

## **E PLURIBUS UNUM - FROM MANY, ONE: IN UNITY THERE IS STRENGTH**

*Paula A. Franzese\**

Law Day represents a magnificent opportunity to celebrate our legal system and our society of laws, as we reflect upon all of the good that has been accomplished. The theme of this year's festivities, "E Pluribus Unum," which means "From Many, One," offers an occasion to honor the diversity of our heritage while saluting the strength that comes from our unity.

It was on August 10, 1776, that the rather distinguished committee of Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, and John Adams first proposed that the Latin phrase *E Pluribus Unum* be a part of the Great Seal of the United States. In fact, we actually see the phrase every day, although most of us seldom notice it. By law, it appears on every United States coin.

Our national motto - Out of Many, One - symbolized the federal union of the thirteen original states and captured the new republic's spirit of tolerance, solidarity and liberty. *E Pluribus Unum* became, as time went on, an even more meaningful slogan, as this nation attracted peoples of all lands, of all places and of all religions, races and ethnic backgrounds.

Yet, on this special Law Day, an occasion to salute our legal system while reflecting on the ideals of unity, we find ourselves in crisis. The tolerance and fellowship that our motto extols seems at times to have surrendered to a society that has become increasingly hostile, contentious, litigious and combative. People are turning against one another; people are turning against themselves.

The soul of the law is suffering. A crisis of morale confronts the legal profession. Systemically, symptoms of this collective malaise are found in the oft-cited decline in civility among lawyers, the high incidence of depression suffered by attorneys and the ever-increasing, win at all cost battles fought both in and out of court. Many lawyers, particularly young attorneys, find with disappointment that their chosen life's work does not have the meaning that they had hoped it would have.

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Compounding the legal profession's own internal struggle is society's ever-growing distrust of the whole lot of us. The good that is accomplished by many lawyers all too often tends to be overlooked by many observers, the popular media principal among them. Commentators warn that there are too many lawyers, and that as a society we are suing ourselves into economic and institutional disaster. To add insult to injury, the profession is now fodder for joke after joke after joke. From Jay Leno to Rush Limbaugh to Geraldo, jabs at lawyers have become commonplace.

The problems that confront us as attorneys and members of the legal community mirror the problems plaguing society at large. In our daily lives, our personal lives, we all too often find ourselves exposed to uncivil aspects of exchange, with strangers, colleagues, and even friends treating one another with disrespect, ridicule, or indifference. Locally, nationally, and globally, the wars at home, in the workplace, in the courtroom, and in the boardrooms have become the wars in the streets.

Less than two weeks ago, a government building not unlike the building we gather in today was decimated by an unthinkable act of terrorism, an act of unspeakable hatred, violence, and disunity, to say the very least. It was one thing for us to fear and to ponder the threats posed by those abroad. It was quite another to watch in horror as CNN showed authorities surrounding a farmhouse tucked in the middle of our nation's heartland. The tragedy in Oklahoma City forces us to reckon with what sorts of hatreds exist right here at home, right next door.

In the midst of so much sorrow, grief, anger, despair, need, and greed, the temptation is to ask, with resignation, "How can I possibly change things? It's going to take a miracle." It is. So today, on Law Day, it seems most fitting to declare ourselves miracle workers. Together, we are ushering in the twenty-first century. It is about time for a change. And, if it is to be, it is up to us. All of us. Lawyer, judge, teacher, student, human being. Because all of us are teachers, guides, mentors, healers, gatekeepers. Yes, we are ushering in the twenty-first century, equipping our children, all children, to do the same. To grow in stature, to harness the stuff of miracles — the power of love, we must prepare ourselves.

That preparation begins first by going within. It is incumbent upon each of us to find the quiet time to ascertain and to define what we want, what we stand for, and what kind of a world we want to live and serve in. As the philosopher Eric Heller once remarked, "Be careful how you define the world, because it is just

like that.”<sup>1</sup> We must take care in defining our vision and taking our stand, mindful that what we think about most expands. What we think about we move towards. With our thoughts we create. With our thoughts we make the world. So we can choose to view our context as something to endure, as a rat race, but, as Lily Tomlin said, “The problem with the rat race is that, even if you win, you’re still a rat.” Or, we can choose to view our work and our lives as a gift, a privilege, an opportunity to act in furtherance of the only two things that really matter: loving and learning.

Terrible things happen. Things that we seem unable to control happen. But what we can control are our reactions. What we can control are our attitudes. What we can control are our responses.

Experience isn’t what happens to us. Experience is what we do with what happens to us. Let us be certain then to check in and always be sure that we are part of the solution.

