

ADDRESS BY

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OF THE

UNITED STATES

BEFORE THE

JEWISH LABOR COMMITTEE

HOTEL ROOSEVELT

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Radio Station WEVD

Mr. Chairman, President Green, Secretary Carey, Mr. Dubinsky, Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is with a feeling of solemn respect that I address the Jewish Labor Committee tonight, and our friends of the radio audience.

Thirteen years ago you banded together to assist your co-religionist workers in Hitler's Reich.

Your instinct was truly democratic; you carried on your work without clashing cymbals of self-righteousness.

You felt the electric shock of world disaster long before it reached other, less sensitive groups, or the body politic of American democracy.

To you must be extended the accolade for vision and foresight,

You heard the rising wind in the night when many others were asleep.

Like Jeremiah and the prophets, your warnings were heard, but you did not stop there.

You raised and expended nearly Three Million Dollars on rescue work.

This money did not come from vast philanthropies.

It came from the pockets of the working men, whose anguished hearts were responding to the summons for aid from those brutally beaten minorities in that black hole of torture, Nazi Germany.

You worked for an ideal in the American way, all during the pre-war period -- all during the war -- and you are still working after hostilities have ceased.

You have set forth a program for your activities here, to combat bigotry and to aid minorities; and for your aims and purposes, your unobtrusive efforts, I give you my word of praise and support.

I am with you tonight to help you in any way that I can, to laud your accomplishments, and to bid you God-speed for the future.

Mr. Held and gentlemen, I am proud of you.

This pride, I, however, do not express alone.

I bring you a similar expression, and his own personal greetings to each one of you engaged in this fine democratic, American work, from our President -- Harry S. Truman.

This is what he said to me:

"I wish that you would tell our friends of the Jewish Labor Committee how pleased I am with their record and how happy I am that they are so fully engaged in the European food program. It warms my heart, in these days of sometimes captious criticism, to witness the work of groups such as this who in reality form the silent services of democracy. They work while others are expounding, and they work also while others are asleep. I will never forget their services to the people, to democracy, and to humanity."

To speak of minorities in America, Ladies and Gentlemen, is to speak of America. We are citizens of a nation of minorities.

We are told by the indisputable facts of our history that minorities came here to escape the oppressions of the majorities -- or individuals who usurped the powers of the majorities -- the kings, the parliament, the ministers, the landlords, or some other authority which repressed and enslaved them.

This fact profoundly impressed the founding fathers.

They intended to place emphasis upon human dignity and to give the breath of life to the tenets of free life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

This, they averred, was not to be taken away by any human power.

When this glorious land was in process of settlement, and simple, forthright and thoughtful Americans were drawing up our written words to memorialize free principles, they looked across to England for a classic example of liberty.

They did not find it there, for British rights were rooted in Parliamentary decision and Parliament could bestow them or take them away.

They next looked to France, where it had been claimed that the rights of the common man were gifts of the majority.

The majority had delegated its power to the King and Nobles, and the King and Nobles took it away.

Our national forebears rejected all these theories and held that God alone is the warder who opens the door of life or death — and that these rights can only be delineated by man in a basic lexicon or Constitution,

This remains as the rudder of the Ship of State, and is as important today in the life of this vast, polygenetic land.

Under the Constitution has grown a body of law with which I, as the People's Lawyer, have much to do, especially regarding minorities.

As I pore over the recurring questions of these laws, oftentimes late at night when the demands of the day upon a government servant are done, it comes to me that tolerance is not a matter of law and that justice for minorities springs from human fair-play.

I recall an editorial in a Washington newspaper during the war which set forth, in comment upon our American soldiers of Japanese ancestry who fought side by side with other Americans. I quote:

"All races, all colors, make us up. And when wars like the present one engulf us, all races and colors take up arms for America. When we strike back at our enemies, the American kin of those enemies do the striking — Americans of Italian extraction, of German extraction, of Japanese extraction. We are of almost every extraction conceivable, black, white and yellow, and so we are tied together not by any mystical philosophy of blood or common ethnic traits, but solely and simply by an idea — the idea of democracy, of individual freedom, of liberty under law, of a justice before which all of us stand equal."

