

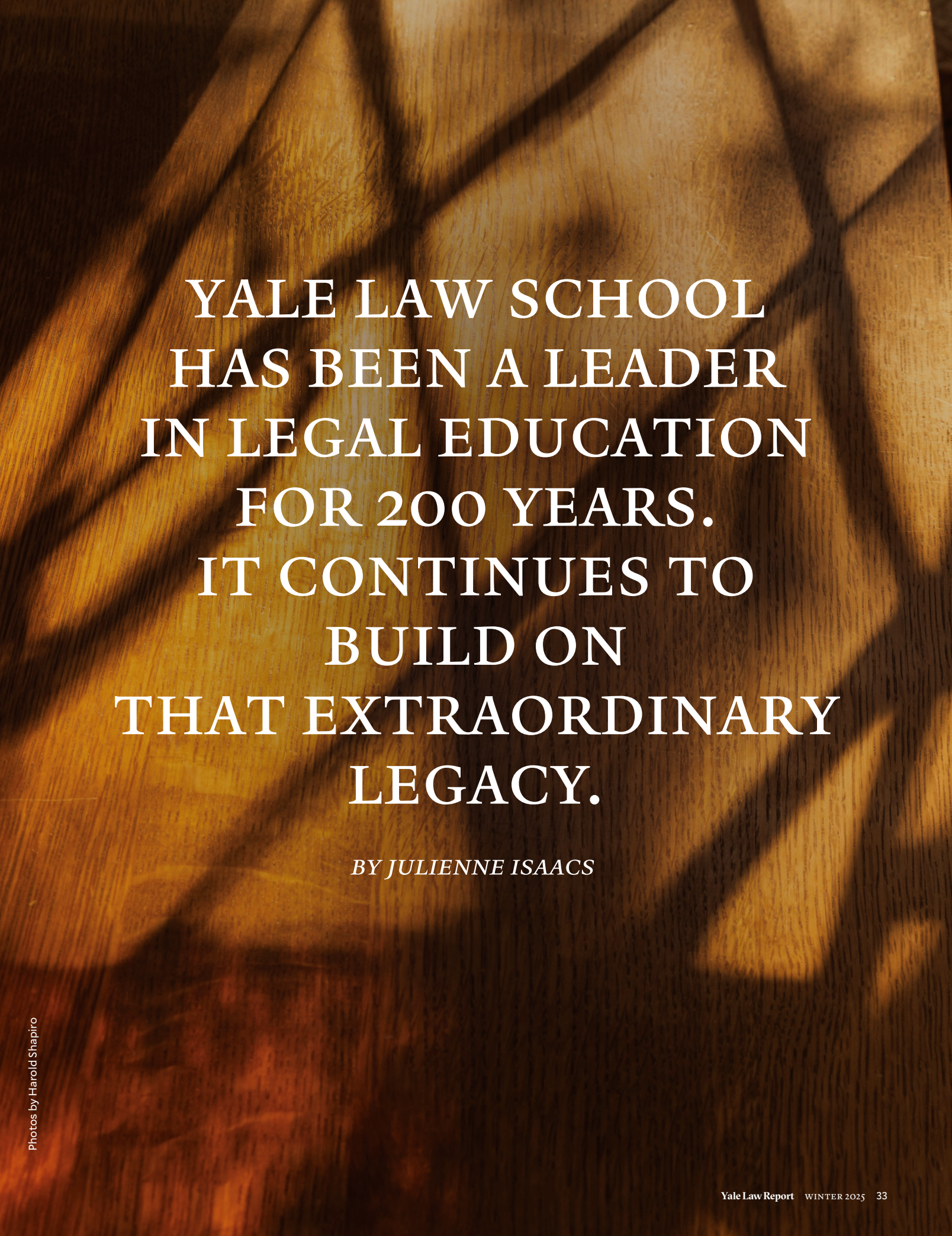
FORGING A BRIGHT FUTURE

Harry
Shulman
DEAN
1954-1955

Eugene
Victor
Rostow
Dean 1955-1965

Harry
H.
Wellington
Dean
1975-1985

Guido
Calabresi
Dean
1985-1994



YALE LAW SCHOOL
HAS BEEN A LEADER
IN LEGAL EDUCATION
FOR 200 YEARS.
IT CONTINUES TO
BUILD ON
THAT EXTRAORDINARY
LEGACY.

BY JULIENNE ISAACS



Members of the Access to Law School Program community in November 2022

In the two centuries since its founding in 1824, Yale Law School has never rested on its laurels.

And it's never stopped looking forward, even as it honors the past.

