

EXCERPTS FROM AN ADDRESS BY
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ATTORNEY GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES
BEFORE THE
HOMECOMING PICNIC

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CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

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2:30 P.M. E.S.T.

Whenever I attend such a meeting as this -- here or down in Texas -- I reflect that present-day problems of government move closer and closer to all of the people.

Take the Peace Conference, for example, now going on in Paris.

That city was a long way off, only a few years ago, and decisions there were regarded as remote -- too remote for people in America to consider seriously.

But two World Wars have cured that situation.

Each one of us is interested in the day by day progress of the peace settlements.

We are all watching the fight that the President is making in order to preserve the thing that our young men fought for across the world.

We stand for permanent peace this time, with no reservations; and I can tell you that the man in the White House will never halt his fight for peace.

Only a week or so ago it was my privilege to sit at a Cabinet meeting and to talk with Secretary Byrnes about the problems of the peace settlements.

He said to me, "If we had been able to put into effect in 1919 the proposals the President has made for this conference, we never would have had a second World War, and the lives of millions would have been saved."

But in those days we had the little band of willful men to block any effective organization for World Peace.

Today we have a united nation behind the United Nations for world peace.

I believe that the atomic bomb -- with its menace to all mankind -- will be a help to world peace.

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In the federal government, and especially to the President, these great international problems come up day by day and press most heavily.

It is not merely a question of deciding issues for the United States. That would be simple.

But out there in the other continents, millions of people are looking to us for faith and guidance.

The President is confronted with problems of China and India -- of Africa and South America, and poor, torn Europe, sick, starved and shattered.

Today it is China and Palestine.

Tomorrow it may be two other places.

And if these are not important and burdensome enough, there are the domestic problems which are heavy in the extreme in this postwar period.

Yet, we seem to be doing fairly well with some of our domestic troubles for the moment.

Production is at its highest peacetime level and we are not half started.

Unemployment is practically non-existent -- and we can go a long way back to find such a situation.

There are some shortages and some inconveniences.

The President, in my opinion, took courageous and forthright action in getting the Decontrol Board functioning to relieve the economic controls.

There was powerful pressure brought by those who sought to divest ourselves prematurely of all controls, so that the few could enrich themselves at the expense of the many.

Those people in their talk about free enterprise neglected to mention that they had their chance after the last war and pushed us into an economic panic.

Some people have conveniently short memories.

Labor seems to have taken hold, excepting in some isolated instances, and is working well.

Management also is working with labor.

They have their shoulders to the wheel.

I used that old Texas expression a year ago in a speech --- for it was my idea of a homely way to describe the situation.

I said, "If we all put our shoulders to the wheel, the domestic problems will be solved."

Now it looks as if we are doing just that.

There is one domestic problem with which I am not satisfied.

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Juvenile delinquency is a real and threatening problem.

The age of 17 is the greatest crime age.

Imagine it --- seventeen!

The time when a youngster should be getting through high school --- going to "proms," and the things that they do --- this particular time, according to our carefully gathered accounts, is the most dangerous period of all.

However, I did not intend to dwell at length upon this phase of lawlessness, bad as the situation is.

Today I call to your attention another phase of lawlessness coupled with civil disturbances that violate all orderly legal procedures,

These outrages, I am sure, you have read about and reports have come to me concerning them from various parts of the country.

I am a devout believer in community government.

That is the best government for it is close to the people.

It is most satisfactory in this country.

It is truly American.

Recently, events have taken place which we all deplore and which indicate that in certain communities law enforcement is either unable or unwilling to cope with those who try to place themselves above the law.

We cannot countenance actions in this country which will vitiate or overthrow constituted legal authority by the use of force.

I mentioned that recently in Chicago and it still stands.

I have called upon and I again call upon all of our local law enforcement agencies to be particularly alert at this time, to be active in repressing the slightest semblance of mob violence and to invoke swift action in the courts for redress.

Those who are guilty must be punished -- and punished quickly.

Some local enforcement officers have done very well in bringing disorders before grand juries and using other legal means to repress them.

During the war, and despite unusual conditions, there has been a marked advance in securing protection for many people in the right to vote.

This has been done through the federal courts by due process of law.

As Assistant Attorney General, I helped extend voting in several states by court action.

As Attorney General, I have caused to be investigated all cases which might possibly imply violations of the civil liberties statutes.

Federal action in most of these cases hangs upon a very thin thread of law.

It is like trying to fight a modern atomic war with a Civil War musket.

However, we have been unsuccessful in halting some displays of mob violence which I and all other citizens condemn.

As I have stated, every resource at my command as the Head of your Department of Justice has been marshaled and has been ordered into action to discover the perpetrators of the horrible crimes which have been committed. The same vigilance shall continue in all cases.

No lead will remain unchecked; no stone will remain unturned; no effort is being spared to find those responsible; and when the culprits are found, no effort will be spared in bringing them to justice.

And our efforts will not stop there.

The time has come when Congress may have to pass legislation to insure to all citizens the guarantees under the Constitution.

When the Congress returns, I shall file a report pointing out the facts and outlining our experience in these cases and, in addition, pointing out the weaknesses of the present federal statutes in the light of these incidents and the need for legislation to protect every citizen in his civil rights.

At a time when our great Secretary of State James W. Byrnes is engaged in the monumental task of working out a formula for guaranteeing life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness for minority groups throughout the world; when our Nation shines undimmed as an example of democracy at its best, a land where members of all races, creed and color can live together in harmony, these sporadic outbursts of intemperance and mob violence can only result in the loss of prestige and give rise to the suggestion that we put our own house in order before we tell others how to run theirs.

As a means toward erasing this blot on our society, I again call upon every loyal citizen and law enforcement officer to do everything within his power to discourage and prevent a further recurrence of mob violence and to see that every participant in such violence is apprehended and prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law.

Recent history has shown only too clearly what isolated instances of persecution of minority groups can lead to if they remain unpunished and unchecked.

We cannot and will not let the seeds of such violence find fertile ground here.

Hatred, bigotry, and intolerance have no place in our national existence, and so long as I am the Attorney General of the United States, all of the powers vested in me will be used to combat them, to stamp them out, and to purge them from our midst.

One of the reasons that we must respect the rights of our own citizens is the effect it has upon the rest of the world.

We cannot stand before the nations of the earth, seeking the four freedoms, when we have instances in our own country of oppression.

No peace conference, no assembly of the United Nations in which we participate will be wholly successful if there is doubt about our integrity.

In addition, those who would destroy our democratic system by force from without and within, gain a point and their arguments gain credence from instances of mob rule.

In order to preserve our way of life, we must either protect the right of all our citizens by community action or we must seek aid from higher forms of government.