

# Commencement Address

September 15, 2001

Remarks by  
Dean Don LeDuc

As the days have passed, all of us have experienced the same waves of emotion. First, shock and the numbness of incomprehensibility. Then, sadness, sorrow, and grief. Incredible frustration about the unknown, faceless criminals behind this horrendous, despicable deed. And a growing anger.

On Thursday, I awoke to a news story of a spontaneous vigil and the White House and the soft singing of Americans, and a Swede living here, assembled at the gates of our greatest national symbol. They sang the words of our national pride, “Oh, Beautiful For Spacious Skies,” then “God shed His grace on thee,” and “crown thy good with brotherhood, from sea to shining sea.”

At that moment, I felt the next emotion — pity and quickly another — pride. We are not a people whose instincts are hatred and death; we are a people of love and life, of freedom and beauty.

I feel pity for those who must live where hope is prancing before television cameras to yell “Death to America,” and joy is burning the flag of a nation they do not know and cannot understand. I pity those whose life has been reduced to hatred, who live in countries where their leaders can survive only by using a perverted view of God to control the people who will one day rise against the bigotry, ignorance, hopelessness, and fear that feeds their fanaticism. How sad it must be to live in a world that sees the murder of the innocent as victory, whose only hope is to die serving evil masters too cowardly to die for their cause themselves.

And now I feel pride. Like many, I have said too casually that New Yorkers are different — rude, loud, and selfish — how wrong. How brave they were, how determined, how kind, how strong. As were their brothers and sisters in Washington. As were the heroic passengers who saved the White House from yet another malevolent group, knowingly giving their lives to protect their country. As were the thousands of volunteers who have come forward to confront and overcome this horror, some to die to help others live.

Proud, too, am I to live in a country that tolerates

differences, that will seek justice rather than vengeance, and that will die to be free. I am proud that our nation’s founders knew the weakness of man, were suspicious of power, and knew the evils that could masquerade as God’s Word, and proud that they wrote a constitution that protects us from the basest instincts of man. I am proud of our leaders who will help America stay together, who will show us how to heal this wound, and who will give us the justice our dead citizens and heroes deserve.

I, like you, felt the frustration of not knowing what to do, but at the moment I heard those singers at the White House, my frustration left, replaced by resolve. I realized that I can do what my country, my forebears, and my God have taught me to do.

I can know the difference between religion and fanaticism — that Osama Bin Laden is another incarnation of Jim Jones, that it is Mohammed and Jesus and Moses who define Muslim and Christian and Jew, not these pitiful creatures.

I can also remember that Americans still die to make me free and that, while liberty is our birthright, it can only be preserved by devotion to our country, and by the willingness to sacrifice ourselves for love of our country, our family, and our friends.

I can live my life proud to be an American, aware of the privilege to be part of the greatest democracy the world had known, and mindful that we are free because we are strong.

We will prevail in the war against terrorism. Just as the Western Hemisphere is now democratic, except for the dying despotism in Cuba; just as the Berlin Wall no longer separates liberty from tyranny; just as the Soviet Union, the evil empire, fell to the inevitable strength of democracy, so will the puny minions of terror fall to the irresistible forces of liberty, freedom, and democracy.

America will survive. Freedom will survive. You and I will survive.

God Bless America. God Bless the Iredell Class.  
God Bless us all.

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Speech Excerpts  
Michigan Chief Justice Maura Corrigan

Thank you for allowing me to share this great day with you. There are a handful of occasions that each of us remembers always. A graduation day is certainly one of them.

Quite obviously, we have other reasons — tragic reasons — for remembering this past week. The chronicle of American history changed this week, but not the course of our nation. For every evil act of destruction, there were a thousand acts of bravery. When this story is told in years to come, the heroism of everyone who helped reduce the suffering is what will be remembered. Think of the New York police and fire departments; Father Mychal Judge, chaplain of the New York City Fire Department; Barbara Olson, the wife of Solicitor General Theodore Olson; Jeremy Glick, Thomas Burnett, and others on Flight 93, which crashed in Pennsylvania while apparently headed for Washington; and so many more. Their heroism will stand alongside, and ultimately overshadow, the evil acts of the few villains who caused this harm.

For a few minutes this afternoon, I will ask you to reflect on lessons from the lives of two fascinating men. One has made this day possible for all of us. The other is the namesake of your class.

As you have heard many times, this is the James Iredell class of the Thomas M. Cooley Law School. It is named after Justice Iredell, who joined the United States Supreme Court in 1790, immediately after helping gain adoption of the federal constitution. Justice Iredell was 48-years-old when he died.

The other man I want you to consider today is very much alive — the founder of this great school and former Chief Justice of the Michigan Supreme Court, Thomas Emmett Brennan.

I am sure you have heard the story of how this magnificent law school was founded. I hope you appreciate the courage and the initiative that was required at a time when formal and informal opposition seemed to appear around every corner.

James Iredell died young, 202 years ago. Thomas Brennan is so full of ideas, he may live another 202 years from

today. What common lesson can we draw from these two? Here it is: Build something.

The need to build is one that great and good people have always recognized. Mother Teresa kept a prayer at her bedside that says in part, “What you spend years building, someone could destroy overnight. Build anyway.” That is what I want you to do. That is what I want you to remember from this afternoon. Build something.

James Iredell helped to build a country. And we know that Justice Brennan built something. He built this great school. He created opportunity, and he did so with vision and fortitude and imagination.

Today’s graduates came from all over the United States, and you will return to your homes across this great nation. You have a law practice to start, bills to pay, families that now can have more of your loving attention.

But somewhere along the line, build something. A park. A shelter for those who are victimized. An organization that matches at-risk children with mentors. A day for the community to clean a local river. A program to feed the elderly. Put something in your town that isn’t there today.

And as you do so, look at Justice Iredell, and remember that he never saw his 49th birthday. Remember also those who died so unexpectedly last week. Each day may be the day of opportunity. It may be the day when you are to act.

As you think back on how you got here today, as you look around at the people who are here to support you, I know your hearts are likewise filled with gratitude. Each of you has many people to thank. Be sure to tell them how deeply you appreciate what they have done.

Enjoy this beautiful day. Embrace the people who made it possible. And in the years to come, join these great men, Justice Iredell and Justice Brennan, by finding a need in your community and solving it with bricks and mortar, courage and imagination.

Thank you. Good luck and Godspeed to each of you.