

From remarks by Justice Robert Cordy at a JALSA event honoring his former law firm and its chairperson. Justice Cordy's remarks about the responsibility of lawyers to the community were so parallel to JALSA's mission, we asked if we could report these on this website.

“Each June and December I joyfully perform the duty of swearing new lawyers into the Massachusetts Bar. The ceremony is performed in the main chamber of Faneuil Hall - where the applicants and their families are surrounded by paintings of important moments and persons in American legal history.

I get to explain to them how the license they are about to receive is not just a license to practice law, it is a license to change the world in many ways both small and profound.

I urge them not to squander the privilege of being a lawyer. And to measure each year not just by their income but by their contributions to making the communities they live in a better place for everyone.

This theme - of the lawyer's responsibility to serve the community - not as an afterthought, but as part and parcel of the privilege of being a lawyer, is one that has deep roots in our history. I think that it is one of the things that has made America great.

Above all else, this is a society founded on the principles that laws are equally applicable to all people, and that every person has a right to seek and receive justice. While our country has been criticized for many things by others in the world – rightly and sometimes wrongly - we still are admired for these principles - not just their words - but how they animate what we expect from our governmental institutions, what we expect from each other, and what we honestly strive to achieve.

I have had the great privilege of meeting with judges and lawyers - from literally dozens of countries around the world from Eastern Europe to the Middle East to Africa over the last nine years. Most of those countries are struggling with the problem of establishing a legitimately independent judiciary, the problems of corruption, and the challenges of widespread social injustice. Without exception, everyone I have met in this context is anxious to understand the American experience with justice, and to replicate it in some way within their own societies. One of the main points I try to make when we meet is that America has not been perfect by any means in the quest for equal justice under law - and that our history is littered with evidence of mistakes from which others can learn. But what is redeeming in our history, and to our credit, is that we take our imperfections very seriously; and work tirelessly to identify and expose them, to publicly debate them, and to correct them when we can. Vital to this process, to the civil discourse – which is absolutely essential to the correction of our compass -- are lawyers -- lawyers who are prepared to stand up and speak against injustice - whether it be at Guantanamo Bay, or in the Dorchester District Court, or before the United States Immigration Service.

At the end of his life, President John Adams reflected that perhaps the best service he ever rendered his country was his defense of the British soldiers charged with murdering colonists at the so-called Boston Massacre. And in doing so, ensuring that the law applied even to those who were most feared or despised amongst us. It took great courage for Adams to do that - and his legal practice suffered for it as a result - at least in the short term. But justice is its own reward, and Adams carried that reward and its important lesson with him the rest of his life - incorporating that lesson into the constitutions and the fabric of this commonwealth and the nation.

Shortly after I joined the court in 2001, we created the John Adams Pro Bono Publico Award to annually recognize lawyers who demonstrated outstanding commitment to volunteering their services for the poor and the disadvantaged. It is the most important award ceremony we hold each year. And one of which I am particularly proud.

So, thank you JALSA - for creating the *Distinguished Community Leadership Award* - to recognize those dedicated to the pursuit of justice. Thank you for recognizing the important role that lawyers in our community play in that pursuit.”