

Preface

I am frequently asked why I believe there is a connection between law and poetry, and this is how I typically respond: A case or code helps to reveal what the law is. A treatise or law review article helps to reveal what the law perhaps should be. Poetry about the law, however, may be the single, most effective way to connect with the human experience of the law—by which I mean what it feels like to be the judge, the juror, the attorney, the witness, or even the accused. Some of the poems in this anthology were written by lawyers, some have obvious legal themes, and others illuminate legal concepts more obliquely. Many of the poets' names will be familiar, but I hope at least some will be new to each reader. Most of all, I hope this anthology will invite the exploration of new connections between law and poetry. The inspiration for this book comes from Abraham Lincoln's first inaugural address in 1861. The final paragraph of the address is as follows:

I am loath to close. We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained it must not break our bonds of affection. The mystic chords of memory, stretching from every battlefield and patriot grave to every living heart and hearthstone all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union, when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature.

In this address, Lincoln speaks at length about the future of the Union and how it might be preserved. In doing so, he states elsewhere in the address, "Continue to exercise all the express provisions of our National Constitution, and the Union will endure forever . . ." As he acknowledges, one of the declared objects for ordaining and establishing the Constitution was "to form a more perfect Union."

With these thoughts in mind, and during this time in which the future of the Union is a matter of significant public discourse, it seemed appropriate to use the language from the Preamble to the Constitution as a means for presenting this anthology. This anthology consists of fifty-six poems, one for each state or commonwealth, the District of Columbia, and each of the five permanently inhabited territories that, together, comprise the United States of America. This collection of poems seeks to challenge the reader to consider how the promises and ideals of the Preamble might be fulfilled by "the better angels of our nature," and to illuminate opportunities for changes that might assist us in reaching those ideals.