

Carmen M. Ortiz, JD '81, the first woman and first Hispanic U.S. attorney for the District of Massachusetts, delivered the diZerega Lecture at the Law School Diploma Ceremony.



CARMEN ORTIZ HEADLINES LAW COMMENCEMENT 2012

BY JAMIE L. FREEDMAN



2012 graduate Michael Smith (far right), who gave the invocation, congratulates Nick Nikic upon receiving the Cooley Memorial Award. David R. Fox (far left) was presented with the John Bell Lamer Award—given to a member of the graduating JD class who attained the highest cumulative GPA for the entire course of the degree—and Mark Christopher Hageman (second from left) was presented with the Anne Wells Branscomb Award for attaining the highest GPA in his class.

For the second year in a row, Professor Gregory E. Maggs received the Distinguished Faculty Service Award, voted on each year by the graduating class and presented this year by Nicholas Nikic, JD '12. Earlier in the day at the universitywide Commencement on the Mall, Professor Maggs also received the 2012 George Washington Award—one of the university's most prestigious awards.

The sunlit Washington Monument provided a striking backdrop for Commencement 2012, as nearly 600 Law School graduates joined the distinguished ranks of GW alumni at a festive, universitywide celebration May 20 on the National Mall.

NBC *Nightly News* Anchor and Managing Editor Brian Williams delivered the Commencement address before an estimated crowd of 25,000 graduates, friends, and family members gathered on the historic Mall.

Mr. Williams received an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters degree at the ceremony, along with international business leader and humanitarian Carlos Slim and artist Clarice Smith, BA '76, MFA '79.

In his address the popular news anchor, who studied briefly at GW in the 1980s, urged the graduates to lift up the nation. "You don't actually have to build a rocket or go into space, but please take us somewhere," he told graduates. "Please keep us moving, push us, lift us up, make us better."

Later in the day, the Law School graduating class—composed of 542 JD recipients and 138 Master of Laws recipients—proceeded to the Charles E. Smith Center for the Law School Diploma Ceremony, featuring keynote speaker Carmen Ortiz, JD '81, U.S. attorney for the district of Massachusetts.

Each graduate was individually recognized at the event, which began with a procession led by faculty marshals Scott B. Pagel, Alfreda Robinson, JD '78, and Joan E. Schaffner. Christopher Bracey, senior associate dean for academic affairs and marshal of the Law School, announced the Commencement. The Hon. James W. Ziglar, BA '68, JD '72, served as grand marshal of the Stockton Guard, comprising graduates of the Class of 1972 and earlier.



NBC *Nightly News* Anchor Brian Williams spoke about innovation and courage during his Commencement address at the universitywide celebration on the National Mall.

As always, a highlight of the ceremony was the awarding of honors to outstanding GW Law graduates, faculty members, and staff members. For the second consecutive year, Professor of Law Gregory E. Maggs received the Distinguished Faculty Service Award, voted on and presented each year by the JD graduating class. Professor Maggs also was the recipient of the coveted 2012 George Washington Award—one of the university's most prestigious honors—presented to him earlier in the day at the universitywide Commencement.

The Distinguished Adjunct Faculty Service Award went to Professorial Lecturers in Law Donna M. Downing and Donald R. Dunner. Bobby Walis, information specialist, received the Law School's Distinguished Staff Service Award. The status of professor emeritus was conferred on two longtime GW Law professors: Ira C. Lupu and Luize E. Zubrow.



DAVE SCAVONE

(Above) In recognition of receiving pro bono awards, 50 members of the Class of 2012 joined faculty for a celebration dinner and baseball game at Nationals Park the Friday before Commencement. The class volunteered 10,549 hours of legal service to the community.



ARJUL EL-TAYEF

Members of the Stockton Guard enjoy the Law School Diploma Ceremony.

Leading members of the graduating class were honored with the Law School's top awards. David Fox received the John Bell Lerner Award for earning the highest cumulative grade point average in his class. The Anne Wells Branscomb Award went to Mark Hageman for attaining the highest cumulative average in the evening program. The graduating class voted outgoing Student Bar Association President Nicholas G. Nikic the recipient of the Michael Dillon Cooley Memorial Award.

Delivering the diZerega Lecture and Commencement Address, Ms. Ortiz shared stories from her life, law school days, and prominent career as a federal and state prosecutor. The first woman and first Hispanic to serve as U.S. attorney for Massachusetts (see profile, page 49), she spoke about her hardworking parents, who moved to New York City from Puerto Rico seeking a better life for their family, and reflected on her own GW Law graduation.

"Not in my wildest dreams did I ever think I would be standing here at this podium addressing you so many years later," she said. "GW certainly provided me with the foundation that I needed to make my own mark."

Emphasizing the importance of public service, she said it has "been a way for me to give back for what I have been fortunate to achieve," adding, "There is no greater fulfillment."



