

HALT Launches FredRodell.com

Sixty-nine years ago, a young Yale law professor rocked the legal establishment with a scathing indictment of the American civil justice system entitled *Woe unto You, Lawyers!*

Almost overnight Fred Rodell became the nation's leading debunker of legal myths, and the target of untold ire from thin-skinned lawyers. And his provocative observations are as accurate today as they were seven decades ago.

Here is just a sampling.

Rodell's 1936 article *Goodbye to Law Reviews* opens by explaining — “There are two things wrong with almost all legal writing. One is its style. The other is its content. That, I think, about covers the ground.”

And proceeds to take on the entire profession — “[I]t is pretty hard to find a group less concerned with serving society and more concerned with serving themselves than the lawyers.”

In *Woe*, Rodell's critique is cultural — “In TRIBAL TIMES, there were the medicine-men. In the Middle Ages, there were the priests. Today there are the lawyers. ”

But the effect of the mystifying process is to exclude ordinary people from the legal process — “[L]aw deals almost exclusively with the ordinary facts and occurrences of everyday business and government and living. But it deals with them in a jargon which completely baffles and befuzzles the ordinary literate man.”

Finally, Rodell points out the basic hypocrisy of the Law — “The last thing any court will ever admit, even when it is being quite practical about what it decides, is that practical considerations have anything to do with the decision.”

As a leader in the legal realist movement, Fred Rodell stuck to his guns for the next four decades (including a stint on HALT's Advisory Board), arguing that we should simplify, demystify and open up our civil justice system.

Rodell was a true pioneer of the legal reform movement, one of the first to identify the structural failures of our civil justice system and to stridently challenge the legal establishment. But since his death in 1980, his thinking has not received the serious consideration that it deserves, and his key writings have disappeared from print.

That is why we at HALT were so excited to begin working with San Francisco legal reform advocate Alex Kline and Fred Rodell's family to revive these visionary legal reform lessons on the Internet.

In addition to introducing Rodell to a new generation, we want to provide a meeting place for those who share an appreciation of his ideals, criticisms and reform objectives. We want to provide a forum where they can put their heads together and work to implement his ideas in practical ways.

Rodell taught at Yale Law for over forty years, and we hope that his students will find their way to this site and use it as a place to re-connect, brainstorm, and formulate action plans to bring about the changes he advocated.

Today we are launching www.FredRodell.com to make *Woe* and *Goodbye* available to all, along with TheLawBlog.FredRodell.com, a forum for renewed critique, debate and thinking.

Let the fun begin.

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February 19, 2008