

Annual Meeting Keynoter Addresses Integrity

A wide-ranging discussion of integrity—what it is and how to maintain it—in our daily lives (and even in libraries).

by Sue Burch

Stephen L. Carter, William Nelson Cromwell Professor of Law at Yale University, provided a riveting and lively keynote address at the 90th Annual Meeting AALL luncheon and awards ceremony.

The author of *The Culture of Disbelief* and *Integrity*, Professor Carter examined the role of integrity in one's daily life, in law, and even in libraries. Admitting that his "record for overdue library books reveals he has no personal experience" with the topic, he explained he is someone who has tried to study it. In fast-paced anecdotal style, Carter used children, football, library wanderings, democracy, political campaigns, Shepard's Citations, a pope and an emperor to illustrate the dilemma of maintaining integrity.

Moral Principles v. Daily Life

He first delved into how most Americans view integrity: moral principles on one side of the spectrum, and our daily lives on the other. How those two sides interact is what Carter finds most revealing about those who strive for integrity.

He also explained how he got interested in the subject. Using his passion for football, Carter explained his attempt to justify to his children that it was all right for a receiver to act as if he caught a pass when the replay showed he dropped the ball: "But Daddy, he's cheating!" wailed one of his children. "You don't know how the game is played," he replied. "But Daddy, he's lying. He's pretending something is true that isn't," insisted his other child. "The player is just doing what he's expected to do. He's playing his role," he attempted to explain. By sharing this typical parent/child exchange, Carter began his telling and frank observations on how easily principles and integrity can be set aside in our lives.

He also told us how difficult integrity is to maintain with any kind of consistency, at least for many of us. And yet it is viewed by Americans as the number one quality we want in our public officials, teachers and our children when they become adults. However, Carter feels that integrity will not be achieved unless we figure out "what it is and then follow that model in our lives."

The Crux of the Problem

He then pinpointed the crux of the problem when facing integrity issues: when do we break "the rules" and when do we not? Carter admitted that "it would be nice" if our life decisions could be based on some well defined philosophical reflections. Unfortunately, these decisions are generally based on "personal convenience," and that is the lesson we teach our children—namely, adults do not have to follow "the rules" if they don't want to.

In turning to libraries, he shared an especially insightful remembrance that occurred during a clandestine New Year's Eve visit to the Yale Law Library. He explained that he loves wandering in libraries and he really wasn't there that evening to get a specific book, but was curious to find out "what books fate might present to [him]." He likes to "just look at them, feel their texture, and look inside them." For Carter, this is a crucial aspect of what libraries are about. Their very fabric presents a place where people don't just get what they want. They often get something entirely different, and this is the "essence of libraries."

Reflection and Challenge

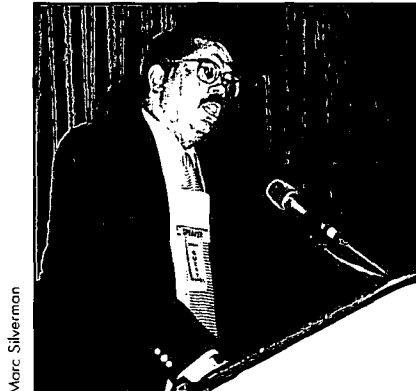
He then moved into a more philosophical examination of integrity. He recited the dictionary definition: "living life according to a set of principles." True integrity, according to Carter, lets us both discover our principles and then stand up for them. He also outlined

the steps in finding one's integrity. First, we need to be "orally reflective," and then we need to have our views challenged. This is important, he explained, because "we don't know if we have integrity until we're willing to sacrifice something for our principles." Additionally, integrity is revealed in not just keeping commitments, but examining how we make our commitments. Using the failing marriage rate in America as an example, Carter pointed out that today many marry too quickly without understanding the work that goes into it. Instead of just walking away, the person of integrity and commitment in a troubled marriage would say, "My marriage is becoming extremely difficult. If there's any way to work through this, I will."

Carter v. Shepard's

In a quick change of direction, Carter probed the "harm" of Shepard's *Citators* to legal arguments and Shepard's impact on the integrity of knowing the law. He explained that before Shepard's existed, lawyers read cases and made their arguments based on understanding the reasoning in the case. Now lawyers merely say to their clerks, "Get me some language to support this—or find cases that say this..." Law clerks, using online services, can easily provide the cases. Integrity requires the realization that all these services—Shepard's, LEXIS, WESTLAW—are just tools. "The importance in the law," he stressed, "is the argument, not the authorities we use." Teachers with integrity demonstrate this to students by "being impressed with their reasoning, not words on a screen or the number of papers they write."

