



“ I graduated in 1959 and had good grades. There was not a firm in New York City that would employ me. **”**

SUPREME COURT JUSTICE RUTH BADER GINSBURG VISITS UCLA LAW

Times have changed for Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg who visited UCLA School of Law on Friday, January 27, 2005. Justice Ginsburg, of course, has been an integral part of those changes, leading the charge with her decade-long involvement with the ACLU and concomitant work on the faculties of Columbia and Rutgers law schools.

Invited to UCLA Law by longtime friend Professor Ken Karst and Dean Michael H. Schill, Justice Ginsburg met with both Karst and Schill in the early part of the day. Later, she lunched with UCLA Law faculty and then participated in a Q&A session with more than 300 students. On Friday evening, she attended a reception at Dean Schill's home celebrating UCLA Law alumni and former law clerks.

More than 60 faculty members attended lunch with Justice Ginsburg, held at the Hugh & Hazel Darling Law Library. Though not originally planned, Justice Ginsburg answered questions from the faculty after the meal. The questions ranged from the partisanship of today's judiciary confirmation hearings to issues on specific cases recently ruled on by the nation's highest court.

Regarding judiciary confirmation hearings, Justice Ginsburg spoke somewhat wistfully about her own hearing, having been "the beneficiary of the bipartisan spirit of Congress" when she was nominated and confirmed. She reminded us of the time President Bill Clinton called Senate majority leader Orrin Hatch to ask his opinion of possible nominees. She noted, "that sort of congeniality doesn't exist today."

Professor Seana Shiffrin brought the discussion back to law schools, asking Justice Ginsburg in what direction the academy should be headed as they teach new lawyers. Justice Ginsburg responded that she was "impressed with the diversity of both students and faculty" today. But she did remind the faculty that oftentimes law review articles were so far out in the theoretical ether that it was difficult to "bring them home." She also remarked that these days there is a great deal of discussion about judicial independence, commenting that, "I would ask you to remember the court when you're writing, because right now we need your help."

The highlight of the day was the 90-minute Q&A session Justice Ginsburg had with students. More than 500 students participated in a lottery to capture one of the 300 seats available in the Dodd Hall lecture auditorium. The remaining students along with faculty, staff and other invited guests, watched the session via a closed-circuit TV feed into a large lecture hall in the UCLA Law building.

In his introduction of Justice Ginsburg, Professor Ken Karst said, "Of the 108 men and two women who have served as Supreme Court Justices, three would deserve



professor ken karst and justice ruth bader ginsburg

a place in the pantheon of American law even if they had never been appointed to the bench because of their contributions as advocates to the growth of the law. The three are Louis Brandeis, Thurgood Marshall and Ruth Bader Ginsburg."

Ginsburg opened by talking about the recent changes on the Supreme Court and the accomplishments of her beloved colleagues, late Chief Justice William Hobbs Rehnquist and recently retired Associate Justice Sandra Day O'Connor. In talking about O'Connor's personal influence as a mentor and fellow woman on the Court, Ginsburg remembered O'Connor's incredible energy and advice to the younger, newer Justice: "Waste no time on anger, regret, or resentment, just get the job done."

After listening to Ginsburg's short address, a diverse set of students lined up at two microphones asking uncensored questions on a host of topics, including judicial confirmation hearings, affirmative action, balancing home and work life, diversity and international law. Throughout the conversation, Justice Ginsburg was measured and thoughtful, but not without sharp wit and open honesty.

