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Judge Dillon Urges Graduates to Lead the Struggle for Justice

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The Struggle for Justice

“You are Expected to Lead,” Dillon Tells Graduates

The lawyer's role in the struggle for justice was the theme for Justice Michael F. Dillon in his keynote address at UB Law School's 102nd Commencement, held at Alumni Arena on May 19.

Dillon, presiding justice of the Appellate Division for Western New York's Fourth Judicial Department, was an expert on the subject. A 1951 graduate of the Law School, he served as Erie County district attorney for 10 years before being elected to the state Supreme Court and then appointed to the Appellate Division. He served as presiding justice from 1979 until his sudden death on July 9. (A tribute to the late Justice Dillon appears in the In Memoriam section of the *UB Law Forum*).

“History tells us that the lawyer has been in the forefront of every struggle for liberty and justice,” Dillon told the 264 degree candidates, their families and friends. “He was the architect of the Magna Carta, the Northwest Ordinance, the Declaration of Independence, the Emancipation Proclamation and practically all of the great documents of freedom.

“And this year, we celebrate the 200th anniversary of what may well be the greatest of all documents of freedom — the Bill of Rights.”

Dillon counseled the new lawyers to “be wary of cynics ... who tell you to avoid politics and government.” Indeed, he said, America dearly needs good leadership. “Your true reward,” he said, “will come from working with the law as a living thing, to be nurtured and revitalized to meet the needs of people and the demands of our time.

“You are expected to lead — to guide the flow of politics, to shape the government, to assess and ensure the rights and responsibilities of human interaction, and to protect and preserve the delicate balance between the power of the state and the rights of its citizens.”

Early in his address, Dillon broke with ceremony and asked the members of the graduating class to stand and “express your gratitude and love” to their families and others who supported them throughout their years in law school. The response was spontaneous and effusive.

The judge ended his remarks with a look forward to the New York State bar examination. “You have been well and truly prepared,” he said, “and we are confident of your success in that endeavor, as well as in your future.

“Congratulations — go get ‘em!”



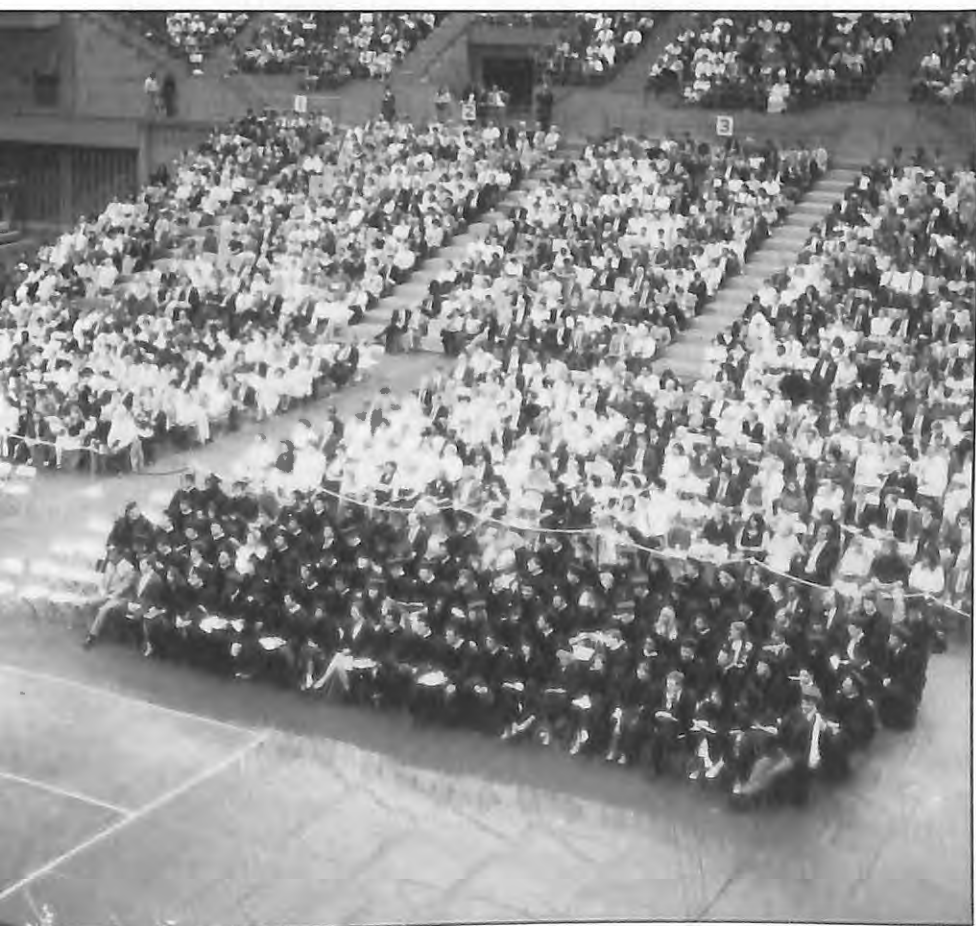


Graduating student Mark Allen Schlechter, delivering the ceremony's Student Address, built on a quotation from the late Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes: "Those of you who aspire to greatness in the profession must immerse yourselves in the agonies of the times."

"The agonies of the times," Schlechter noted, "are not difficult to spot." He cited homelessness, environmental destruction, racial inequity, the prevalence of children in poverty, and the threat of war throughout the world.

But "we now have the opportunity to continue this legal tradition of effecting social change," Schlechter said. "For what is a lawyer if not an activist — one who actively works to protect the constitutional rights of the people she represents? And what other constant exists in this world, but that things must and do change?"

Recognizing the diverse paths the graduating class will pursue, Schlechter said: "While each of us will play a different role in the legal community, our responsibility, as lawyers, to the society in which we live will remain the same. Whether we are corporate lawyers, law professors, legal services attorneys, sole practitioners or any one of a number of legal occupations, our affirmative duty to protect the fundamental constitutional rights and basic human needs of the people will be with us always."



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Presenting the Faculty Address, Professor Muhammad I. Kenyatta spoke of the remarkable transformation that the black leader Malcolm X experienced during his years in prison. Kenyatta suggested to the Class of 1991 that their lives in the law be spent "yearning and striving for justice," just as Malcolm X did in the latter part of his life.

Kenyatta noted that Commencement day — June 19, 1991 — would have been the 66th birthday of Malcolm X, had he lived. "Today might have been a day for him to celebrate his life in the law — had his life been different," said Kenyatta. He spoke in graphic detail of the terrible hardships suffered by the black leader in his youth.

"Those of you who have been involved in the Prison Task Force know that sometimes it is in prison that those who have been locked out of opportunities, because of failings of their own or society's, develop a yearning to learn — a yearning that burns through the steel bars that hold them and causes them to rise to set their minds free — at a time that their bodies are in chains.

"And so it was with Malcolm, that in prison he turned around." Malcolm went on to become a powerful orator, an outspoken enemy of oppression, and a leader for justice and human empowerment.

"We're many people, but what we have in common is the law," said Kenyatta.

"Some days you'll find yourself bogged down in what seems to be petty, day-to-day pointless things. But remember that you are the guardians of justice," he told the graduates.

"And just as the yearning for justice transformed Malcolm, let you and I keep hoping everyday that we, too, can be transformed, and changed, by challenges that beat us down.

"Like Malcolm, let you and I play our roles as transformers of society. Let us struggle for what might be... in an America of which Malcolm, and ourselves, and our children, and our loved ones, and all of those who yearn for justice — in an America of which we all can be justly proud."



Latin Honors

Summa Cum Laude

Laurie A. Ambrose
Jill A. Clarke
Mary Ellen Kresse

Magna Cum Laude

Theodore J. Baecher
Alan C. Birnholz
Ann B. Campbell
Nathaniel K. Charny
Charles A. LoFaso
Sally B. Logan
Edwin C. Mills
Amy H. Nichols
Kimberly P. Russell
Margot L. Watt

Cum Laude

Sean P. Beiter
Shawn P. Black
Bruce Brown
Piero Bussani
Shyh Y. Chin

Joseph K. Choi
Martin J. Coleman
Catherine Connolly
James W. Connor
Leonard B. Cooper
Robert L. Cronyn
Toni Delmonte
Eric P. Doherty
Kevin S. Doyle
Michele R. Driscoll
Rosemarie E. Farrell
Joy A. Feldman
Dawn A. Foshee
Allen D. Friedman
Chester J. Gary
Laurice A. Ghougasian
William Greener
Jonathan G. Hager
Robert P. Heary
Jonathan G. Johnsen
Eric S. Katz
John C. Krenitsky
Carter M. Mann
Lizbeth A. Martin

Kathleen M. McDonald
John T. McGuire
Samuel R. Miserendino
Francine E. Modica
Kimberly A. Neal
Cheryl A. Nohejl
Diane H. Nowak
Stephen J. Obie
Patricia M. Petersen
Kimberlyanne C. Podlas
Michael J. Pulver
Anne M. Purcell
Kathleen M. Reilly
Timothy W. Reinig
Kirstin M. Romann
Steven W. Rubenstein
Rosanna D. Sandell
Paul W. Sharratt
David J. State
Adele A. Sullivan
Carl J. Tierney
Alan D. Voos
Kathleen A. Welch
Christopher C. Willett



CORRECTION: Trial Technique awards for Fall 1989, presented at the 1990 Commencement, were inadvertently omitted from the last UB Law Forum. Winners were: Ian Bradford, Mary Callahan, Kathleen Doyle, Nancy Quinn, Kathleen Ranni, Wendy Ricks, Beth Steinberg and Sandra Wallace.

Leading the Commencement as marshal was Adjunct Professor Albert R. Mugel, who was celebrating his 50th class reunion during the weekend. Special guests of the Law School included members of the Council of the University at Buffalo: M. Robert Koren, chairman, Joan K. Robinson, Mary E. Randolph and Kenneth Gage.

Also in attendance were John L. Hettrick Sr., chairman of the University at Buffalo Foundation; Harold J. Brand, president of the Erie County Bar Association; Anthony J. Colucci Jr., president of the Law Alumni Association; Edward D. Peace, president of the Minority Bar Association of Western New York; Barbara L. Schifeling, president of the Western New York Chapter of the Women's Bar Association; U.S. Rep. Henry J. Nowak; Hon. Nelson H. Cosgrove, Hon. Vincent E. Doyle, Hon. Henry G. Gossel and State Assemblyman Robin Schimminger.

The Commencement was highlighted at beginning and end — during the processional and recessional marches — with music by the Hot Cargo String Band, a five-member combo made up of law and history professors and two law students.

Awards and prizes were presented by Professor Lee A. Albert, associate dean for student affairs. (A list appears in an accompanying article.) Dean David B. Filvaroff and Acting Provost Kenneth J. Levy conferred degrees on the graduates. Professor Kenneth F. Joyce once again received the faculty award and Cheri Tubinis received the staff award. ■

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