



Department of Justice

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REMARKS OF
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ATTORNEY GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES

AT THE GRADUATION CEREMONIES
LOS ANGELES POLICE ACADEMY

LOS ANGELES

OCTOBER 1, 1971

ADVANCE FOR RELEASE: 4:30 EDT

This morning I helped to dedicate a memorial on which the names of 130 members of the Los Angeles Police Department were carved in stone. They were the officers who, since 1907, have made the supreme sacrifice in the line of duty.

That memorial and that dedication are symbolic of a critical period through which American law and justice are now passing. The memorial, built with private donations from the citizens of Los Angeles, is a timely expression of their confidence in, and support for, their police. It is dedicated at a time when some other elements in this country have done everything they could to tear down public respect for the police.

As you step into your duties you are also stepping into this crosscurrent of attitudes. You will find that your new uniform makes you members of an instant minority group, with automatic friends and automatic enemies that you never had before.

As if this were not difficult enough, it is only the top of an iceberg that constitutes a deeper challenge. The whole question of public safety is at issue in this country. For more than a decade crime has been rising. There has even emerged a whole new type of criminal -- the fanatic revolutionary who kills with bombs and incendiaries, who

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ambushes police, who burglarizes public files, who inflames mobs to violence. At the same time, criminals old and new have more legal weapons to help them escape conviction and correction than ever before. And ironically, the claim is actually raised that people are being repressed, when in fact the only tyranny that threatens is the tyranny of the mob.

In the midst of all this, the spotlight of public scrutiny is on the police officer, more than ever before. His task of maintaining the public peace is greater than it has ever been, but he must perform this task within narrower legal restrictions. The requirements demanded in the name of due process are changing so fast that what may be a lawful arrest today may be unlawful by the time the case comes to trial. And the prospect of lawsuits asking damages for police irregularities is now greater than ever.

In short, never has so much been expected of the police officer. Some people expect, in fact, that he will fail--that he will overstep his authority so that they can claim police repression.

So my first message to you is that if you are inspired by difficult challenges, you will have plenty of inspiration in the months and years ahead.

My second message, just so I don't paint too disturbing a picture, is that as you face this challenge you have three things going for you.

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The first thing you have going for you is yourself. Today young policemen are better qualified and better trained than ever before. Here in the Los Angeles area, where law enforcement agencies are among the national leaders, you are living up to that tradition. Let me tell you another reason why I am personally aware of the high qualities of today's police officer.

Each year a small group of outstanding young people are invited by the President to participate in the Federal Government for one year. They are known as White House Fellows. For the first time this year, one of the 16 to receive this extraordinary recognition is a police officer, and I am fortunate in having this exceptional young man from the New York City Police Department as my special assistant.

The second thing you have going for you is a President of the United States who has, by word and by deed, given utmost support to the American police officer. President Nixon has asked for and received from Congress large funds to aid state and local law enforcement. In Washington, D. C., the one major urban area under Federal jurisdiction, he called for reforms that have brought a decisive reduction in the volume of crime. He has crystallized public indignation over the rising number of police killings, has directed the FBI to help investigate them when asked by the local authorities, has requested from Congress a \$50,000 grant to the survivors of any policeman killed on duty.

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Most of all, President Nixon has used the moral weight of the presidency to stimulate stronger public support for the peace officer. At every opportunity he has spoken out for the vital role of the policeman in maintaining security in this country. Three months ago he told an audience of policemen gathered in Washington:

When you go home, tell your colleagues that the era of permissiveness with regard to law enforcement is at an end in the United States of America. Tell your colleagues that... in terms of the support of the President of the United States and the Attorney General, we back law enforcement officials in their attempts to reestablish respect for law, in their attempts to enforce the law with justice.

The third thing you have going for you is public opinion. In a survey last March here in California, 79 percent of the people questioned said they believed the police were doing a good job. It is my observation that those who have been castigating the police--calling them names, charging them with repression--constitute a very small fraction of Americans. There is a basic American respect for, and support of, the law. This respect and support is being further stimulated by words and actions of the President of the United States.

These are the reasons why I believe that, although the challenge is greater than it ever was before, today's police officer is better able to meet that challenge. Certainly the nation has been going through a

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severe trial in maintaining the public safety. But when I see a community honoring its police as Los Angeles has this morning, and when I see the high caliber of young men going into police service, as I see before me now, I am more confident than ever of the triumph of law and justice in America.