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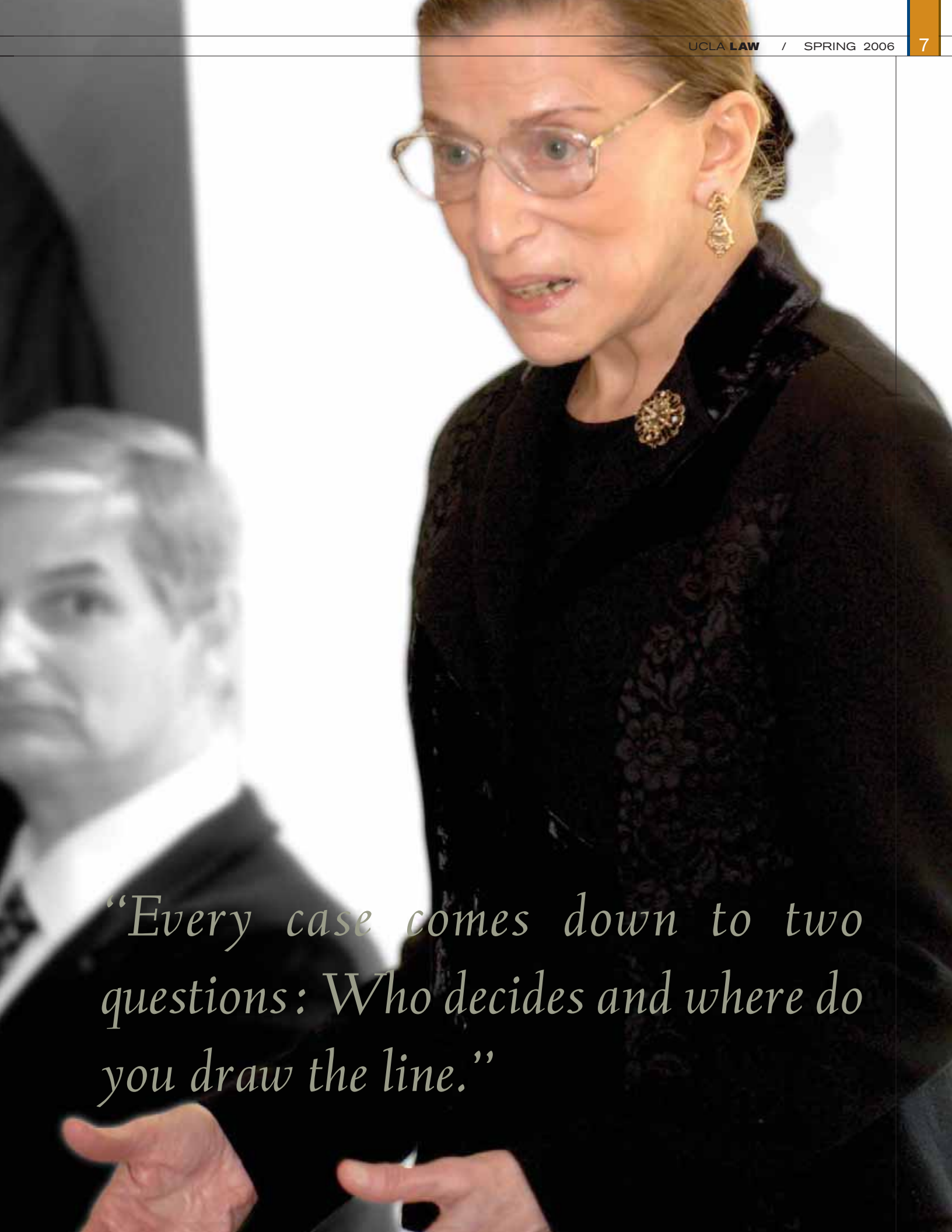
On the subject of judicial confirmation hearings, Ginsburg remembered when Chief Justice Warren Burger came to congratulate her on her Supreme Court nomination. He noted that she would face four days of Senate hearings, when his own hearing had only lasted one hour. Justice Ginsburg said that there was one word that explained the difference, “Television.”

In answering student questions, Ginsburg reminded them that no matter the injustices that had occurred, or the issues at hand, it was imperative to always bring the topic back to the rule of law. “Every case comes down to two questions: Who decides and where do you draw the line.”

Time and time again, whether discussing Iraqi detainees, the victims of Hurricane Katrina, or sovereign tribal nations, Justice Ginsburg came back to the role of individuals in affecting change. “The courts are a reactive institution. We don't make the cases that come to us. And if there isn't a public and if there isn't a bar that is going to bring these cases to us, we would never have them...But as long as there are people who care and lawyers ready to represent the people who are the victims of unconstitutional behavior, we will get those cases eventually...If you really care, don't start with the courts, start with getting others, your fellow citizens, to appreciate what our nation's highest values are.”

That evening at Dean Schill's home, Justice Ginsburg was welcomed by faculty, alumni and friends of UCLA Law, including many of her former clerks, UCLA Chancellor Albert Carnesale, actress Diane Keaton, businessman and philanthropist Stewart Resnick '62, and Judge Kim McLane Wardlaw '79. At the end of the evening, Justice Ginsburg spoke of her former law clerks as “family” and as individuals to whom she would always stay close.





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