There were no minorities on the battlefields of freedom,

There was no discrimination then, and America should see that there is no discrimination now.

Intolerance and bigotry are too expensive for even rich America.

The fight against it is now on the international stage, in the Four Freedoms.

We must come upon that stage with clean hands.

We cannot condemn abroad what we condone at home.

It is a two-front war, this fight for human compassion and understanding.

It is at once a long-range battle against ignorance -- and a short, sharp engagement against elements who would use bigotry as a political weapon.

Don't think that some of our very moral and respectable elements are above it.

Remember 1928 and what they did to the great Man of the People, Alfred Emmanuel Smith.

It is only by constant vigilance of such organizations as this, that greedy interests who will use any excuse to get power, can be repressed.

If you let the light of day into intolerant movements, they will dissipate like fog before the sun.

It is only by allowing them to thrive and multiply that they, like termites, will undermine the structure of our liberties.

I ask you to be as fearless in the right as you have been in the past -- to teach tolerance, to be tolerant.

In my present capacity as your Attorney General, I have a duty toward minorities.

The Department of Justice has always been the inner fortress for their protection.

Under two great Presidents, there has been a ceaseless Executive solicitude for the oppressed.

Those who come from without our borders claim our zeal, for the Nation was built upon this material.

On December 22, 1945, President Truman issued his famous directive, declaring that the people of the United States cannot and will not ignore the grave dislocation of populations in Europe and that this Government would facilitate under existing quota laws a full immigration program.

In addition, only a few weeks ago I personally signed the order admitting under the law the refugees of the Oswego Camp -- One Thousand lives snatched from death.

In my own official functions as Attorney General, and the chief of the Department of Justice -- which includes the Immigration and Naturalization Service -- I occasionally am called on for my views on proposed immigration measures.

When, at one time, a bill was introduced in the Congress that would have cut immigration quotas 50 per cent, I strongly urged delimitation of the drastic provisions of this bill.

And only the other day, when further knowledge gave me an opportunity to review this bill and others like it in all the developing stages of our immigration problem, I despatched a message to the House Committee on Immigration which constitutes my definitive views on the subject.

In response to a request for my views on Bill S. 1758, which proposed to suspend immigration for a period of five years, altogether, I based my case against the bill on rudimentary arithmetic and the simplest common sense.

Both made it plain that there is no necessity for such legislation.

For one thing, the present quotas permit the entry of approximately 153,000 quota immigrants each year.

At no time during the past ten years has the number of immigration visas issued in any one year exceeded 40 per cent of the quota.

The average for the past ten years is less than 20 per cent.

In 1920, aliens constituted 6.9 per cent of the population of the United States.

At the present time they comprise little more than three per cent.

But more than that, - I made the point in my report to the Committee - and I repeat it here tonight.

The United States has the responsibility of leadership.

A drastically restrictive immigration measure like the one proposed would affect foreign policy because it would compromise world efforts to solve the problem of the world's displaced peoples on an international plane.

I hate an international picket line.

But there is still another phase of the problem I want to discuss with you as an American among Americans.

There are provisos in our immigration law, - provisos seven and nine of the basic act of February, 1917, - which permit of a certain breadth of interpretation.

Under the administration of these provisos certain species of former-criminals, near-criminals, and others more or less undesirable, may be admitted from foreign countries into the United States.

I propose that they shall be kept out -- and they will be kept out.

It is not a question of thereby reducing the number of eligible aliens in the United States.

It is a question simply of plugging up the loopholes in our immigration laws through which the undesirable have found it possible to squirm into our shores.

As a general thing certain undesirables can, by filling up the quota with immigrants of evil quality, cut down the potential of immigrants of good quality in the same nationality.

This I shall prevent -- and recent directives I have issued to the Immigration Service underscore my purpose.