From Many, One. In unity there is true strength. Let us be of one mind and of one heart, so that we despise nothing except meanness and cowardice, so that we are governed by our admirations rather than disgusts, so that we are always on the side of caring, of healing, and of loving.

This weekend my son and I watched *The Lion King*. As you probably recall, in that movie the young Simba confronts his own crisis of confidence, doubting his abilities and forgetting his inner strength. At a critical turning point, the spirit of his late father, Mufasa, comes to him and says essentially, “My son, you are more than you have become. Remember who you are, and take your place in the circle of life.” This is such a powerful message. It is indeed up to us to realize that we are more than what we have become. It is up to us to remember who we are, and to take our place in that circle of life, mindful that it is a circle — perfect, whole, and complete, depending, for its very existence, on our taking the hand of the brother and sister to our left and to our right. No matter our superficial differences, we find, when we are willing to listen, that the human heart speaks a single language. From Many, One.

As we remember who we are, we must determine what it is that we intend to achieve as a consequence. What kind of an impact are we having? What kind of an impact do we want to have? Our lives are shaped most not by what we take with us, but by what we

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<sup>1</sup> E. HELLER, *THE DISINHERITED MIND* (1979).

leave behind. When all is said and done, how would we want to be remembered? What will we have left behind?

Let us be clear about what we stand for. There is no such thing as living a neutral life. Let us call upon our imaginations and deepest vision in order to find our way to the kind of world that we wish to serve and the kind of people that we wish to be. Individually as well as collectively, it behooves us to take the time to define those attributes that we value most; those qualities that represent the best of who and what we are.

The vision that we embrace should include a view of our chosen life's work as noble and honorable. As the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. said:

If a person is called to be a streetsweeper, he should sweep streets even as Michelangelo painted, or Beethoven composed music, or Shakespeare wrote poetry. He should sweep streets so well that all the hosts of heaven and earth will pause to say, here lived a great streetsweeper who did his job well.

Our collective vision finds us all healers. The true challenge is to recognize and to accept responsibility for this fact. We heal with our words and with our actions. In the face of so much that is to be done, we heal with one loving thought and one loving impulse, one minute, one hour, one day at a time. Mother Teresa was once asked, "Sister, how have you been able to accomplish such great deeds?" She replied, "There are no great deeds. Only small deeds done with great love."

We heal when we heed our inner wisdom, when we are true to ourselves. I have always been inspired by Gandhi's life and legacy, a legacy created because he was true to his own voice. And I was fascinated to learn that it wasn't always that way. As a youngster, he had felt inferior because of the color of his skin and because of the schools he attended. So he journeyed to England, where he studied to be a barrister, dressed in three-piece tweed suits, and studied the foxtrot. It wasn't until later, in India, that he dared to reclaim himself, taking a stand for who he was and where he came from. He proceeded to define his vision carefully as well as mightily. We live, he said, so that we might ease the pain of all feeling beings. And then the miracles unfolded.

Gandhi's life also tells me that we heal when we seek the strength to ask the right questions. To ask, what's in it for me?, is to be asking the wrong question. To ask, in the face of popular cynicism, suffering, and need, how can I possibly make a difference?, is to ask the wrong question. Instead, it is up to us to ask,

how can I possibly dare not to? Edmund Burke said, "All that is necessary for evil to succeed is for good people to do nothing." There is no such thing as living a neutral life. Each of us is powerful, no matter what we have ever been told to the contrary.

Do not empower the naysayers, the critics, the negative thoughts, the self-doubts. Let us promise to never allow our partnership with anyone to silence our voice, or keep us from assisting another person in using hers or his. To cower as a consequence of the assessments of others, or because of self-defeating thoughts, is to betray ourselves. It is to surrender. We cannot let that happen. There is too much to be done, and too many people, so many of them as yet nameless and unknown, who are counting on us.

There is the proverb of the boy on the beach. The tide precipitously pulls out, leaving thousands of starfish stranded on the shore. If not thrown back, they will dry up and die. The boy begins picking them up, one at a time, and throwing them back to sea. A man comes by, and says, "Hey, give it up. There are thousands of them out here. You can't possibly make a difference. It doesn't matter what you do." The boy looks down at the starfish he is about to throw back in and replies, "But it does matter to this starfish."

Let us be happy, then, for the starfish now in our hands. Let us seek the wisdom and the courage to see that it is there. To know, as Emerson said, that one life has breathed easier because we have lived — let that be the measure of our success. Let us be grateful for this opportunity to serve. And let us be happy for this life. It is a precious gift. Let us embrace this moment, and each moment to come, as if our lives, and countless other lives, depended on it. Because they do.

