

2016

## Ribbon-Cutting Ceremony: Keynote Address

Ruth Bader Ginsburg  
*United States Supreme Court*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.wcl.american.edu/aulr>



Part of the [Law Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Ginsburg, Ruth Bader (2016) "Ribbon-Cutting Ceremony: Keynote Address," *American University Law Review*. Vol. 65 : Iss. 3 , Article 1.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.wcl.american.edu/aulr/vol65/iss3/1>

This Remarks is brought to you for free and open access by the Washington College of Law Journals & Law Reviews at Digital Commons @ American University Washington College of Law. It has been accepted for inclusion in American University Law Review by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ American University Washington College of Law. For more information, please contact [kclay@wcl.american.edu](mailto:kclay@wcl.american.edu).

---

## Ribbon-Cutting Ceremony: Keynote Address

## REMARKS

### RIBBON-CUTTING CEREMONY: KEYNOTE ADDRESS

FEBRUARY 12, 2016

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY WASHINGTON COLLEGE OF LAW

THE HONORABLE RUTH BADER GINSBURG\*

The invitation to participate in this ribbon-cutting ceremony was one I could hardly resist, because of this law school's unique history, and because Dean Claudio Grossman is among the most savvy, sympathetic, [and] persuasive, law school leaders. The founders of what has become American University Washington College of Law, as the Dean just told you, Ellen Spencer Mussey and Emma Gillett, joined forces in 1896 to hold law classes for aspiring young women. They did so because the predecessor of George Washington University's Law School refused to admit women. Mussey and Gillett, in succession, were the first women in the USA to serve as law school deans. When the Bar Association of the District of Columbia persisted in excluding women, this Law School's first deans didn't

---

\* Associate Justice, United States Supreme Court. Prior to serving on the U.S. Supreme Court, Justice Ginsburg was instrumental in launching the American Civil Liberties Union's (ACLU) Women's Rights Project and served as the ACLU's General Counsel from 1973–1980. In 1980, President James Carter appointed her to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit. After serving on the D.C. Circuit for thirteen years, President William Clinton nominated Justice Ginsburg as an Associate Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court. Justice Ginsburg took her seat on the Court on August 10, 1993.

waste time on anger or self-pity. They became charter members of the Women's Bar Association of D.C., founded in 1917, successful from the start, and still thriving. The school Mussey and Gillett founded was not for women only, its admission policy—unlike GW's and Georgetown['s]—was nondiscriminatory from the start.

And its leaders took part in efforts to make our Union more perfect. Ellen Mussey was a prominent participant in the suffrage movement. She was also drafter and proponent of legislation giving married women control over their own property and earnings and putting mothers and fathers on a par regarding guardianship of children. Emma Gillett, too, was a participant in the struggle to gain the franchise for women. After the suffrage campaign, she did not rest content. She joined the National Woman's Party and strongly advocated passage of the Equal Rights Amendment as a necessary complement to the Nineteenth Amendment. That perfection is yet to be accomplished.

Graduates of American University Washington College of Law should take just pride in the School's origin and, even more, in what the College has become at this 120th anniversary of its founding. Yet, as committed as you and I may be to excellence in legal education, we must admit that law and lawyers have fared rather badly in many a song and story. In Johann Strauss's *Die Fledermaus*, a lawyer, Dr. Blind, has a bit part, but his assistance is so ineffective, he manages to get for his client a few extra days in jail. The lawyer in *Porgy and Bess* ups the price for a divorce from \$1.00 to \$1.50 when Bess tells him she was never really married before. The judge in Gilbert and Sullivan's *Trial by Jury* succeeds at the Bar by marrying a rich attorney's elderly, ugly daughter, then ditches her when the briefs came trooping gaily, and every day his voice was heard at the Sessions or Ancient Bailey. But the legal profession that graduates of this law school will join has among its practitioners legions of women and men who strive to change the perception of lawyers as an avaricious lot; those legions are lawyers devoted to, and at work for, the public good. It is lawyers of that kind that American University Washington College of Law seeks to train, lawyers who will use their talent and education to help repair tears in our society and world. To take just one of many examples, the Law School's United States/Israel Human Rights Law Fellowship program brings together . . . young lawyers[, Jews and Arabs alike,] to promote the well-being of all in that region. The program, now named for its creator, Professor Herman Schwartz, recently celebrated its 30th anniversary.

The values that guide American University Washington College of Law are equality, diversity, and intellectual rigor, and its world-class faculty is well equipped to foster those values. The school offers rich and diverse programs in business law, environmental law, trial advocacy, various clinical enterprises, health law, criminal law, intellectual property law, human rights and humanitarian law, and international law, to name some of the areas one can pursue in depth here. And now the school is settled in a campus both spacious and state of the art. I won't describe it in any detail, because it is here, before your eyes: its well-designed buildings, fine library, well equipped courtrooms, attractive dining hall and cafe, beautiful outdoor spaces, [and] great facilities for conferences. Shortly after leaving law teaching—my occupation for seventeen years—for a post in the U.S. Judiciary that began in 1980, I wrote that legal education is a “shared adventure.” The sharers include students, teachers, alumni, staff, university and community leaders, judges, [and] members of the legal profession and public supportive of American University Washington College of Law. All assembled at this gathering have shared in making today's celebration possible and should derive huge satisfaction from the realization of the Tenley Campus. May that shared adventure of legal education launched by Mussey and Gillett continue here for decades to come, and may that adventure flourish in the grand facilities we dedicate this afternoon.

\*\*\*