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A Note from Lauren Robel

LAUREN K. ROBEL*

“The secret of success is constancy to purpose.” - Benjamin Disraeli

Constancy to purpose defines the success that Victor Streib has achieved in his career as an academic and an advocate. He has fought passionately for the rights of children and women who have been sentenced to death, and has further fought to change society so future generations have options that lead them away from a life of violent crime. It takes a special kind of person to spend decades representing the rights of some of our most powerless and—quite often—reviled citizens in the face of ambivalence and antipathy, and Victor is that special person. He is a national authority on the death penalty, a noted scholar and educator, and an exceptional advocate for the clients he represents.

I am especially proud of the role that Indiana University has played in forming the basis of Victor’s distinguished career. A seventh-generation Hoosier, Victor became the first in his family to graduate from college. After receiving his undergraduate degree from Auburn University in industrial engineering, he returned to Indiana to attend law school in Bloomington. He began his legal studies in June 1968 and graduated just twenty-six months later in August 1970.

Victor was an older student, having served in the U.S. Air Force before starting college, and he entered law school during a period of intense social change. Like many of his generation, he experienced his own personal and political awakening during this time. He developed an abhorrence of what he calls “the American love affair with violence”¹ and became a conscientious objector. He also discovered that law and higher education offered a unique opportunity for him to champion the cause of the underdog, which is where his heart had always been.

Victor started his career as an academic and an advocate for the powerless after graduating from law school. He was admitted to the Indiana Bar in 1970 and began teaching in Indiana University’s Department of Forensic Studies (now Criminal Justice) in 1971. Almost immediately, he

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1. Victor L. Streib, *Sentencing Juvenile Murderers: Punish the Last Offender or Save the Next Victim?*, 26 U. TOL. L. REV. 765, 766 (1995).

began focusing his work on issues of the death penalty and its application to children and women. He had a unique opportunity to see the system in action when he served as deputy prosecuting attorney in juvenile court in Bloomington in 1976, and this experience informed his later representation of juveniles and women on death row during the appellate process.

After leaving Indiana University, Victor began a distinguished career as a law professor. He first taught at the New England School of Law in Boston and then at the Cleveland-Marshall College of Law at Cleveland State University. In 1996, he became Dean of the Claude W. Pettit College of Law at Ohio Northern University, the institution from which he is now retiring. He is an incredibly prolific scholar and has published more than three hundred books, chapters, articles, and papers.

Victor's commitment to understanding and fighting the death penalty and its application to juveniles and women has truly defined his life. Forty years ago, when he began tracking the number of juveniles on death row, the United States was the only Western country that still sentenced minors to death. Victor was among the first scholars to study this issue seriously and raise awareness about the fact that a child in this country could be executed but could not "drive, vote, marry, contract or play church bingo[.]"²

Victor set out to change this situation and shift our national focus from vengeance and retribution to rehabilitation and prevention of further violence. He served as appellate counsel in a number of high profile cases, including *Thompson v. Oklahoma*,³ in which Wayne Thompson—who was fifteen years old at the time of his crime—was sentenced to death.⁴ The case was a victory: the Supreme Court overturned Thompson's death sentence and held that execution of a person who was under the age of sixteen at the time of the offense was a violation of the Eighth and Fourteenth Amendments.⁵ But the victory was not complete. Victor's ultimate goal was to persuade the Court to draw a line prohibiting executions of any person under the age of eighteen at the time of the offense.

One year after *Thompson*, it appeared the Supreme Court would not draw this line. In *Stanford v. Kentucky*,⁶ the Court sanctioned imposition of the death penalty for minors who were sixteen or seventeen at the time of

2. Tina Hildreth, *Supreme Court to decide on juvenile death penalty*, THE MICHIGAN DAILY, Oct. 21, 2004, <http://www.michigandaily.com/content/supreme-court-decide-juvenile-death-penalty>.

3. 487 U.S. 815 (1988).

4. *Id.* at 819.

5. *Id.* at 821-38.

6. 492 U.S. 361 (1989).

their crimes.⁷ But Victor remained constant to his purpose and continued writing about the death penalty for juveniles and women, serving as appellate counsel for children and women facing the death penalty and advocating for a moratorium on the death penalty for juveniles. In 2005, the Supreme Court of the United States cited Victor's work eight times, along with society's "evolving standards of decency[.]" in holding that it is unconstitutional to impose the death penalty on offenders who were under the age of eighteen at the time their crimes were committed.⁸

Fresh on the heels of this success, Victor returned to Bloomington to deliver the 2006 Ralph Fuchs Lecture, *Representing Kids Who Kill*. Professor Fuchs, who retired from teaching the same year Victor graduated, would have been proud to have Victor deliver this lecture in the series named for him. Like Victor, Fuchs was a champion for the underdog during times of stress and social change. He was active in the NAACP and fought for civil rights and racial equality at the state and university level. Further, at the height of the McCarthy Era, he fought for the rights of free speech, free press, free assemblage, and other civil rights in academic institutions. Victor's lecture, and life, resonated deeply with these themes. Our faculty and students were delighted to welcome Victor back in 2007 to teach a seminar in juvenile criminal law.

As Victor embarks on the adventure of retirement, it is wonderful to reflect upon the huge impact he has had since he left Indiana University. Through his commitment to his purpose, he has achieved great success in the field of criminal law, particularly juvenile criminal law and death penalty scholarship. The Maurer School of Law is proud to claim him as one of our alumni.

7. *Id.* at 364-74.

8. *See Roper v. Simmons*, 543 U.S. 551, 563 (2005).