Dean and Sol & Lillian Goldman Professor of Law Heather K. Gerken often notes that the names of prior Yale Law School deans, etched in the stained-glass window behind her, are “written” on her desk in silhouette on sunny days. For her, it's a reminder of the Law School's tradition of restless thinking.

“One of our strongest traditions is a tradition of change,” said Gerken. “We change not for change's sake, but to live up to our best values. We cannot maintain our legacy of excellence if we rest on our laurels.”

Through every era, Yale Law School has expanded the School's horizons and led boundary-breaking initiatives. The goal, in the words of former Dean and Sterling Professor Emeritus of Law Guido Calabresi '58, is to “train people who are not just excellent, but loving, kind, humane, and good.”

The future presents many challenges that the Yale Law School community is tackling head-on — from artificial intelligence to climate change and economic inequity. But as Gerken said, “being the best law school in the world is not enough”: Yale Law School intends to keep pushing the envelope — and its peers — to make meaningful change.

KICKING OPEN THE DOORS

In the last several years, the Law School has made important strides in expanding access to legal education, not just in New Haven but around the country.

This emphasis can be seen in the dramatic increase in the number of veterans at the School — up from just 1% to nearly 10% of the current 1L class — as well as increases in the numbers of first-generation and low-income students (one in four students in this year's 1L class).

The Hurst Horizon Scholarship Program has removed barriers to law school by offering full tuition to J.D. students with the greatest



financial need. Eighty-eight students received the scholarship this academic year alone.

“From the first day I started this job, I had one goal — to kick open the doors to legal education,” said Gerken. “We did so systematically. Step one was to change *this* institution, building a new model to show our peers what could be done. We have moved heaven and earth to bring talented students from every walk of life here. Building pipeline programs and casting our admissions net broadly were just the start. We also needed to support those students at every step of the way once they arrived. That's why we built mentorship programs, created full-tuition scholarships for 15% of the class, and strengthened what was already the finest financial-aid program in the country. The model has been built. It's been a huge success. Now is the time to push our peers to do the same.”

The Law School's two pipeline programs are prime examples of how mentoring can empower people to seek careers in the law.

The Access to Law School Program, which was conceived by J. Skelly Wright Professor of Law James Forman Jr. '92, offers two years of free support, training, and mentorship to people from the greater New Haven area as they prepare applications to law schools around the country.



David Nierenberg '78 (center) and Hurst Horizon Scholars



Launchpad Scholars

Meanwhile, Yale Law School's Launchpad Scholars Program, powered by Latham & Watkins, provides yearlong support, including LSAT preparation, one-on-one mentorship, and other training opportunities, to applicants around the country.

Both programs have already made a difference in New Haven and beyond.

Crafting a strong application is one hurdle standing in the way of law school for many applicants; tuition cost is another. Far too many successful applicants cannot take the seats they've plainly earned, due to financial need.

For decades, Yale Law School has been a leader in reducing the financial burden of law school. Since its inception in 1989, the Career Options Assistance Program (COAP) has provided more than 2,200 Law School graduates with substantial postgraduate assistance with educational loan repayment. It's one of the most generous law school loan repayment programs in the country, and its best-in-class model has sparked similar initiatives at many other schools.

In 2022, Yale Law School took a quantum leap when it introduced the Soledad '92 and Robert Hurst Horizon Scholarship Program. The program aims to help redefine the future of legal education by erasing tuition for students with the greatest need — and to inspire peer institutions to establish their own need-based programs.

The establishment of the Hurst Horizon Program was closely followed by another major step forward: Yale Law School's withdrawal from the U.S. News & World Report rankings.

For decades, the rankings incentivized law schools to direct aid dollars toward recruiting students with the highest test scores and GPAs, and away from those who needed aid most.

"The U.S. News rankings are profoundly flawed — they disincentivize programs that support public interest careers, champion need-based aid, and welcome working-class students into the profession. We have reached a point where the rankings process is undermining the core commitments of the legal profession. As a result, we will no longer participate," wrote Gerken at the time.

Yale Law School's departure from the rankings inspired a flood of other schools — more than 60 — to do the same, resulting in revamped rankings that rely solely on publicly available data. Following that exodus, and with the diminished influence of the U.S. News rankings system, more schools are now starting to offer their own need-based, tuition-free scholarships, including Harvard Law School, Washington University in St. Louis School of Law, Michigan Law School, and Stanford Law School.

Accelerating this trend across legal education is a major goal. "Every law school should be giving aid purely based on which

“Our goal is to train lawyers to tackle the toughest problems while maintaining their hope that change is possible. That kind of hope requires courage, imagination, and the ability to recognize the best in others. We aim to cultivate all three.”

