of the advocacy that was provided him, it won't take over ninety years to uncover who he was, because there's at least one person who chooses to know who he *is*.

There will be thousands upon thousands of stories that are inevitably lost to history, but what little we can do is have the grace and the presence of mind to make each person we encounter feel more human.

And what this means in practice—and this isn't always possible, but it will be, sometimes—is to use our power to demonstrate to others that we will ask who they are and what they love and who they love, and we will remember their details, and we will

make at least one of their memories our own, and we will hold it and carry it forward, so that the law can be more than just a cloth we weave out of rules we read but rather something more like a cloak, something with heft, something protective, something humanizing. Because that is the heart of our job—assuring others that the world sees them, assuring others that the world knows them.

Thank you.

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