

C L A S S O F 2 0 1 1 G R A D U A T I O N

CANFIELD COURTYARD
STANFORD UNIVERSITY
JUNE 11, 2011
10:00 A.M.

SLS

CLASS OF 2011 GRADUATION

TO THE MEMBERS, FRIENDS, AND FAMILIES
OF THE CLASS OF 2011:

I can imagine what you are feeling, sitting out there now, waiting for this to begin—and to end. I can imagine because I recall it well, though my own graduation was 27 years ago: the mix of excitement, anticipation, and anxiety blended with a slightly disturbing dash of “is that all there is?” The sense that your time here passed in a flash. The memory of the first day of law school, when this last day seemed forever away and the anxiety, anticipation, and excitement were of a very different kind.

And now, here you are—about to actually graduate from law school. Look around and marvel at how the same people who were strangers when you began have become friends and familiars. And know that they will remain friends and familiars for the rest of your lives.

Some you will remain in close contact with. Others you will work with—or work against. Some you will see only rarely, or only at reunions. But with all your fellow graduates you will have shared the unique and never-to-be-repeated experience of coming to maturity and becoming lawyers.

I hope—we hope—that above and beyond all these complex emotions, you feel a great sense of satisfaction and happiness, for you have accomplished something worthy of your joy and that of your families and friends. Some of you know this only too well. Others, I imagine, grew up in homes where this day or some day like it was always taken for granted, where it was assumed that you would pursue an advanced degree of some sort. But do not lose sight of what a remarkable accomplishment it is. You have worked hard for many years, so much so that it has become habit and you may no longer fully appreciate just how hard it was to reach this point.

Think back to that first day of law school, when you were not completely sure how to identify the plaintiff as opposed to the defendant and when understanding and using phrases like “in personam jurisdiction” or “res ipsa loquitur” seemed impossibly sophisticated. You have learned an incredible amount in your time at Stanford. And, as a result, you are now prepared to join one of humankind’s oldest and most honorable crafts.

Does that sound overblown? Don’t be embarrassed by my grandiose rhetoric. Not today. We should not walk around all the time solemnly declaiming the

profound significance of our chosen paths in life. But today, the day you formally become lawyers (if not quite yet licensed, practicing attorneys), is a good time to recognize what you have accomplished, to say it aloud and stow it away in the backs of your minds so you never fully lose sight of it.

We hope we have prepared you well for your lives and careers. Or, rather, I should say we hope that we have helped you to prepare yourselves. We hope, too, that this means more to you than simply acquiring the knowledge and technical training necessary to use the law effectively. Law is a powerful tool. It can be used for good or for ill, or it can be used indifferently. It can be used instrumentally, as nothing more than a means to an end, or it can be used with a sense of respect and appreciation for its internal art and architecture and history.

What we hope is that we have helped you to see the differences between these uses and have helped you to use law thoughtfully—with appreciation for what you are doing and with a sense of balance and responsibility. Indeed, this sense is more important now than ever, because the times are difficult and you face more uncertainty as you embark on your career than has been the case for many years. Just be confident that if you work hard and, more important, care about your work, you will do well. It is when times are hard that law becomes most important, and part of your responsibility as lawyers is to ensure that law continues to serve and preserve what is best in our society.

Others will talk to you about what that responsibility entails—maybe today, certainly in the days to come. For my part, I want to send you off with a simpler message. Choose a life that works for you and is meaningful to you. You should seek to do good, of course. In whatever life you choose, you should seek to use the knowledge you’ve acquired here to make society better. But whatever you do, be ambitious. Set high goals for yourselves. The world is faced with monumentally difficult problems, problems created by your parents’ generation that we are leaving for you to solve. So go out there and solve them. We believe that you can. And I mean that to each of you, personally, not in some generic generational sense. We need lawyers to solve the problems ahead. We need great lawyers, lawyers with vision and energy and ambition enough to do the impossible.

Do the impossible. Be great, because you can. And live great lives.

Congratulations,



Larry Kramer

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A SHORT HISTORY OF SLS

Stanford began offering a curriculum in legal studies in 1893, when the university recruited legal scholar Nathan Abbott from Northwestern University to be the founding head of the nascent law program. Stanford University founder Senator Leland Stanford launched the new department with much fanfare by arranging for former U.S. President Benjamin Harrison to deliver a landmark series of lectures on the Constitution. Over the next several years, Abbott assembled a small faculty to which he imparted a standard of rigor and excellence that endures to this day.