DEAN HEATHER K. GERKEN



Lecturer Emma Sokoloff-Rubin '18, Shreya Minma Reddy '25, Dean Gerken, and Katie Becker '26 at an informal San Francisco Affirmative Litigation Project clinic meeting

students need it most. Everyone who earns a spot at law school deserves the chance to attend,” Gerken said. “We will not be a profession that is truly open to all until we can say that. Now is the time for every law school to do the same and focus on the metrics that truly matter.”

Travis Torrence '05, former chair of the Fund Board at Yale Law School, said that the School’s commitment to excellence as well as equity makes him “incredibly proud” to be an alumnus. “While it is a given that our unparalleled commitment to fostering intellectual rigor, innovative approach to legal scholarship, distinguished faculty, and vibrant community of scholars have had an outsized impact on society when compared to our peers, initiatives like the Hurst Horizon Scholarship Program set us apart in novel ways that compel other institutions to emulate the Law School’s thought leadership,” he said.

A CURRICULUM FOR THE FUTURE

Yale Law School’s courses and clinics continuously innovate to meet both the pressing needs of the moment and look toward the future.

The curriculum has had a longstanding tradition of operating like a “mini-university” that celebrates learning for its own sake and is deeply intellectual. A Yale Law School degree is first and foremost a thinking degree.

“Law schools don’t just train lawyers; they also generate ideas. We write scholarship and debate ideas for independent aims, not to mention the sheer joy of it,” wrote Gerken in the *Harvard Law Review* in 2019. But the Law School fiercely resists the theory/practice divide; students do both.

The School’s robust array of clinics — nearly 30 — allows students to work in service of real-world clients while gaining experience in specialized areas of law, including environmental justice, entrepreneurship and innovation, criminal justice, and mental health justice.

“The clinics at Yale take on challenging cases that allow students to have a voice in the key issues of the day across a wide range of disciplines,” said Fiona Doherty '99, the Nathan Baker Clinical Professor of Law and Deputy Dean for Experiential Education at Yale Law School. “The students learn to be creative and nimble advocates who push the boundaries of the law in responding to the needs of their clients. Clinics encourage students to think about what the law should be, not just what it is.”

Alongside faculty, experts and scholars from around the world regularly teach at the School, as well as alumni that return to share their wisdom and examples of leadership writ large.

The Joseph C. Tsai Leadership Program, launched in 2021, has expanded the Law School curriculum to bolster cross-disciplinary



Gretchen Rubin '94 (second from right) meets with students during a Tsai Leadership Program immersive trip.

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TRAVIS TORRENCE '05, FORMER CHAIR OF THE FUND BOARD AT YALE LAW SCHOOL

programming meant to help lawyers succeed in a wide range of possible careers and build on a Yale Law School point of pride in producing wide-ranging graduates. Under its banner, the Carol and Gene Ludwig Program in Public Sector Leadership offers support and unique training opportunities to students interested in pursuing public sector careers, while the Michael S. and Alexa B. Chae Initiative in Private Sector Leadership provides educational and professional development to students who aspire to leadership careers in the private sector.

These programs are meant to provide students with “every literacy they need” to navigate the problems of tomorrow, while immersing them in the world of ideas, said Gerken.

As the School’s faculty look to the future, the curriculum continues to evolve. In the spring, Charles F. Southmayd Professor of Law Scott Shapiro '90 and Ruzica Piskac, Professor of Computer Science at Yale, will co-teach a cross-disciplinary course titled “Law and Large Language Models” that will allow law and computer science students to program AI models.

Students interested in business can immerse themselves in a fictional company’s options in “Anatomy of a Merger,” an advanced seminar taught by Visiting Lecturer Charles Nathan '65 that uses a semester-long hypothetical exercise to examine strategy and tactics and give students a chance to engage in mock negotiations.

Students on a public policy track can take “Ethical Choices in Public Leadership,” taught by Yale Jackson School of Global Affairs

Lecturer Eric Braverman '02, which draws on perspectives from law, management, and public policy to explore how leaders make ethical decisions.

Courses like these are nimble by design: students can customize their education to suit their interests. It’s a trademark of the place. As former Dean and Sterling Professor of Law Robert Post '77 noted, Yale Law School does not produce cookie-cutter lawyers, but “prizes eccentricity.”

“It requires courage to stand out and forge our own path,” said Post. “I hope we never lose faith that in every student and in every faculty member we deem worthy of hiring, there lies the possibility of great, original, and unforeseeable ideas. That faith is what makes this School so special.”



Professor Ruzica Piskac and Professor Scott Shapiro '92

Judge J. Michael Luttig and Dean Gerken at a Crossing Divides event in February 2024





The current and former deans at a panel during Alumni Weekend 2024, moderated by Tali Farhadian Weinstein '03 (far left)

“Technology is changing; the environment is changing; the world is shrinking. It’s the same old story: to stay the same, we’ll have to change. So we can’t just rest on our laurels; we will just have to do a better job of it over our next 200 years.”