Let us recapture the hopefulness, the wonder, and the innocence that may have been misplaced somewhere along the way. It has been said that the future is in the hands of those who can give tomorrow's generation valid reasons to live and to hope. If that is so, we hold the future in our hands.

I have always been touched by the story of the parent who has two children, one of them an avowed optimist, happy no matter his circumstances, and the other an avowed pessimist, miserable most of the time. The parent, trying to bring both children back to center, fills the pessimist's room with all of the toys and games known to delight even the fussiest child. In the room of the optimist, although he hates to have to do it, the parent places tons of horse manure. The dad waits tens minutes or so, and then ven-

tures into the pessimist's room, only to find his child standing in the corner, arms folded in front of him, scowling as he says to his parent, "Father, how dare you patronize me with these petty offerings?" The father sadly shrugs, and proceeds to enter the room of the optimist. There, he is astonished to find his child gleefully whistling while at work, busily spraying Lysol and shoveling the manure into a corner. The parent, in amazement asks, "My son, in the midst of all this, how can you maintain such a cheerful countenance?" The boy replies, "Daddy, don't you get it? With all this horse manure, there must be a pony!"

With our hearts and minds wide open, let's find those ponies. Let's join together, help each other, teach each other, and be good to each other. Luciano de Crescenzo, the Italian writer, said, "We are each of us angels with only one wing. And we only fly when we embrace each other."

Let us embrace each other, so that together we nurture strength of spirit and peace of mind. We will need that strength. Together, we are going to usher in one of the most important breakthroughs in history. A breakthrough where all of us, woman and man, teacher and learner, parent and child, reach the top of the mountain — not alone, not because we have had to become something we are not, and not because we have pushed someone else off.

Let us vow to continue to share our bounty of opportunity and influence and power and goodwill. Success is infinite and it is contagious. There is enough room for all of us at the top. But none of us will get there, and stay there, unless all of us get there and stay there.

This breakthrough that we will usher in depends upon our having the courage to liberate the gentler virtues that reside within our hearts — the attributes of sensitivity, nurturance, intuitiveness, compassion, and caring. We must encourage the development and liberation of these values in the people we live and work with. This is not always easy, and we are apt to be misunderstood in the process. We serve a world that for too long has relied on domination, control, aggression, competitiveness, and manipulation as the primary ingredients for success. Gentleness, by contrast, is often mistaken for weakness. But we know better. And by our example, we teach. We teach that gentleness is to be expected only from the strong. Cruelty comes from the weak.

The breakthrough that we will usher in requires that we wear on our sleeves our goodness, our integrity and our commitment to

excellence. It challenges us to live our message and to empower others to do the same. It depends upon our continuing to choose the path of caring and peacemaking in our approach to each other and our endeavors; it asks that we be the voice of reason, even in the midst of seeming chaos, and that we introduce love, even in the face of adversity.

Love is a choice. This possibility of choosing to love is what makes our having free will worth the risk of its abuse. In the days and months and years ahead, as the road diverges, it will be up to us to ask, "Does this path have a heart? Is this an honorable course?" Let us hope that we will always have the wisdom to choose that course, and the strength to take others with us. Our doing so will go on to transform for the better the shape of this world, far more than any courtroom or boardroom victory ever could.

Teilhard deChardin said that the day will come when, after mastering the wind, the waves, the tides and gravity, "we shall finally harness for God the energies of love. And on that day, for the second time in the history of the world, we will have discovered fire." Let us work to see that day come, notwithstanding the distractions and many temptations to do otherwise.

As the Council of Bishops proclaimed:

Yes, people can be mean and cruel and irresponsible. Love them anyway.

What you're building today may be torn down tomorrow. Build it anyway.

If you commit to goodness and to the way of love, you may be accused of false piety. Commit to goodness anyway.

If you endeavor to help others, you may be resented for it. Help anyway.

And if you give this world the best that you've got, striving to serve the nobler ends of justice and fairness, you will feel pain and fatigue in the process. But give it your best anyway.

This is our imperative. It is our mission, and I know that it will be our legacy. As George Bernard Shaw wrote, "I want to be thoroughly used up when I die."<sup>2</sup> When all is done, let it be said that we were thoroughly used up. Shaw continued: "Life is no short candle for me. It is, instead, a splendid torch, which I have in my hands for this brief moment. I must make it burn as brightly as possible before I hand it to the future."<sup>3</sup> That torch is in our hands. I feel proud and privileged to be carrying it with you.

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<sup>2</sup> GEORGE B. SHAW, *MAN AND SUPERMAN* (1941).

<sup>3</sup> *Id.*