



By Debra Kroszner

Facing a world filled with great possibilities, but also “inexorable” and “unfathomable” challenges, Yale Law School graduates were encouraged on Monday, May 20, to use law as a powerful tool for change.

Several hundred people, including more than 200 graduates and their families and friends, filled the William K. Lanman Center at Payne Whitney Gymnasium during the 2013 commencement ceremonies.

The event featured remarks from Dean Robert C. Post '77, Jacquin D. Bierman Professor in Taxation Anne L. Alstott '87, and U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor '79, who thrilled the crowd when she appeared after having been awarded an honorary Doctorate of Law by Yale University earlier in the day.

COMMENCEMENT 2013

Graduates Encouraged to Use Law as Tool for Change



Photos by William K. Sacco, Yale University Media Services and Tyson Streeter, Yale Law School

Photos and video of Commencement 2013 are available online at www.law.yale.edu



Speaking about both the perils and power of law, Alstott detailed the societal problems that impact the youth of the country, from education inequality, to the rising cost of obtaining a degree, to dismal unemployment numbers among young graduates.

At the heart of these problems of generational transition, Alstott said, lies the law.

“Law too often serves power at the expense of the vulnerable,” Alstott said. “Legal rules too often reinforce class divisions and bolster privilege. Legal actors too often abuse their power in order to distribute largesse to the wealthy at the expense of the public.”

However, Alstott encouraged graduates to internalize these sobering realities with an optimistic mind, and focus on the true power and potential their degrees have to make a difference.

“As you reflect on our time together, I hope you will see that we showed you the dark side of the law to give you clarity and resolve—not to make you cynical,” said Alstott. “We taught you to spot the hidden advantages

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ELIZBETH WILKINS '13

A Clerkship at the U.S. Supreme Court

Elizabeth Wilkins was sitting on a train last September when the phone rang. On the other end was U.S. Supreme Court Justice Elena Kagan offering her a coveted position of being her judicial clerk. Wilkins, a native of D.C., immediately called her parents to share the exciting news.

“My mom started to cry,” recalled Wilkins, noting that her parents came from humble means, both living in segregated communities as children. “The idea to them

that their daughter would be clerking on the Supreme Court was so incredible. In that moment, I thought about all of the things that happened for me to be able to be here.”

Wilkins is a graduate of Yale University who worked as an organizer for the Obama campaign in 2008 and at the White House Domestic

Policy Counsel prior to coming to YLS. She will begin her federal clerkship with Chief Judge Merrick Garland of the U.S. Court of Appeals D.C. Circuit this summer before working directly for Justice Kagan in 2014.

“I think the legal writing and reasoning skills are going to be things that stand me in good stead regardless of what I am doing afterwards,” said Wilkins of the clerkship opportunity.

Passionate about workers’ rights and bettering the lives of those living in low-income communities, Wilkins said her time at YLS has opened her eyes to the range of ways she can make a difference in the world. And as she heads to D.C. to work on the nation’s top cases, Wilkins said she remains open minded about where this next phase of her career may take her.

“I would like to find a balance in my life between having the space and time to think deeply about things, but at the same time being connected enough to the world to feel like I am doing some good.”



RYAN LISS '13 LLM

From Toronto to New Haven, Teaching International Law

As an undergraduate at the University of Toronto, Ryan Liss was still exploring what career path he wanted to pursue. But after settling on a major in Ethics, Society, and Law followed by humanitarian work addressing child rights in the Philippines, Liss’s vision for his future suddenly became clear.

“I saw the need for legal advocacy work to make sure that the most vulnerable had someone on their side,” said Liss of his time abroad. “That experience crystalized things for me.”

Now, after graduating with his LLM, Liss has been awarded the prestigious Trudeau Scholarship to pursue his JSD at Yale Law School. He will also be serving a six-month stint as a Robina Fellow working at

the International Tribunals in the Hague next year.

Liss said coming to Yale challenged his perception of international law and confirmed his desire to find a way to work in academia, teaching international human rights law, while still being connected to social justice and public advocacy work.

“My ideal goal is to teach international law and still be engaged with international criminal tribunals,” Liss said.

Having the opportunity to be a part of the Trudeau community is something he feels will bring immeasurable value to his education. “It’s a great opportunity to engage with other scholars and mentors who are bridging this gap between community service and academia,” said Liss.

With his sights set on teaching, Liss also hopes to one day have the same impact on future students as his professors have had on him.

“I look forward to having the opportunity to carry over that mentorship component to teaching,” said Liss, who plans to return to Canada after completing his studies. “That’s where I want to be, and particularly after having been awarded the Trudeau Scholarship, it’s an opportunity to keep giving back to Canada.”



Profile photographs by Debra Kroszner

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accorded to the powerful so that you can level the playing field. We taught you to see the invisible walls that insulate privilege so that you can dismantle them. We have helped you grasp the tools of justice, and we trust you to use them. I cannot wait to see the results!”

Alstott closed with a poem by Oliver Wendell Holmes:

*Build thee more stately mansions, O my soul,
As the swift seasons roll!
Leave thy low-vaulted past!
Let each new temple, nobler than the last,
Shut thee from heaven with a dome more vast,
Till thou at length art free,
Leaving thine outgrown shell by life’s unresting sea!*

“We, as lawyers, can be builders too,” said Alstott. “We can use our tools to build a society in which every member of the new generation can celebrate her graduation—not only with joy but with well-founded hope for the future.”

