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Cardozo Celebrates the Class of 2023

Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law

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Cardozo Celebrates the Class of 2023



Cardozo School of Law celebrated the Class of 2023, whose graduates embarked upon their academic journey in the midst of the pandemic, during its graduation ceremony at Lincoln Center on June 5.

Dean Melanie Leslie noted that the accomplishments of the class members were nothing short of extraordinary, given that the graduates had to adapt to remote classes.

“Graduating from law school is always an impressive achievement,” Leslie said. “But what this class has accomplished today is momentous.”

She mentioned the work students did in criminal justice, which ranged from obtaining clemency for clients to settling a lawsuit to end solitary confinement for those on death row in Louisiana.

Many of these successes were made possible because of the collaboration among the graduates, she said.

Although relationships among students took time to grow because they were working remotely, they quickly came together once classes were held in person. And, rather than viewing each other as competitors, Leslie said students were urged to see classmates as resources and co-collaborators.

Leslie advised the graduates to “bring open hearts and curious minds to each new encounter—and have the humility to learn from everyone you meet.”

The keynote speaker was the Hon. Joseph Greenaway Jr., who served as a circuit judge of the United States Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit. He reflected on his career and highlighted the three principles he strives to live by: pursue excellence, challenge yourself and find your fun.

He recalled his parents as hard workers, instilling in him that “the pursuit of excellence is a lifelong pursuit.”

Greenaway told the graduates that St. Jerome’s motto, “Good, better, best. Never let it rest. ’Til, your good is better and your better is best,” has always resonated with him as he believes in continuous improvement.

Greenaway also said it’s important to challenge oneself. He said one may face several difficulties, but personal and professional growth “go hand in hand.”

Greenaway wrapped up his remarks by encouraging the graduates to find their fun, sharing that one of the joys he has found is in triathlons.

“We all need passions besides the law,” he said. “Give yourself those respites.”

LL.M. class speaker Xènia Campàs Gené acknowledged that for many of her fellow classmates, coming to New York to pursue their degree was not only a dream but also a risk. She said she hopes the class will embrace uncertainty and persevere through challenges.

J.D. class speaker Talia Heller pointed out that in ancient biblical Hebrew, there is no word for “history.”

“It means what came before us, our own past and in the past of our ancestors, it’s actually all a part of us right now,” she said. “Everything that happened before is connected to us. We’re just a continuation of a big, messy, wild story.”

When the president of Yeshiva University, Rabbi Dr. Ari Berman, addressed the class, he discussed a life lesson he learned while on a call with his daughter during a flight. He said he was unable to speak to her without disturbing his fellow passengers, so she spoke to both sides of the conversation, carrying on what he might say to her in response to what she said.

“I realized that my daughter is carrying my voice in her heart, and she can hear me even when I am not present,” Berman said.

Although he recently lost his father, Berman said he has carried his father’s voice with him and shares it with his children.

“It’s essential to remember throughout your life, not just what’s in your heart, but who is in your heart,” Berman said.

Professors were also honored during the graduation ceremony. “With so many of us starting law school alone in a brand-new city, or even coming back to school after being in the workforce, it is the kindness and support from faculty and staff that we will remember most,” said Student Bar Association President Hannah Petitti, who presented the awards.

Among the winners were Best First Year Professor Myriam Gilles, Best Professor Jessica Roth, Best Adjunct Professor Brian Farkas, Best Administrator Jennifer Kim, who is the dean of students, and Outstanding Assistance to the Student Body Stephen Iannacone, who serves as the director of academic success.