It is these undesirables whose bad conduct in our country soon prejudices public opinion against all aliens, and who become instruments for provoking the enactment of harsher immigration laws such as those I am now opposing.

To admit them into the United States is to provide fuel for the inflammatory arguments of the intolerant.

And we can all agree that it is wrong for the undesirable immigrant to push the desirable immigrant out of his place in the quota of the same racial group.

And that is my position.

Everybody in American Government is deeply and anxiously concerned with integrating current Government acts and legislation with our basic institutions to make sure they dovetail.

This is, as it must be, especially true on the higher levels of Government.

The rigid pursuit of such a course becomes difficult in time of war and emergency.

Yet I think it will be held that this Government's treatment of 110,000 persons of Japanese ancestry, two-thirds of whom were citizens of the United States, was in the end as just and as correct as the inherent dangers of the war and the circumstances permitted.

I mention this case because this, too, touches upon the question of intolerance and bigotry, and because all these questions are tied together into a policy that we constantly strive to square with our basic institutions.

These people were held on suspicion and without trial.

The military order excluding all Japanese-Americans from the Western Defense Command was in effect validated by the Supreme Court on the basis of military exigency.

Subsequently, under Federal management, the evacuees were treated with every consideration to compensate them in some small part for the unavoidable injustice which had been done them.

Here too the American Government discharged its obligation on a moral plane consonant with the American conscience.

Some 57,500 of these evacuees have been returned to their former homes in the West.

Another 51,800 probably improved their future as a group by resettling to new territory in the Eastern States.

Some 4,700 were voluntarily repatriated to Japan.

The problem at best was intensely difficult, but our Government proved that by understanding and by pursuing its tradition of justice the most that could be done to minimize hardship was done.

And again our traditional policy, to the greatest degree permitted by the situation, was vindicated.

The problem of these 120,000 people of Japanese ancestry is now solved.

It is a grave mistake to view racial antagonisms introspectively and separately, one race apart from the others.

An endless chain of emotions and problems are involved, and the attack against race hate ought to come, as it does from the standpoint of Government, on a single front including all of our people.

The Jewish people, however, have in the late war taken as a group blows of such fury and devastation as your race has not known since the days of Titus.

The destruction, wantonly, without military need, out of no motive other than greed and race hate, of half the Jewish people of the earth, is a blot on the escutcheon of western civilization.

If the facts could be stated in these sums, it means simply that the Jews are the greatest of all the losers in the War, - greater than the Germans who tortured and killed them, and greater than the Japs who sought the profits of the joint victory.

The death of the six million Jews killed in this war gives the Jewish race a claim on the conscience of mankind.

I think Dr. Einstein stated the case well the other day here in New York, when he spoke of the moral laws propagated by the Jews, from which so much of our civilization is derived.

It is not a coincidence, he said, that the Nazi destruction of about half the Jewish people was directed precisely against the very group who are the source of those moral laws which the Nazis hated and flouted.

These laws are a part of the way of life of our western civilization; and some debt, it seems to me, is owed the people who suffered the greatest calamity in their history in face of the world enemy.

And now, as I near the end of my time with you, I am going to tell you of the thoughts that I often have as I consider the vexing problem of the homeland of the Jewish people.

I have read, as you have, many times in late years of these tragic ships which have cruised the high seas, loaded with cargoes of pathetic, homeless people.

It brought to my mind the classic story by Edward Everett Hale, of the "Man Without A Country."

Philip Nolan, the man in that story, was a Texan like myself; and I have always felt that the story, multiplied thousands of times, could be told of the endless search of these refugees for safety.

In the story, Nolan leaves behind at his death a slip of paper, marking a place in his Bible.

The text was:

"They desire a country, even a
heavenly;
Wherefore God is not ashamed
to be called their God:
For he hath prepared for them
a city."

The story is pure fiction.

There never was a "Man Without A Country."

No Texan, I am proud to say, served in that sorry role.

But the spirit of the text, out of Holy Writ, lives on and breathes hope for the homeless.

May that hope be realized soon.