He next gave an intriguing examination of public places and social interaction. If we are in front of our computers all day, we risk losing that "ordinary, yet unexpected contact with students and colleagues in libraries." He feels libraries are "great equalizing institutions. Everyone is free to go, and we encounter



Keynote speaker Stephen Carter spoke eloquently on the topic of integrity.

others we don't know." One of the problems of the online world is that it provides barriers to physically encountering strangers; and a cyberworld makes it difficult to build civility. Public spaces, on the other hand, can build a stronger democracy "if in those spaces we have conversation, because democracy requires conversation among citizens," and integrity is central to those conversations.

Integrity in Politics

Carter went on to explain his love of democracy, the art of persuasion and the give and take of ideas. Integrity requires us "to tell the truth," but there are three risks to exposing one's truth: "ridicule; no one will listen; and the fear *not* that others won't change their minds, but that we *will* change ours."

In a segue into politics, Carter explored Americans' belief that almost all politicians lie, and yet we pay attention to their campaign promises. And more intriguing, we still vote according to those promises we know will not be kept! Politicians, he explained, have a difficult time with integrity because if they do what "they believe in and it's unpopular, the media prints that they are out of step with the consensus." If politicians do what's popular, they are accused of pandering. Also, despite Americans' proclamation that they despise negative campaigning, they do not often exhibit integrity at the polls. We don't "punish" politicians for running that kind of campaign by voting against them.

Pope v. Emperor

Carter ended his speech with a tale of a controversy from the 12th century, between Pope Gregory VII and Emperor Henry IV. They were feuding over who had the right to appoint bishops. The emperor's people decided the problem could be solved by "constructing" some documents that revealed earlier popes had granted this power to emperors. There were "no feelings of lying because they believed the emperor was right," and thus constructing those documents was also "right." This kind of "the end justifies the means" thinking is very prevalent today: "If we know we're right, don't stand in our way." However, Carter shared his belief that we might see a change in this reasoning—a change that will transform humans from ends to means.

A Challenge to Librarians

He concluded with kudos and a challenge to librarians. He first asked his audience to imagine "building libraries with no people in them, that people weren't important, but the information was." He told us he agreed that "information **is** important to libraries," more important, "information is there **for** people." And despite our attention to the technology, efficiency, and cost of some of the new library marvels, he urged us to remember that "libraries exist for people, and that libraries can maintain their integrity when others are losing theirs!"

Carter's keynote address was an intriguing combination of philosophy, libraries, and the law. In a refreshing departure from our pragmatic library-speak programs, his discussion elevated our consciences to loftier thoughts of principles, commitment, and ethical strength. We were also treated to a different and stirring vision of libraries as entities of happenstance social encounters, of books that "choose" us, and most important, of integrity.

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Oscar & Associates

Some lucky attendees actually had time to stop and chat; for others the Meeting seemed like a whirlwind of challenge and stimulation.

Betty Taylor (University of Florida, College of Law Legal Information Center, Gainesville, Florida), and Marie Wallace (Retired Law Librarian, Los Angeles, California) each received the Marian Gould Gallagher Distinguished Service Award at the Association Luncheon.



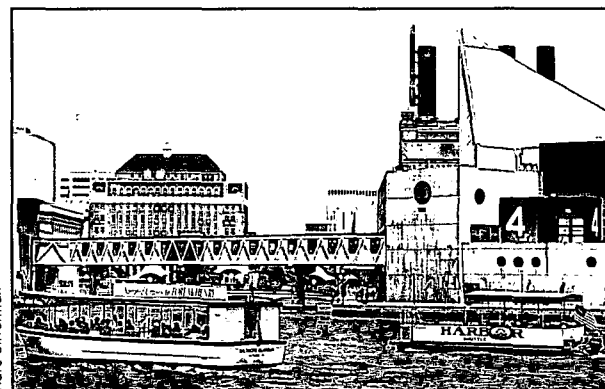
Marc Silverman

Betty Taylor



Marc Silverman

Marie Wallace



Marc Silverman

The water taxis were particularly popular.

Audio cassette recordings of Annual Meeting programs are available. Program handout books are also available. For ordering information, please see p. 21.