ARJUL EL-TAYEF

The status of professor emeritus was conferred on Ira C. Lupu, F. Elwood and Eleanor Davis Professor of Law, and Professor Luize E. Zubrow.

Lauding the Class of 2012 for its commitment to public service (the group volunteered more than 70,000 hours of legal services to the D.C. community), she cited examples of the students' contributions to people in need and encouraged everyone to continue making a difference.

"For me and now for all of you, the foundation laid by GW Law has given us the tools to be good and caring lawyers, and for that I'm forever grateful and proud to be an alumna," she said.

"As you go forth, if you have the opportunity in your legal careers to serve the public in any capacity, I encourage you to seize that opportunity. The experience and the sense of fulfillment that it will bring you will be tremendously worthwhile. Trust me that you will not regret it." **GW**

A PASSION FOR PUBLIC SERVICE

More than three years ago, when the job of United States attorney in Massachusetts became vacant, Carmen Ortiz, JD '81, hesitated about applying. She had worked for years as an assistant U.S. attorney in the Economic Crimes Unit in Boston, and had spent eight years as a state prosecutor. Still, she worried she wasn't as well known as the other candidates and that maybe her experience wasn't broad enough.

"As women, we often second-guess ourselves," she says. But after some encouragement, she put her name in the mix.

In spring of 2009, she received a call from someone she least expected, Sen. Edward Kennedy. He told her he and Sen. John Kerry nominated her to the president for U.S. attorney. After a lengthy vetting from the Department of Justice and the White House, President Obama nominated Ms. Ortiz for the job. She was confirmed by the U.S. Senate and sworn into office in November 2009.

It was no ordinary selection. Ms. Ortiz was the first woman and the first Hispanic United States attorney in Massachusetts. Under her watch, the infamous fugitive James "Whitey" Bulger was captured after 16 years on the run; Salvatore DiMasi, the former Massachusetts House speaker, was convicted of taking bribes; and Tarek Mehanna was charged and convicted of providing material support to Al Qaeda and conspiring to kill Americans overseas.

Awards have followed these high-profile cases. Ms. Ortiz was named Latina of the Year by *El Mundo* newspaper in 2012 and Bostonian of the Year by the *Boston Globe* in 2012. The George Washington University Law School honored her with the J. William Fulbright Distinguished Public Service Award in 2010.

Ms. Ortiz's life has been a classic American dream, but not without adversity. Her parents came to the U.S. from Puerto Rico, in search of a better life. They settled in New York City, in public housing. Her father did all he could to provide for his family. He drove a cab. He sold trinkets on the street until he earned enough to open his own shop in Brooklyn and move his family to Long Island.

The first in her family to go to college, Ms. Ortiz attended Adelphi University on scholarship, majored in business administration, and set her ambitions on law school.

"I worked hard to get into college," she said, "and I worked twice as hard to get into law school." A summer internship with a congressman on Capitol Hill led to her interest in studying law in Washington, D.C.

At GW, she found her passion for prosecuting cases, especially high-profile ones. One summer, she interned with the U.S. Department of Justice's Public Integrity Unit. There, she was assigned to work with Eric Holder, then a trial lawyer and now U.S. attorney general. He was trying one of the government's largest corruption cases, known as Abscam.

Ms. Ortiz further honed her skills as a prosecutor during her third year of law school. "My favorite course at GW was the student prosecutor class," she says. "I worked in the U.S. Attorney's office in D.C. and in the Misdemeanor Trial Section. By the time I graduated, I had done a jury trial and a number of bench trials, handling criminal cases involving prostitution and shoplifting charges. I figured out this was my path."

No one doubted her fire and resolve. A close GW friend, Elise Grace, said about her in the *Boston Globe*: "She was so self-made that she didn't tolerate people who just weren't honest and who didn't work hard and do the right thing."

When Ms. Ortiz moved to Massachusetts with her future husband, Michael Morisi, JD '82, whom she met at GW Law School, she became an assistant district attorney in Middlesex County. "I really thrived there," she said. "I was in Superior Court within six months, trying rape and robbery cases. I was very driven and always volunteered to stand in if someone couldn't handle a case. I was that ambitious and that tenacious. I wanted to be in court all the time."

Life, though, threw her a curveball in 1992, when her husband was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer at age 34. "Before the diagnosis, I thought I had it all," she says. "Then I realized it was not so simple." Her husband died in 2000. She was left to raise her two daughters alone.

More than a decade later some Boston newspapers are speculating about her running for governor of Massachusetts. But for the time being, she is happy where she is. She has remarried, one daughter graduated from college, and the other just finished her sophomore year at GW. She knows the November presidential election can turn everything upside down if the administration changes.

"There is more for me to do," she says. "This isn't my last chapter. The principle of life that has helped to guide me is to never give up despite life's challenges."

—Laura Hambleton