HAROLD HONGJU KOH, FORMER DEAN AND STERLING PROFESSOR OF INTERNATIONAL LAW

Yair Listokin '05, Deputy Dean and Shibley Family Fund Professor of Law, said that Yale Law School’s courses have something for everyone and evolve as the world changes. “I’ve had the privilege of seeing firsthand how our incredibly wide-ranging, eclectic curriculum only continues to improve and increase in scope,” he said. “We are constantly working to ensure we equip students for the needs of the future.”

RISING TO MEET TOMORROW’S PROBLEMS

Yale Law School has faced its fair share of challenges during the last 200 years; several times, it nearly closed its doors. Each time, its leaders found a way forward. Thanks to this tradition of resilient leadership, it is extraordinarily well positioned to meet the problems — seen and unforeseen — of the next century.

“This is a generation inheriting impossible problems, and our job is to teach students to solve them,” said Gerken. “We’re in a moment of tumult, and everything is going to change — from climate and politics to technology and economics. For a school that trains lawyers to lead in every sector, it’s crucial that we adapt.”

“Technology is changing; the environment is changing; the world is shrinking,” said former Dean and Sterling Professor of International Law Harold Hongju Koh in a 2024 interview. “It’s the same old story: to stay the same, we’ll have to change. So we can’t just rest on our laurels; we will just have to do a better job of it over our next 200 years.”

But Yale Law School is not simply adapting; it’s actively creating new models and proposing solutions to some of these “impossible problems.”

Jack Balkin, Knight Professor of Constitutional Law and the First Amendment, said that the School and its scholars will likely be on the front lines of developing legal solutions for the regulation of AI and related technologies, for example. “They will pioneer new uses of AI in legal research, using AI to ask new kinds of questions... [and] create new methods for employing AI in legal education,” he said.

Another “impossible problem” is climate change. As devastating natural disasters fill the news, faculty like Joseph M. Field ’55 Professor of Law Doug Kysar are tackling topics like climate



Members of the Access to Law School Program community in November 2022

accountability in the courts while proposing new models of environmental justice.

Meanwhile, growing threats to democracy and the rule of law are met with a rigorous commitment to professionalism, collegiality, and training in engagement across divides through programs like the Crossing Divides speaker series. The newly launched Center for Free Speech and Academic Freedom, led by David Boies Professor of Law Keith Whittington, aims to become a leading hub for academic freedom and free speech and to safeguard these values for future generations.

The ability to communicate despite difference, Gerken said, is an essential skill for lawyers, and a critical tenet of democracy.

“Our goal is to train lawyers to tackle the toughest problems while maintaining their hope that change is possible,” said Gerken. “That kind of hope requires courage, imagination, and the ability to recognize the best in others. We aim to cultivate all three.”

In a 2024 interview, former Dean and Sterling Professor of Law Anthony Kronman ’75 echoed this idea. Law schools, he said, “have a lasting responsibility to see that their students and graduates develop not just the technical skills, but the habits of mind and heart that are needed ... understanding the need to keep our wonderful, tumultuous democracy in sound working order and to preserve, in some rough, collaborative relation, our devotion both to the will of the people and to the rule of law.”

The fact that Yale Law School is well equipped to meet the challenges of the future is in large part due to its community of alumni, whose support has borne fruit in the programs and day-to-day life of the School, from the preservation of its buildings to the power and reach of the law school experience itself.

Their engagement and investment in the future of Yale Law School makes meeting the challenges of tomorrow possible.

Leslie Gomez ’95, president of the Yale Law School Association, noted that the School has a rich tradition of giving back.

“The world, at moments, can appear bleak. The antidote to that bleakness is connection and belonging — the feeling that you are a part of something larger than yourself,” said Gomez. “Coming back to the Law School as a volunteer has helped me to realize that my



Leslie Gomez ’95 at Alumni Weekend 2024

law school experience isn’t static, but expansive — that it isn’t limited to the three years I spent in New Haven but is open to infinite possibilities that grow out of connections and shared experiences. And those connections enhance and enrich each of our pathways.”

Paul Mandell ’98, former chair and current Fund Board member, offered his vision for the future of the School. “I hope to see the Law School continue serving as a leader within the legal industry, raising the bar for all law schools and the profession itself — bringing together a diverse population, a diversity of ideas, and continued innovation to improve society,” he said.

It’s a tall order. But the people that have made Yale Law School such a remarkable community for two centuries are working together to tackle it.

“No challenge is too big, and no vision is too bold for this magical place,” said Gerken. “We are ready.”