

Speak Up for Democracy and Diversity

Historic Law Day 2000 Celebration at the Law Library of Congress

by Marie-Louise Bernal

Now, therefore, I, Dwight D. Eisenhower, President of the United States of America, do hereby designate Thursday, May 1, 1958, as Law Day USA. I urge the people of the United States to observe the designated day with appropriate ceremonies and activities; and I especially urge the legal profession, the press and the radio, television and motion picture industries to promote and to participate in the observance of that day.

The drafter of these words, Charles S. Rhyne, who also personally persuaded President Eisenhower to sign the document, was honored and featured as speaker at the Law Library of Congress Law Day celebration on May 1, 2000. Since 1958, every U.S. President has annually issued a Law Day Proclamation, and the activities surrounding the event have not abated—quite the contrary, as is evident in the “Planning Guide” the American Bar Association (ABA) distributes every Spring, as well as by the special Law Day Chair the ABA appoints to coordinate and inspire Law Day events nationwide. The theme for this year’s celebration was “Speak up for Democracy and Diversity.”

In introducing the speaker, Law Librarian Rubens Medina described Charles Rhyne as “a distinguished lawyer in private practice, a prominent litigator and a prolific author who spent most of his career at the center of political power. He counseled several presidents and became a recognized expert in the field of aviation law. As a passionate proponent for human and civil rights, he fought discrimination throughout his career wherever he encountered it.” Rhyne refers

with pride to the fact that he was the one to integrate both the D.C. Bar and Duke University, his alma mater.

Integration of the University was his condition for agreeing to serve as a Duke Trustee, a position he still holds. “As a litigator, Mr. Rhyne successfully argued numerous cases before the Supreme Court. His desire to increase the public’s awareness of the rule of law and to halt the use of force found its ultimate expression in 1958, when President Eisenhower, through Mr. Rhyne’s efforts, signed a Presidential Proclamation declaring May 1, 1958, as Law Day USA. These efforts received worldwide attention, when *Time Magazine* devoted its May 8, 1958, cover to Charles Rhyne, then President of the American Bar Association (ABA).” Rubens Medina concluded his remarks by pointing at Rhyne’s remarkable “ability to translate his vision into reality, which has not only earned him numerous honorary degrees

and positions of leadership, but also two Nobel Prize nominations. However, his real crowning moment came in 1963 when 2500 legal representatives from all over the world came together in Athens to discuss how to extend the rule of law internationally, the first World Peace Through Law Conference. He served as President for the World Peace Through Law Center from its inception until the organization in 1991 changed its name to World Jurist Association.”

In his opening remarks, Medina also offered thanks to the Friends of the Law Library of Congress. With the support of the Friends, “the Law Library has been able to develop its own annual tradition to observe Law Day, as a way to celebrate

the significance of law and the legal profession here and in other countries of the world, and as a way to reflect the wealth of the Law Library’s vast global collection, and the expertise and diversity of its research and reference staff.” The Friends were represented by Abe Krash (President), Senator Charles McMathias (Member of the Board), and by Executive Director Anne Mercer.

When he rose to speak, Charles S. Rhyne, now in his 88th year, immediately captivated the audience with the same sharp mind as he had when his strong bearing and penetrating eyes looked out from the cover of *Time Magazine* almost half a century ago. “It is an honor to speak to you in the Library building dedicated to Thomas Jefferson,” he began. “I think Jefferson—with his belief in freedom of thought and individual liberty, as well as his recognition of the importance of a public declaration of these rights—would have approved of the Law Day we celebrate.”



The founder of Law Day, Charles S. Rhyne, holds the audience captive with his account of how both the idea and the practical implication of a special day dedicated to Law came about.

“I thought you might be interested in the way Law Day came about, and the way it has changed with the times. Mine will not be a scholarly presentation, but I hope it will offer some insight, and some amusement, about how public pronouncements often come into being.

“The justifications for a Law Day were twofold, one timeless and one very much a product of its times. The timeless notion was the use of law to achieve individual and social justice. The application of that notion to the Cold War, to contrast democracy with

communism, was a product of its times, but one which, I think, is relevant to the new democracies which have replaced the communist regimes. You have been provided with a copy of the radio address I gave on that first Law Day in 1958 over the Voice of America. This shows the original purpose and rationale of a Law Day.”



Margaret Bush Wilson (American Bar Association Chair of Law Day 2000), at left, and her colleague Mabel C. McKinney-Browning (Director of the ABA Division of Public Education) made the trip from Chicago especially to hear Charles Rhyne's presentation.

"The immediate inspiration for a May 1 celebration of Law was directly related to the Cold War. For many years, the American news media gave front page headlines and pictures to the Soviet Union's May Day Parade of new war weapons. I was distressed that so much attention was given to war-making rather than peace-keeping.

"My idea was to contrast the United States' reliance on the rule of law with the Soviet Union's rule by force. To that end, I drafted a U.S.

Presidential Proclamation, which made its way from John Foster Dulles (Secretary of State), to Sherman Adams (Chief of Staff to President Eisenhower), and stopped there.

"It had seemed such a sure thing that Dulles had affixed his signature, authenticating the President's signature, before the Proclamation was presented to Eisenhower. Dulles then left on a trip. Because Dulles was so respected, not only by Eisenhower but by the world, I wanted his signature on the Proclamation rather than some assistant's.

"Time passed. May 1 was fast approaching and I had heard nothing, so I went to see Governor Adams. He pulled the Proclamation out of his desk and gave it back to me saying, 'The President will not sign a Proclamation praising lawyers!'

"I strode down to the Oval Office and handed it to President Eisenhower himself. As he stood there reading it, Adams burst in yelling, 'Do not sign that paper praising lawyers!'

"I think Jefferson—with his belief in freedom of thought and individual liberty, as well as his recognition of the importance of a public declaration of these rights—would have approved of the Law Day we celebrate."

"The President held his hand up for silence until he had read the entire document. Then he said 'Sherm, this Proclamation does not contain one word praising lawyers. It praises our constitutional system of government, our great heritage under the rule of law, and asks our people to

stand up and praise what they have created. I like it and I am going to sign it.' And he did. It has always seemed to me that Governor Adams thought I was urging, not recognition of Law

Day, but recognition of a Lawyers' Day, sort of like Mother's Day or Father's Day. I am glad that President Eisenhower set him straight."

Rhyne closed by expressing the hope "that the opportunity which Law Day provides to reflect on the use of law by both nations and individuals will prompt both you in this audience and the leaders of nations to explore ways in which not only the Internet, but also other new technologies, can make more law more readily available to those who need it."

The event was held in the Jefferson Building of the Library of Congress and attracted close to 100 persons. Some had traveled from afar, such as Margaret Bush Wilson (American Bar Association Chair of Law Day 2000), and her colleague Mabel C. McKinney-Browning (Director of the ABA Division of Public Education), both from Chicago, Illinois. Also attending were invited guests from organizations such as the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank, and NASA. Last, but not least, among AALL members, were Dick Danner (Duke University School of Law, Durham, North Carolina)—to represent Charles Rhyne's alma mater—Mary Alice Baish (AALL Associate Washington Affairs Representative, Georgetown University Law Center), Kammie Hedges (Bureau of National Affairs), Marilou M. Righini (Transnational Publishers, Inc.), Linda Corbelli (U.S. Supreme Court Library), and Randall Snyder (Executive Office of the President).

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Charles S. Rhyne, seated, listening to Law Librarian Rubens Medina introducing him to an invited audience on Law Day, May 1, 2000. To his left, Margaret Henneberry, President of World Jurist Association, founded by Rhyne (under its previous name World Peace Through Law Center).