

LEGAL EDUCATION OWES SO MUCH TO DEAN JAMES P. WHITE

RANDALL T. SHEPARD*

The James P. White Lecture series has always had a broad purpose, which is to keep Indiana lawyers, professors, and judges, thinking about what legal education is and ought to be. That is why having this endowed lecture in the place where his portrait hangs is so important.

I know that if Jim had asked Justice Ginsburg who to invite, Dean Testy would have been on her list as well, so, hallelujah. When we celebrated Jim's twentieth anniversary as what was then called consultant, Dean Nina Appel wrote this in the collection of wonderful letters from across the country and beyond commemorating the occasion:

Dear Jim, you are a Brahe, a special angel, an illuminating star, and you are valued greatly. You sweep the legal education universe and skies, and countless gazers and beneficiaries are grateful for your indefatigable first-class achievements. You have epitomized fairness, intellect, culture, grace, and wit, along with the relentless search for truth and justice and your search for exquisite cuisine, fine lodging, and sartorial splendor.

Now, I certainly did not know then what it meant that you are a Brahe. It turns out that Tycho Brahe was a Danish astronomer in the 1500s, who died in 1601, and he was considered the greatest astronomer before telescopes. What that meant in our context is that Jim was terrific at visualizing things and possibilities.

Now, Jim's approach to the American Bar Association was admired, and it was something all of us were thankful for. Roy Stuckey from South Carolina, a dean, said, "I enjoy our relationship as allies or opponents, and you play to win, fairly."

Jerry Bepko used to talk about the places where he would run into Jim White, like airports. Jim was the only person I ever knew who in one year had elite status in three airlines at the same time because he went so many places to help people work on legal education.

And Bill Hines, a dean from Iowa, wrote in his letter in the book that the deans gave to Jim:

* A.B., Princeton University, Princeton, New Jersey; J.D., Yale Law School, New Haven, Connecticut; LL.M., University of Virginia School of Law, Charlottesville, Virginia. Randall T. Shepard served as the Chief Justice of the Indiana Supreme Court from 1987 until 2012 and is the former Chair of the ABA Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar. Former Chief Justice Shepard now serves as a senior judge on the Court of Appeals of Indiana. These remarks were adapted from a speech given on September 9, 2025, at the Robert H. McKinney School of Law as part of the James P. White Lecture series.

Remember the time you and I were at the lingerie shop in I. Magnin in Los Angeles both on the same mission: to purchase gifts to take home to our wives. Imagine what those store clerks said in trading stories about those country bumpkins from Iowa who'd been in their store.

Well, that is sort of where it was, and he did so much to advance the law when they published a whole book in 1993 during the 100th anniversary of the Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar, which was the ABA's very first section. One of the chapters is, in that whole book, covering 100 years, was "Jim White Arrives at the ABA," showing how important that was and how much it made a difference ultimately.

Jim's efforts reached far and wide. He helped schools with new dean training. He helped with outreach. Erica Mosher once said he was specifically good in that time, helping women and minorities find their way into law school and law school education. And that's part of the reason, along with many other reasons, he was called *Consultatus Maximus Magnus*. That was his title, we called it, and a lot of people agree with that.

Guido Calabresi, probably the most famous dean of the Yale Law School in the twentieth century, wrote to Jim, "Your extraordinary tenure has changed the face of legal education."

This lecture and this gathering recognize the monumental contribution that Jim made to so many lives. He was our friend and a leader in so many ways. On law, Jim would be quick to acknowledge that American legal education is a vast enterprise influenced by a host of leaders and institutions. His friends would say with some confidence that he ranked with the likes of Christopher Columbus Langdell and Roscoe Pound as a maker, and re-maker, of legal education. Hundreds of thousands have had more useful careers by virtue of his work, and we have been grateful for the chance to be his friend.