Following Alstott’s address, Justice Sotomayor arrived on the dais, prompting the cheers and applause to grow louder as she waved and sat down beside the faculty.

Welcoming her back to New Haven, Dean Post reflected on Sotomayor’s time at Yale Law School and her remarkable career.

“She is judicious; she is empathetic; she is firmly grounded in social reality,” said Post. “She is a superb legal craftsman, faithful to the integrity of the law while shaping the law to be responsive to our shared values.”

“You are a Justice who does the appellation credit, and we are delighted and proud to welcome you back to Yale,” added Post.

When Sotomayor took to the podium, she reflected on how she felt more than thirty years ago, sitting in the same seats as the graduates before her. She urged graduates to listen to their instincts and focus on building a life, not a résumé.

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“Find your passion,” Sotomayor said. “Find your passion, not other people’s passion. And that actually is the real answer to the difficulties most of you may experience about questions like, ‘Am I doing meaningful work?’”

“Law is service if you do it with honor and integrity and a sense of passion...”

U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor ’79

“The answer is, if you are doing work that satisfies you, that makes you feel good about what you are learning and accomplishing, even if to others it’s not what they want to do, it doesn’t matter, because you are serving.”

“Law is service if you do it with honor and integrity and a sense of passion...” added Sotomayor.

During Dean Post’s address to graduates, he instilled on them the importance of using the judicial skills they have acquired at Yale Law School as a vehicle to deal with the ever-changing and uncertain world around them.

“We can be confident only that in the coming decades we will encounter a world of rapid and almost unimaginably profound change,” Post said.

“And a question that we might consider is how we could possibly have prepared you for the multiple and unforeseeable challenges that await you?”

Post told graduates that they must believe in themselves in order to face these challenges and advocate for positive change.

“It is not enough that when you leave here you understand the challenges you will face, or even that in facing them you are able to envision new possibilities of improvement,” he said.

“You must also believe, deep in your souls, that you matter, that your response to these challenges will make a difference to the world,” added Post. “You must have the confidence to respect your own considerable capacities, and this will inspire you to act, whenever action is needed.”

Two hundred thirty three degree candidates were honored, including 207 JDS, 21 LLMS, 3 JSDS, and 2 MSLS. Y



JIM WILLIAMSON '13

The Intersection of Business and the Law

Finding himself drawn towards two very different intellectual disciplines after graduating from Princeton University, Jim Williamson was faced with a decision—should he pursue business or law?

But after spending time working in both the private and public sectors, Williamson discovered he didn’t have to choose just one. Instead, he decided to explore the intricacies between both fields, enrolling in a specialized dual JD/MBA degree at the Yale Law School and the Yale



School of Management.

“I always knew that I was interested in more of the big-picture type of analysis,” said Williamson, who worked as a McKinsey analyst and Policy Director for the Pennsylvania Treasury Department

prior to coming to New Haven. “I wanted to explore how systems work and fit together and the interplay between the private and the public sector.”

Immersing himself in the diverse Yale community and drawing on the rich resources of the Yale Law School Center for the Study of Corporate Law, Williamson said he was encouraged to explore a wide range of approaches and theories that have sharpened his skill set and prepared him for his next step as a Credit Analyst for a New York City hedge fund.

“Being around people who are coming up with groundbreaking ideas has been a great experience,” said Williamson. “But more than that, it’s also about being around people who are training you to be one of those people who come up with ideas themselves.”

And it’s that very sense of possibility—the chance to create something groundbreaking and new—that Williamson believes will fuel him throughout his career, wherever the next big idea may take him.

“Coming here drove home the fact that ideas actually do matter—we see this a lot in the law,” said Williamson. “Look at all the innovations in finance in the last thirty years. So many came about because of a new idea at the intersection of business and the law.”

GLENDAM. ALDANA MADRID '13

Public Interest Law for Social Change

After nearly ten years immersing herself in public interest causes on the East Coast, Glenda M. Aldana Madrid is moving to the Pacific Northwest to advocate for residents along the border where increased racial profiling has become a major problem.

“Nobody ever thinks about the northern border for border patrol issues,” said Aldana Madrid, “but there has actually been a massive increase in the number of reported instances of racial profiling and other really troublesome practices—it’s really eroding community trust.”



Aldana Madrid was awarded a one-year fellowship at the Northwest Immigrant Rights Project in Seattle through the Gruber Program for Global Justice

and Women’s Rights at Yale Law School.

Born in Guatemala, Aldana Madrid and her family moved to Los Angeles when she was ten. With a strong interest in Latin America and international human rights, she began to explore law as a means to help others while studying at Harvard.

After graduating, Aldana Madrid worked for a young non-profit, the Human Rights Foundation in New York, where her interest in public interest law took hold. That interest quickly became a true passion in New Haven, as she engaged directly with the surrounding community and the courtroom.

“In clinics and in classes, I really had a chance to deepen my knowledge of how public interest law works,” said Aldana Madrid.

Looking forward to a change in scenery and a new challenge, Aldana Madrid said she is committed to public interest and human rights work, but remains open to the many ways in which she can advocate for social justice in the future.

“I believe that there are multiple ways to do public service work, and I look forward to exploring those options as my career develops.”