

**Dean's Remarks:**  
**Celebration of Life: Henry P. Monaghan**  
**February 20, 2025**

**DANIEL ABEBE<sup>1</sup>**

Good evening. I see many familiar faces in the room today: Columbia Law School faculty, students, and staff who have benefited so greatly from decades of Henry's wisdom, guidance, and support. I see some faces from farther afield as well: former colleagues and students from years past. I see Henry's mentees who have gone on to assume leadership positions at the highest levels of government, academia, and the judiciary. And, of course, I also see Henry's loved ones: His wife, Nancy; his son, Brendan; and several of his family members and friends.

Welcome.

To those of you who are joining us from outside the Columbia community, it is our great pleasure to host you on our campus, in a building where Henry spent more than four decades of his career.

To Nancy, Brendan, and all of Henry's family and friends who join us today—and to Henry's sister, Mary, who was unable to attend but who will see the recording of this memorial—the entire Columbia Law School community extends its sincere condolences for your loss.

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I think many of you know that I only joined Columbia Law School this past August. Unlike the majority of you in this room, I suspect, I did not have a chance to form a long-standing relationship with Henry. But I nonetheless knew of him as a prolific scholar in the fields of Federal Courts and Constitutional Law. His work did as much to shape the development of legal thought as it informed jurisprudence at the highest levels. And his writing reflected the qualities that many of us admire and aspire to: precision, clarity, and analytical rigor.

It was only after I arrived at Columbia, however, that I came to understand the depth of Henry's impact as a mentor and institution builder. He occupied a sort of unofficial deanship among the

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public law faculty. Henry had an uncanny ability to not only pick talent out of a crowd, but also to nurture young and mid-career scholars and help them flourish. Several of his mentees join us here today. But even though I knew him by reputation—or maybe by legend—I never had the opportunity to meet him in person. That all changed in early December. I knew Henry was set to retire at the end of the calendar year, and I also knew that he was not able to travel to campus at that point.

I decided to reach out to him by email to see if he would be open to a visit, so I could present him with a gift from his colleagues in honor of his retirement. I expected him to decline, as he had done over the summer, but he instead wrote me a near-immediate response. He said, and I am quoting here:

*My dear dean, I would love to see you and we could certainly arrange a visit early in December. I would have said no if I thought that I couldn't make a final contribution to the school as it moves forward. But I think I can; I am the final installment of the old order. But it did leave me with some thoughts about the future.*

And he shared his thoughts with me for nearly an hour on the history and intellectual culture of the Law School; the importance of advancing knowledge and producing scholarship of the highest quality; and the enduring greatness of our faculty and students. Suffice it to say, Henry indeed made that “final contribution”—both to me and to the Law School that he loved so much. And I am so grateful to have had the opportunity to meet with him that day. I am also grateful to Nancy for her kind hospitality.

But I would be remiss if I did not confess that I also saw something in Henry that I did not expect—but what is likely familiar to all of you—I saw a mischievous, even playful side of him. When I arrived at Henry and Nancy’s home, I presented Henry with a few gifts and items from his office, including the book *Ulysses* that John Hart Ely had given him decades back. I handed the book to Henry and noted the inscription. He looked at the book for a moment and then looked at me and asked, with a wry smile, “Ulysses, have you read it?” He got me there, and I said no.

I also learned that Henry does things on his own terms. When Henry felt that he had finished sharing his insights with me, he looked at Nancy and said, “You know, I think the Dean has other things to do,” which gently but clearly marked the end of our special time together.

The memory of our wonderful meeting is one that I will cherish personally and as Dean. It meant a great deal to me then, and it means even more to me now, as that was the last time I had a chance to be in his presence.

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I am very much looking forward to hearing reflections from so many of Henry's distinguished colleagues and friends during today's program. I am particularly pleased to welcome our friend and colleague John Manning, Provost at Harvard University, former Dean of Harvard Law School, who traveled from Cambridge to be here with us today.

Thank you all so much for being here today to pay tribute to Henry. Columbia Law School has lost a true lion, but I am confident that Henry's legacy will continue to shape the law—and this *law school*—for generations to come.

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