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It is my pleasure to welcome all of you to Columbia Law School. You are an exceptionally impressive group, which is why you have earned the privilege to be here at Columbia.

This is a very special intellectual community, which was described especially well by the nation's new FBI director, Jim Comey. Until earlier this month, Jim was here as a fellow in our Hertog Program on Law and National Security. When he left, Jim wrote this to his Columbia Law School colleagues: "I was deeply struck by the unique combination of intellectual rigor and human kindness that pervades this faculty. I watched folks hold each other accountable to very high standards of reasoning and communicating, while also treating each other like family. It is a very special environment. . . ." I agree, and I hope you love being here as much as I do.

In my opinion, there has never been a more exciting or important time to go to law school. I realize not everyone thinks so. I bet your family and friends have sent you a constant stream of media reports painting a sobering picture of the legal profession and of legal education. My guess is that law school doesn't get that many "likes" on Facebook nowadays. (By the way, I have no idea what that means, but one of you will explain it to me later.)

So why do I think law school is the place to be? There are many reasons, but I want to emphasize the one I think is most important: The law is the bedrock of our civilization. The law may be imperfect, but it is the most effective mechanism we have to bring out the best in human nature, while containing our baser impulses.

Albert Einstein famously said that he loved humanity but hated humans. Don't be offended, since he never met any of you. What he meant is that human nature is a very mixed bag.

After all, it is easy to name a host of human achievements that are inspiring and humbling—acts of extraordinary generosity or courage, stunning technological advances, entrepreneurial achievements that make our lives safer and more comfortable, beautiful works of art, compelling intellectual contributions, and much more. As John Keats put it, "there is an electric fire in human nature tending to purify—so that among these human creatures there is continually some birth of new heroism."

But unfortunately, it also is far too easy to identify rampant examples of greed, violence, folly, and brutality—in our own time and throughout history. And I am not talking only about the decision on *Downton Abbey* to kill off two main characters this past season (although that bothers me enormously). The ugly side of human nature is why Einstein said he didn't like humans, and why Thomas Hobbes thought that human life in the state of nature was "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short."

This duality in human nature is captured especially powerfully in a book that many of you have read: *The Diary of a Young Girl* by Anne Frank. As you may remember, Anne was a Jewish girl who went into hiding from the Nazis, spending two years in an Amsterdam attic. Anne wrote the following famous words less than three weeks before her hiding place was discovered—and less than a year before she would die in a Nazi concentration camp: "[I]n spite of everything I still believe that people are really good at heart. I simply can't build up my hopes on a foundation consisting of confusion, misery, and death. I see the world gradually being turned into a wilderness, I hear the ever approaching thunder, which will destroy us too, I can feel the sufferings of millions and yet, if I look up into the heavens, I think that it will all come right, that this cruelty too will end, and that peace and tranquility will return again. In the meantime, I must uphold my ideals, for perhaps the time will come when I shall be able to carry them out."

Well, how do we carry out those ideals? Like Anne Frank, many of us believe that human beings are capable of great things, even though they sometimes do terrible things. How, then, do we improve the odds? What can we do to bring out the best in people, while constraining their darker side?

In this effort, the law is fundamental and indispensable. Our profession is tasked with setting limits on the baser impulses of humanity, while also creating conditions in which creativity, generosity, and excellence can thrive. We don't always succeed, but it is hard to think of anything more important. The other side of the coin is that failing to join in this noble effort is worse than a missed opportunity. As Edmund Burke said, "The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing."

Your goal, then, should be to make the law more just and more effective. This challenge is presented in every field of the law—and you will find that the graduates and faculty of this magnificent law school are engaged with virtually all of them. To make the point more concrete, though, I will offer a few examples.

Obviously, the criminal justice system is dedicated to constraining humanity's worst instincts. This body of law discourages people from behaving badly, while also ascertaining that the defendant is the one who actually committed the crime and did not have a justification for doing so. In the U.S., states often base their criminal laws on an authority known as the Model Penal Code. You will not be surprised to know that the Model Penal Code's principal drafter, Herbert Wechsler, Class of 1931, was one of the most prominent professors ever to serve on this faculty.

There are also laws regulating the way wars are fought. One of the founders of this school back in 1858, Francis Lieber, drafted the law of war for the Union Army during the American Civil War. The Lieber Code remains a foundational document in the field. What governments can and should do to protect the security of their people remains a salient issue today, as you know from front-page stories about surveillance, drones, cybersecurity, sanctions,

leaks, and the like. Our faculty is deeply engaged in these debates, and many developed their expertise through government service as well as scholarship.

Constraining destructive impulses is also a preoccupation of constitutional law. No one understood this better than Alexander Hamilton, who was a drafter of the U.S. Constitution, the nation's first Secretary of the Treasury, and, of course, a student from 1774 to 1776 at Columbia (which was then called King's College). "In framing a government which is to be administered by men over men," Hamilton observed, "the great difficulty lies in this: You must first enable the government to control the governed, and in the next place, oblige it to control itself."

