

ANNUAL DINNER SPEECH (June 22, 2011)

Mark, and to all my friends and colleagues on the board of trustees, on the KCBA Staff and at my firm Perkins Coie, to this evening's honorees, and to my fellow members of the King County and Washington bars, I thank you for this opportunity to serve you and KCBA in the role of president.

It has been a great first 125 years. The next 125 promise to be even better.

Look at how much better shape we're already in compared to when KCBA was founded 125 years ago.

KCBA's birth came about in the backdrop of huge divisions among local lawyers over how to respond to a wave of immigrants who looked different from themselves and King County's other white settlers. Many lawyers, including some of the most prominent, had joined groups that sought to expel immigrants from China for no better reason than that they were Chinese. Some condoned violence as a means to achieve that end.

Today, by contrast, we hear references to a post-racial society. While that's probably overly optimistic, it is beyond question that race relations are much improved compared to 1886. Jim Crow laws and forced segregation are things of the past. Literacy tests and poll taxes for voting are gone. America has become more diverse and more accepting of diversity. Members of minority groups have risen to top positions all across America, in government, in corporations, in the professions. Today, an African-American lawyer is president. And, in recent years, the people of our state twice elected a Chinese-American lawyer as governor. Imagine what the rioters of 1886 would have thought of these developments!.

Likewise, the divisions within the Bar that helped to stoke the anti-Chinese riots no longer exist. Rather than trying to impede members of minority groups from achieving the American Dream, lawyers have been at the forefront of some of the great social and political movements of the past century, none greater than the Civil Rights movement. It

is easy to believe that the lawyers who founded the KCBA, and many of those who followed them, had something to do with the positive changes we have seen over the past century and a quarter.

Our profession too is more diverse, not only compared to 125 years ago, but compared to just 25 (or so) years ago when I was admitted to this State's bar. Still, the fact remains that the percentage of minorities who are lawyers in King County is much lower than their percentage of the general population. That will change, and with the help of KCBA the time it will take for that change to occur will be shorter than it otherwise would be.

Just as the lawyers who founded KCBA took a courageous stand to support persons who did not look like themselves or share their customs or backgrounds, so today's KCBA stands in the vanguard of efforts to bring more diverse faces into our profession.

Consider our Future of the Law Institute, known as the FLI. The FLI is our effort to expose economically disadvantaged high school students, many from minority families, to what it is like to be a lawyer and to encourage them to go to college and consider law as a career. Consider also our Foundation's efforts to raise funds that, in significant part, are earmarked for scholarships that enhance the ability of minority students to attend our two great local law schools.

Consistent with our historic mission to fight discrimination and its effects, the KCBA board this year adopted a broadly inclusive definition of diversity to guide its efforts. It defines "diversity" as:

the inclusion of individuals who self-identify with those groups historically discriminated against, and which continue to experience the effects of such, and/or who are under-represented in the legal profession including on the basis of disability, gender, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression.

We are also in the process of forming a new Diversity Committee that will be charged with promoting this broad concept of diversity.

Just as our diversity efforts reflect the commitment of our founders, so too does our pro bono work. A very significant portion of our resources, almost 40% of our newly approved budget, is devoted to meeting the legal needs of the underprivileged of our county, many of whom, like the Chinese immigrants of 1886, face legal difficulties that are not readily resolved without the Bar's assistance.

Consider the array of pro bono services that KCBA and its volunteers provide, to fulfill our mission "to promote social justice by ensuring equal and non-discriminatory access to our services for all individuals." Our pro bono programs help low-income people to avoid or delay eviction, file for bankruptcy protection, obtain custody of children, get a divorce in abusive situations, vacate criminal records and more. Each year, over 1500 volunteers handle over 10,000 cases, providing over seven and a quarter million dollars of free legal services in King County.

Promoting diversity and pro bono is not only noble-minded, but it is in our self-interest. As President Kennedy said 50 years ago, "If a free society cannot help the many who are poor, it cannot save the few who are rich."

None of what KCBA does could be accomplished, of course, without you. When you sign up as a pro bono volunteer, you make a direct impact on people who need your help the most. When you participate in and support programs like the FLI, you encourage young people of color, many from economically disadvantaged families, to consider a career in law that they otherwise might have thought was not open to them. When you donate to the King County Bar Foundation, you directly support our pro bono programs and diversity efforts. When you join KCBA as a member, when you attend KCBA-sponsored CLE programs, when you sign up for our Lawyer Referral Service, a portion of what you pay supports our pro bono mission.

Before I conclude, let me ask you to do something. Look at our pro bono services website and ask yourself whether there is a need that you can help to fill as a KCBA volunteer. If you have not recently made a tax-deductible contribution to support the work of the Foundation, it's easy to do, on our website, on your KCBA membership renewal forms, or in response to solicitations that you will receive from the Foundation throughout the year (including at the fabulous Breakfast With Champions). If you have not yet returned your membership renewal forms, *what are you waiting for?* Send them in (and sign up for a section or committee or two while you're at it). If you're looking for a good CLE program, don't forget to consider those that we offer. When talking with lawyers in your office or in your social group, ask if they are KCBA members and, if they're not, be an ambassador for us, encourage them to join, and let them know all the wonderful things that KCBA does to make our portion of the world a little bit better.

And so, my friends, colleagues, honorees, and other ambassadors for KCBA, invoking once more the memory and spirit of President Kennedy (if not his actual words), I urge you, finally, to ask yourselves not just what the King County Bar can do for you, but what together we can do for the betterment of our profession, our community, and our society. And if *we all* do that, the next 125 years will be off to a tremendous start.

Thank you for your gracious attention. Thank you all for attending this evening's festivities, and a special thank you to Mark and all our honorees. Tonight's meeting is adjourned.