

ACLU: Still Fighting for Liberty

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While he was a student in law school, Anthony Romero began fighting for the rights of the underprivileged. During his visit to Tulane Law School as the 2010 Dreyfous Lecturer, he shared his story of when and how he was thrust into the forefront of protecting civil liberties during a time of crisis in America.



Anthony Romero, left, executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union, flanked by Janet C. Hoeffel, vice dean of academic affairs at Tulane, answers questions after his lecture at Tulane Law School. (Photo by Tracie Morris Schaefer)

Just four days before the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks, Romero took office as executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union. Soon after the enactment of the Patriot Act, Romero launched the Keep America Safe and Free campaign designed to restore individual freedoms, due-process rights and the government's system of checks and balances.

Almost nine years later, Romero says that pressure from competing ends of the political spectrum continues to get in the way of the country's ability to make decisions.

"The war on terror will never come to a public, decisive end," said Romero regarding President Barack Obama's obstacles associated with closing the Guantanamo Bay detention camp. "Everything is political."

U.S. attorney general Eric Holder announced in November that five suspected terrorists would be tried in a Manhattan federal court, but Romero explained to the group gathered in the [law school's](#) appellate moot court room that the White House could still overturn Holder's decision and instead prosecute in a military court. In his opinion, "This would be a bad choice."

When Obama agreed to discontinue the torture of detainees, close the Guantanamo Bay camp and protect the right to representation and fair trials for terror suspects, Romero said he and the ACLU saw the promises as a "civil liberties trifecta."

"Things like translations (in military courts) can be inadequate," says Romero. "A defendant might speak for three minutes in his language and the English translation is only one minute. Something isn't right there."

Romero's lecture on March 17, part of the [Dreyfous Lecture Series](#), was on "Collateral Damage: The War on Terror, Attacks on the Courts, the Effect on Liberty." He is co-author of *In Defense of Our America: The Fight for Civil Liberties in the Age of Terror*.