

7-1-1979

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Recommended Citation

Thomas E. Headrick, *A Tribute to a Great Teacher*, 28 Buff. L. Rev. 457 (1979).

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.law.buffalo.edu/buffalolawreview/vol28/iss3/9>

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A TRIBUTE TO A GREAT TEACHER

THOMAS E. HEADRICK*

Joe Laufer's career at Buffalo spanned twenty-one important years in the life of the school. He joined a small faculty in a small law school; the full freshman class in his first year was smaller than his section of torts in his final year. At that time there were less than ten women students in the school, and only occasionally, a minority student.

It is remarkable to think that he embarked on his Buffalo career when he was nearly fifty, long after most people enter law teaching. Chased from Germany by Hitler, he settled in Palestine in the thirties. Already educated and experienced as a lawyer, he found it hard to locate an outlet for his training, and he spent several years in factory and farm labor before entering journalism and later taking a position in a government law school. The decision to come to the United States in 1937 was a major step. Fate in its ironic way brought him to North Carolina and Duke Law School where custom and law maintained a racially separate society and educational system.

Tested and molded by his experience, torn indefensibly from his roots, he developed an empathy and affection for black Americans. He was an early member of the NAACP. He became a central figure in the law school's efforts to increase the number of black graduates entering the profession. The empathy was not indiscriminating, nor was the affection blind. Learning to become a lawyer, he knew, was demanding on the intellect and on self-discipline. A good legal education could not be had by casual anointment in legal lore. It took work from both the student and the professor. Over the three years that I knew Joe, the Special Assistance Program for Minorities was his central concern. He threw head, heart and soul into making it work, into finding ways to bring minority students, poorly prepared for rigorous legal education, up to a level of professional capability. The success of the Program, which is now an integral part of our curriculum, is testimony to his enormous energy and ingenuity.

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His concern for minority students was part of his larger mission as a faculty member. For him, teaching did not end when class was over. Wherever he and a student met—in his office, in the hallway, over lunch, or in his house as often was the case, he taught. He was the consummate teacher.

His scholarly insights and erudition are part of our fund of legal knowledge. They live on in the minds of several thousand students whom he taught. But the mark he leaves most indelibly came from his superb ability to combine a high sense of principle and intellectual integrity with a deep sense of caring for his students and colleagues, the mark of a great teacher.