The year 1900 is significant in the law school's history. After undergoing rapid expansion of the legal curriculum and library, the legal studies department moved from its office in Encina Hall to the Inner Quad and for the first time offered a three-year professional law program. The law department also became one of 27 charter members of the Association of American Law Schools. During this time, the law department began to focus more on professional training than on undergraduate education. The transition from a department to a modern graduate law school was completed in 1924 when Stanford began requiring a bachelor's degree for admission to its legal program.

The Great Depression and World War II seriously disrupted the work of the law school. Enrollment dropped sharply and at the end of 1943 only 30 students were in attendance. The law school nonetheless adhered to its high academic standards, while recognizing that academic content would need to grow to reflect national developments. The faculty correctly predicted that government would play a greater role in the regulation of private affairs and so added administrative law, taxation, trade regulation, labor law, and related subjects to the curriculum during this period.

The late 1940s and 1950s brought a tidal wave of changes, including a new location at the front of the Quad, the first edition of the *Stanford Law Review*, the construction of a law school dormitory (Crothers Hall), the successful introduction of a new moot court program, the graduation of two future U.S. Supreme Court justices, and a commitment to maintaining selective enrollment and small class size. This last decision was perhaps the most important from the standpoint of the long-term success of the law school as it established a rigorous legal program unique in the West and an intimate educational experience for a small, carefully chosen student body.

The 1960s and 1970s ushered in important changes at Stanford Law. Reflecting greater social awareness of the time, the law school became more diverse and its student activities more varied. In 1965 the law school admitted its first African-American students, and in 1968 then Dean Thomas Ehrlich created a new staff position focused on diversity, appointing (now Judge) Thelton Henderson as the first assistant dean in charge of minority admissions. Law student organizations expanded and grew to include, among others, the Environmental Law Society, the

Stanford Chicano Law Student Association, the Women of Stanford Law, and the Stanford Public Interest Law Foundation. And in 1972 the first woman professor, Barbara Babcock, and the first African-American professor, William Gould, both joined the law school faculty. Also in the 1970s, the law school again moved—this time to its current home in Crown Quadrangle. Speaking at the 1975 dedication ceremony for the new law campus, U.S. President Gerald Ford extolled Stanford’s foundation as a “solid triad of law, learning, and liberty.”

Building on this foundation, Stanford has consolidated its position as one of the nation’s top law schools. Recognizing the necessity of experiential learning, the law school has developed a state-of-the-art clinical program, offering students closely supervised, pedagogically driven opportunities to work with clients. The law school has instituted model programs in both environmental and intellectual property law. The law school also has deepened its commitment to interdisciplinary education, working with graduate schools throughout the university to develop cooperative learning opportunities and joint degree programs.

Moreover, through the generosity of friends and alumni, the law school has been able to plan for the physical expansion that such programmatic changes require. The law school has not only seen extensive renovations and technological updates to its existing administration and classroom buildings but also the expansion of its campus. In 2009 law students welcomed the addition of new housing with the opening of the Munger Graduate Residence, the residential complex adjacent to the school, designed to facilitate interdisciplinary living and learning. And in 2011 the 65,000-square-foot William H. Neukom Building was officially opened in a ceremony with U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder in which he said, “The building we now dedicate is the embodiment of an idea—a vision of all that is, and can be, good in the legal profession.”

Much has changed at the law school since its founding in 1893. Originally, students were drawn mainly from California; today, they come from every region of the United States and around the world. Admission was not competitive in 1893; now, more than 4,000 candidates typically vie for the 180 places in each entering class. In 1893, only a handful of courses were offered; today, students can choose from among hundreds of course offerings both in the law school and around the university.

Despite these differences, Stanford Law School’s basic mission has not changed since Nathan Abbott’s day: dedication to the highest standards of excellence in legal scholarship and to the training of lawyers equipped diligently, imaginatively, and honorably to serve their clients and the public, to lead our profession, and to help solve the problems of our nation and our world.

C L A S S O F 2 0 1 1 G R A D U A T I O N

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