The goal of the law is not only to prevent abuses of power and to deter wrongdoing, but also to create conditions in which our talents and energies thrive. The law can help cut through prejudice and bias in order to ensure that everyone can pursue their dreams and contribute to a better world. As you know, one of the shining moments in the history of American law was the Supreme Court's decision to end racial segregation in *Brown v. Board of Education*. Professor Jack Greenberg, Class of 1948, argued the case along with Thurgood Marshall. I hope you will spend time with Jack, who is too unassuming to tell you how important his contributions were. So I will make the point by quoting another Columbia Law School graduate, Eric Holder, Class of 1976, who is the first African-American to serve as Attorney General of the United States. A few months ago, I was standing with him when Jack came over to say hello. So the Attorney General turned to me and said: "Without Jack Greenberg, I wouldn't be doing what I am doing. If not for Jack, we would not have an African-American Attorney General." That is an inspiring thought.

Ruth Bader Ginsburg, Class of 1959, has also had this kind of impact. I bet you know that she is the second woman to serve on the U.S. Supreme Court. You may not know that she is also the first woman to serve as a tenured member of this faculty. While teaching here in the 1970s, Ruth Bader Ginsburg won a series of victories at the Supreme Court that established gender equality as a constitutional principle.

As an advocate, she had a gift for framing controversial arguments so that they seemed uncontroversial. She saw the value of sometimes bringing gender discrimination cases on behalf of male clients, so that male judges would identify more closely with them. For example, in representing the husband of a female member of the U.S. military, she persuaded the Supreme Court that *husbands* of soldiers should be allowed to receive health care through their spouses, just as *wives* do.

In addition to enforcing rights, the law also enables people to trust each other and work together in order to discover, create, and innovate. We all benefit from channeling humanity's competitive instincts into efforts to acquire new knowledge, build businesses, and create wealth. But in order to live in a world where we have iPads, airplanes, and *Game of Thrones*, we need a legal system that protects investments, facilitates cooperation, prevents corruption, promotes healthy competition, and facilitates orderly reorganizations when businesses fail.

In your time at Columbia, you will see how fields like contracts, intellectual property, corporations, securities, tax, and bankruptcy have a profound effect on our economic well-being. There is no better place to study business law than Columbia Law School. Ever since Columbia law professor Adolph Berle transformed our understanding of the modern corporation in a pathbreaking book more than 80 years ago, this school has been at the forefront of the study and practice of business law.

It would take hours even to scratch the surface of this school's impact on our economic life, so I will limit myself to one example. It comes from my own business card. You might think I'm going to talk about myself—admittedly, one of my favorite subjects—but instead I will mention my title, which is the Harvey R. Miller Professor of Law and Economics. Harvey Miller, Class of 1959, is one of the world's leading experts in bankruptcy law. As a senior partner at Weil Gotshal & Manges, he has been involved in virtually every major bankruptcy in the past four decades, including as counsel to the debtor for Lehman Brothers and General Motors. Harvey also teaches an extremely popular course on bankruptcy here at Columbia, which some students affectionately call "Miller time."

As these examples show, the law is closely intertwined with much of what we think is important and good in the world. This means that lawyers have the opportunity to help right wrongs and to bring us all closer to the better world we dream of attaining. What could be more important than that?

At Columbia Law School, it is also true that, as the old saying goes, you can do good and do well at the same time. Within the law, you can find work that is not only morally compelling, but also interesting, rewarding, and fun. Everyone has different tastes, and during your time here, you will begin the process of finding the best fit for you.

You will also develop skills that are crucial in any professional endeavor, so that you can change direction and take on different challenges over the course of your career. For example, thinking critically and knowing what questions to ask is important not only when you try a case, but also when you run a movie studio, an investment bank, or a government office—as many of our graduates can tell you from personal experience. Presenting your views persuasively is important not only when you negotiate a deal, but also when you run a museum or defend a scholarly paper.

Another advantage of being here is that you will get to know each other. Some of your closest friends in the coming years are in this room, although you probably have not met them yet. You will remain in touch for the rest of your lives, enjoying each other's company and taking pride in each other's successes.

Well, we have covered a lot of ground today—from Einstein to *Game of Thrones* and Miller time, which is an improbable journey, to be sure—so I should wrap this up. I will conclude with three pieces of advice.

First, your highest priority—at Columbia Law School and wherever you go from here—should be preserving your integrity. Intelligence without integrity is like a Maserati without a steering wheel. It is useless at best, and potentially very dangerous. Be sure that people think of you not only as exceptionally capable, but also as exceptionally decent, honest, fair, and kind.

Second, although law school and the legal profession will place significant demands on your time and energies, don't lose sight of your other interests and commitments. If you love reading, playing basketball, or working in a soup kitchen, you should keep doing it. You will need to manage your time more carefully. If you do, the balance you find in maintaining these interests will help you to be more fulfilled and more successful.

Third, and relatedly, be sure to make time for your family and friends. They are always in your corner, and you need to return the favor. We can't always control when we are needed by spouses, children, parents, siblings, and friends, and sometimes you will be pulled in different directions. That is part of life. But remember that it is an honor and a privilege when people depend on you, especially the people closest to you.

In the coming months, you will live a full and active life. I hope and expect that you will enjoy it here as much as my colleagues and I will enjoy having you with us. Congratulations again, and welcome to Columbia Law School. We look forward to sharing this adventure with you.