

C L A S S O F 2 0 0 8 G R A D U A T I O N

M E M O R I A L A U D I T O R I U M

S T A N F O R D U N I V E R S I T Y

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CLASS OF 2008 GRADUATION

SLS

TO THE MEMBERS, FRIENDS, AND FAMILIES
OF THE CLASS OF 2008:

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 more than two decades ago: the mix of pleasure and excitement, of anticipation, of anxiety mixed with a slightly disturbing dash of “is that all there is?” The sense that your time here just passed in a flash. The memory of the first day in law school, when this day seemed forever away and the fear and anticipation and excitement were of a very different kind.

And now, here you are—about to actually graduate 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 eventually 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.

But 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 a phrase 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 the oldest and most honorable crafts humankind has developed.

Does that sound overblown? Are you slightly embarrassed for me, speaking in such grandiose rhetoric? Don’t be. 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 well. 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 of what you are doing and with a sense of balance and responsibility.

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 you all 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,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Larry Kramer". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "L" and "K".

Larry Kramer

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A SHORT HISTORY OF SLS

Stanford began offering a curriculum in legal studies in 1893, when the university engaged its first two law professors. One was Benjamin Harrison, former President of the United States, who delivered a landmark series of lectures on the Constitution. The other was Nathan Abbott, who served as head of the nascent law program. Abbott assembled a small faculty to which he imparted a standard of rigor and excellence that endures to this day. In his honor, the student with the highest academic standing in each year's graduating class is designated the Nathan Abbott Scholar.

In 1900, the department moved from its office in Encina Hall, the men's dormitory, to the Inner Quad, and for the first time offered a three-year professional law course. The curriculum and the library were rapidly expanding, and the law faculty began extending its presence in the university by giving a series of lectures on medical jurisprudence at the request of the medical faculty. The law department also graduated its first minority student (Walter Fong, 1896, the first Chinese-American student, who minored in law and became a member of a San Francisco law firm) and one of its first women (Di Margaret Gardiner, a 1908 graduate of the department who became a deputy city prosecutor in Los Angeles). Stanford's law program was officially transformed into a modern professional school in 1924 when it began requiring a bachelor's degree for admission.

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, recognizing as early as 1940 that academic content would need to grow to reflect national developments. As it became clear that government would play a greater role in the regulation of private affairs, administrative law, taxation, trade regulation, labor law, and related subjects became part of the curriculum.

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 United States Supreme Court Justices, and a commitment to maintain the school's enrollment at about 350 students. This last decision was said to be "perhaps the most important development from the standpoint of the long-term program of the school. This decision has been based on the conviction that it is Stanford's role to offer legal training of high degree to a relatively small, carefully selected student body, training that promises to be unique in the West."

Reflecting the political and social upheaval of the 1960s and 1970s, the law school became more diverse and its student activities more varied. In 1965, the law school admitted its first African-American students. 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—Barbara Babcock—joined the Law School faculty. Also in the 1970s, the law school moved to its current home in Crown Quadrangle. President Gerald Ford, speaking at the 1975 dedication ceremony, extolled Stanford’s foundation as a “solid triad of law, learning, and liberty.”

Building on this foundation in the next several decades, Stanford consolidated its position as one of the nation’s top law schools. Highlights include the institution of model programs in environmental law, intellectual property, and international law. 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 actual clients. 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. Not only has the school seen extensive renovations and technological updates, but it also looks forward to the addition of a new administration and classroom building and an adjacent graduate residence complex that will facilitate faculty and student interaction.

Many things have 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 several foreign countries. Admission was not competitive in 1893; in 2007, more than 4,000 candidates applied for the 170 places in the entering class. In 1893, only a handful of courses were offered; today, students can choose from among more than 200 course offerings in the law school alone, with many others available in other parts of 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.

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