

1973

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Recommended Citation

Michael I. Sovern, *Julius Goebel, Jr.: In Fond Recollection*, 73 COLUM. L. REV. 1369 (1973).

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JULIUS GOEBEL, JR.: IN FOND RECOLLECTION

MICHAEL I. SOVERN*

Memorable teachers, like great delicacies, are not to everybody's taste. Most of us endured nineteen years of formal education, encountering perhaps 100 teachers along the way. Many were journeymen, imparting whatever information their particular slice of the curriculum warranted. A few, a very few, truly moved our minds. And, not uncommonly, the genius who made me see left others in the dark, while my friend's cicerone left me hopelessly lost. The teacher who dares to inspire will not inspire many, but if in every class a few are enabled to think in a way they could not think before, that teacher is a master of his craft. Julius Goebel was such a teacher.

Like most of the living alumni of Columbia Law School, I was Julius Goebel's student. With my classmates, I sat sometimes in amusement, sometimes in amazement, sometimes in sheer terror. Later, I had the rare privilege of knowing Julius as a colleague and was touched by his devotion to teaching, excited by his commitment to scholarship of the most demanding kind, and moved by his deep loyalty to Columbia. As Dean, I have spent many a happy moment listening to alumni reminisce about their time in Julius' class. For virtually all, the experience was unforgettable. For some—for more, I might add, than most teachers even hope—exposure to Julius' disciplined mind, love of learning and reverence for the law had been an intellectual watershed.

It is fitting that our memorials to Julius include the Julius Goebel Faculty Assistantship. The student holder of the Assistantship has a special opportunity to work closely with a faculty member on a substantial research project, thereby advancing two of Julius' deepest commitments—a student's education and worthwhile research. The income from the endowment, paid to the student, eases his financial burden and frees his mind for the kind of inquiry that Julius so loved.

Though Columbians think of Julius mainly in the classroom, to the larger world, it was, of course, his scholarship that brought him fame. Historians still speak in awe of his classic, *Felony and Misdemeanor* (1937). When the definitive history of the Supreme Court was to be written by a group of eminent scholars, the choice for Volume I, *History of the Supreme Court of the United States: Antecedents and Beginnings to 1801* (1971), was naturally Julius Goebel. Characteristically, he was the first to complete his labors. His final project, which Professor Joseph Smith will complete with loving care, left many a recent visitor to the Law School bemused. A caller looking for a professor on the west corridor of the eighth floor by examining the name plates

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on each office would come, in due course, to one bearing the legend, "The Law Offices of Alexander Hamilton." It was there that Julius and a collection of assistants were engaged in an extraordinary reconstruction of the law practice of Alexander Hamilton.¹

Julius could be whimsical, he could be bawdy, he could be elegantly witty. He could laugh and he knew how to make others laugh. I remember a moment in D.L.I. which, like the rest of my generation, I took in the basement of Butler Library. Our cavelike classroom had one entrance to the rear right and another to the rear left. One day two hapless students from I know not where wandered through the rear right door. Deeply engaged in their own conversation, they did not realize for fully several seconds that they had stumbled into a class in session. By this time they were almost halfway across the back of the room and very nearly paralyzed in the agony of choosing whether to retreat or to go forward from the point of no return to the door on the other side of the room. Julius spoke at last, "The dining car is the next one forward."

A History of the School of Law, Columbia University (1955), prepared under Julius' direction, bears the imprint of his scholarship and his sense of the ridiculous. Each year we respectfully confer on the outstanding member of the graduating class the John Ordronaux Prize. The History, after supplying the usual vital statistics about the scholar so memorialized, tells us that

he had a neurotic fear of infection that led him to disinfect his bills with camphor and carried a bit of tarred rope in his purse to kill the germs on his coins He would sometimes sleep with his head in a bandbox, to outwit the bats that might get into his hair.²

Though any appreciation of Julius Goebel is implicitly an appreciation of his wife Dorothy as well, for they were as much one as it is possible for two people to be, I want to make our feeling for her explicit. Dorothy and Julius shared life, though their academic enterprises were only occasionally collaborative, and so all of us at the Law School came to know and love her too. We have some inkling of how grievous her loss is and we are frustrated by the fact that our sympathy cannot do more.

I end, as I suspect others contributing to this issue will, by drawing upon the best commencement address I have ever heard. (That seems like faint praise. I do not mean it to be.) Julius retired as the Class of 1961 was graduated and he spoke to them as both were leaving. Beginning, he made his listeners laugh; closing, he moved them deeply. He began:

This is the first time in the course of a forty year sojourn at Columbia that I have been privileged to speak at a major academic festival. You who have been my students no doubt have your own

1. Volumes one and two of *The Law Practice of Alexander Hamilton* appeared in 1964 and 1969, respectively. A third and final volume is forthcoming.

2. *A HISTORY OF THE SCHOOL OF LAW, COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY* 49-50 (1955).

conjecture about this oversight. As for myself, I suspect that it was just recently discovered that not since 1923 have I attended a Columbia commencement.

He closed:

Let us flatter ourselves that the departure of the Class of '61 and its Draconian taskmaster will leave a hole—a hole, like Mercutio's wound, "not so deep as a well, nor so wide as a church door, but 'tis enough, 'twill serve."