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Golden Gate University School of Law

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NEWS FROM GOLDEN GATE UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF LAW

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U.S. Appeals Judge Stephen Reinhardt Calls Federal Courts 'Symbol of White Power'

SAN FRANCISCO — Federal Court of Appeals Judge Stephen Reinhardt, who made headlines last month for his recent criticism of the U.S. Supreme Court's handling of the Robert Alton Harris appeals for stays of execution, is once again taking aim at the country's highest court and the federal court system.

Calling the federal courts "a bastion of white America" and a "symbol of white power," the outspoken judge today said, "Presidents Reagan and Bush have ensured that the federal courts will not be representative." Reinhardt delivered the main address at the Golden Gate University School of Law Commencement on Saturday morning at Masonic Auditorium, 1111 California St.

Reinhardt, who was appointed to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit by then-President Jimmy Carter, is a self-described "war horse of the left." His address, which was highly critical of the federal court system, including the U.S. Supreme Court, linked the recent riots in Los Angeles and the prevailing racial unrest in many parts of the country with the make-up of the court system under the Reagan and Bush administrations.

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"Only a few years ago it was the federal courts, and particularly the Supreme Court of the United States, that offered the greatest hope to our minorities. The message the new Supreme Court has delivered to the minority communities is clear: We no longer care; we have other concerns; look elsewhere for help," Reinhardt said. "The Supreme Court continued its anti-civil rights course this term."

Citing the dearth of non-white judges in the federal court system, Reinhardt said, "In 12 years, Bush and Reagan have appointed 115 federal appellate court judges. Only two of them were African Americans. Clarence Thomas is black America to our president." The figures for Hispanic, Asian and Native American jurists "are even worse," he said.

Calling poverty and racism "the twin dangers that threaten to destroy America," Reinhardt said the recent riots in Los Angeles and unrest in other cities have given Americans "a glimpse of the future: riots, racial hatred, armed warfare and the military occupation of our cities." The ingredients for confrontation and violence, he said, are large populations of jobless youths, an extensive sense of relative deprivation and injustice, distrust of the legal system, abrasive police-community relations, visible inequality, concentrated poverty and racial awareness. "No one should have been surprised when Los Angeles exploded," he said.

Americans, black and white, increasingly believe blacks do not receive fair treatment in the courts, Reinhardt said, drawing on figures from a recent nationwide poll in the wake of the Rodney King verdict. "This means our judicial system is failing. A (Supreme Court) that once served the poor, the oppressed, the disadvantaged, now has entirely different clients, entirely different interests, an entirely different agenda."

While public criticism of the Supreme Court by a federal judge is rare, Reinhardt has challenged the court before. At the Yale commencement last month, he said Robert Alton Harris's constitutional rights were denied by the high court which, he said, demonstrated

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Reinhardt at GGU
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more interest in legal procedures than a man's life. The outspoken judge has previously questioned what he calls the "majoritarian" attitude of the Supreme Court which, he says, protects mainly those sectors of society that are already powerful.

Before being appointed to the federal appellate court in 1980, Reinhardt specialized in labor law and was a partner in the firm of Fogel, Julber, Reinhardt, Rothschild & Feldman. He also was president of the Los Angeles Police Commission. Before serving on the Police Commission, he was president of the Los Angeles Recreation and Parks Commission, and a member of the Los Angeles Coliseum Commission. He also was secretary of the 1984 Los Angeles Olympic Organizing Committee from 1978 to 1984. He currently is a member of the Board of Directors of the Los Angeles Amateur Athletic Foundation, which administers the surplus from the 1984 Olympics.

A graduate of Pomona College and the Yale Law School, he is a member of the Order of the Coif. He is a veteran of the U.S. Air Force.

Golden Gate University School of Law was founded in 1901 and is one of the oldest law schools in Northern California. The Law School is accredited by the American Bar Association. Golden Gate University, headquartered in downtown San Francisco, is accredited by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges.