



Department of Justice

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Remarks by
Attorney General Ramsey Clark
in Accepting the
DISTINGUISHED SERVICE MEDAL
for
JUSTICE THOMAS C. CLARK
American Legion National Convention
Boston, Massachusetts
August 29, 1967

It is pardonable, I hope, for a son to be proud of his father. If not I am guilty of the unpardonable. June 12 was the last day of the past session of the Supreme Court and the final occasion on which my father will grace that great bench. Chief Justice Warren delivered a most laudatory statement of his contributions to the Court and to justice. In a brief response, Dad noted that if his father had been present he would have chuckled, perhaps laughed at what was there said - and not without a ring of skepticism; but, if his mother had been present, she would have smiled deeply - and believed every word of it.

My son, Tom C. Clark II and I were there. We smiled deeply - and believed every word of it.

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Having been so blessed, I would venture the thought that few things more fortunate can come to a man than to have a truly great father.

He is with us today in spirit though in body he is in Washington recuperating from an illness he has now overcome. He is deeply honored by this conference of your Distinguished Service Medal. He is a Legion member of three decades--proud of his association with you and of your good works. He is, I should note, a life member of the Department of Justice Post. Justice Clark is grateful and extends through me his appreciation. Our whole family thanks you.

In an address in 1964, Justice Clark said:

" . . . what we call justice but reflects the moral fibre of the people, their character, their courage, their perceptiveness, their faith. That is because no system of justice can endure that is not based upon supremacy of the law. And the supremacy of law in turn depends upon its commanding a wide consensus among the people. In the end only that provides security in a free society."

Today the consensus is not wide enough. Lacking in the hearts of too many Americans is that respect for the rights of others which is the foundation of the rule of law. Abraham Lincoln said that if ever our nation should fall it would be from within. Lawlessness from within can destroy a nation which no force from without could ever overthrow.

The American Legion, its members, and the millions who have served their country in time of war have assured to all of our people their opportunity for fulfillment if they, left to themselves, have only the capacity for justice. What greater tragedy can history hold than the loss of such an opportunity? What greater weakness can society show?

If this chance is lost, then those brave men who fought for our freedom in the wars against foreign enemies fought in vain as surely as if those wars had been lost.

For this reason the American Legion has a major stake in the war on crime and the elimination of domestic violence. Your help is needed.

The trend toward lawlessness--rising crime and rioting--will not be easily arrested. Reversal will come even harder. But that it can and must be reversed is manifest. We have no higher priority. Crime is the antithesis of all our belief and hope.

Required is the comprehensive effort of government, business, labor, churches, schools, of individuals and of our great associations and voluntary organizations. Each must do its part. None can place on the others the entire responsibility. We are talking about the character of our country. We must work together. America has a building job to do.

First we must bring excellence to our system of criminal justice. This will be a difficult and costly endeavor. It

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involves research, training, higher pay, more coordination and planning among agencies and jurisdictions. It calls for more resources, better applied. It requires--as does every accomplishment of democracy--the effort of local, state and federal government and the support of the people. It is an endeavor deserving of the attention and support of the American Legion. Your Posts can help support their local police and improve local courts and prisons. You can help create public demand for excellence which will bring it to being. You can support a strong, well trained National Guard to prevent domestic violence.

In no area is special effort more important than among our youth. Here, the Legion has long provided leadership. Your Boys State and Boys Nation programs, Junior League Baseball, support for the Boy Scouts of America, your high school oratorical contests and other programs have shown what imagination, initiative, and hard work can accomplish. Redouble these efforts. Think anew and act anew to help our youth. Because it is in the hearts of young Americans--our future, our most precious resource--and our most lawless citizens--that the war on crime will be won - or lost.