

1 FELLOWS OF THE  
2 AMERICAN BAR FOUNDATION  
3 - - -  
4

5 SPEECH BY THE HONORABLE JANET RENO,  
6 ATTORNEY GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES  
7 - - -  
8

9 Tuesday, May 18, 1993  
10 The International Club  
11 1800 K Street, N.W.  
12 Washington, D.C.  
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## P R O C E E D I N G S

(9:06 p.m.)

## INTRODUCTION

MS. HOSTETLER: We're getting close to the high point of the evening.

I can't recall that any member of a President's Cabinet has so completely completely and quickly captured the public's attention and admiration as has our new Attorney General, Janet Reno.

(Applause.)

By now every public school child in America knows that Abraham Lincoln lived in a log cabin and Janet Reno lived in a house built by her mother in the Everglades next to the edge of a swamp. Well, it seems to me that Janet Reno's mother really knew how to raise a daughter. A lifetime of wrestling with alligators has prepared her very well for the sharks in Washington.

(Laughter.)

Even the cynical, hard-bitten, inside the Beltway types have been completely captivated by her. The press loves her, perhaps because her father was one of them, but more likely because she disarmingly gives the press her home telephone number.

The President loves her because the press loves her. The Congress people admire and respect her because

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1 their constituents admire and respect her.

2 And in all seriousness, I think it's clear why  
3 the constituents admire and respect her. It's clear to  
4 all who have followed her distinguished career after  
5 Harvard Law School, in private practice, as a prosecutor,  
6 and as the five times elected state attorney in Miami,  
7 Florida, that Janet Reno has never forgotten why she went  
8 to law school in the first place.

9 It wasn't to earn a lot of money. It wasn't  
10 even to become a Fellow of the ABA, as nice as that is.  
11 No, it was to be, in her words and Learned Hand's words,  
12 "a servant of justice." And what more could we ask of the  
13 leader of our Department of Justice and of our justice  
14 system?

15 It gives me great pleasure to welcome our  
16 Attorney General, Janet Reno.

17 (Applause.)

18 PRESENTATION OF THE HONORABLE JANET RENO,  
19 ATTORNEY GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES

20 GENERAL RENO: First of all, I have to dispel a  
21 myth. In the three months I've been here, I have found  
22 nothing cynical, nothing mean, nothing forbidding, about  
23 the Beltway crowd.

24 (Applause.)

25 Secondly, I paid a long overdue regard to

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1     somebody I hold very dear at the ALI luncheon, but now I  
2     have an opportunity to pay a special regard to somebody  
3     who is equally as important. You don't know what it's  
4     like to go to Harvard Law -- some of you do -- to go to  
5     Harvard Law School in 1960 and be one of 16 women in an  
6     entering group of 544 men, and have the Dean of the  
7     Harvard Law School send you an invitation to come to his  
8     house for dinner, and then to have his wife make you feel  
9     like a million dollars and like you're one of the very  
10    special people in the world.

11             And she has done that consistently year over  
12    year after I've graduated. She has always remembered me.  
13    And thank you, Mrs. Griswold.

14             (Applause.)

15             And to you younger lawyers, never forget the  
16    difference that you can make in reaching out and touching  
17    somebody. It makes all the difference. Jamie Gorelick is  
18    probably struggling with DOD great issues. She inherited  
19    me. I hadn't met her before three months ago, and that  
20    lady reached out and touched me and has made a tremendous  
21    difference.

22             There are so many different people around this  
23    room who have touched me in one way or another. Just  
24    remember how much it means to people to reach out and give  
25    a helping hand, particularly to a young lawyer.

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1           And there is Sam Dash, who looked at me as I  
2   came in and thought: What has Sandy D'Alembert done to  
3   me. Sam, thank you so very much.

4           (Applause.)

5           There is on the east side of the Department of  
6   Justice Building the inscription, and I don't know how  
7   many of you read it lately because it's hidden by trees  
8   and not that many people travel down that way, but it  
9   says: "The common law is the will of the mankind, issuing  
10  from the life of the people, framed through mutual  
11  confidence, sanctioned by the light of reason."

12           I'm going to repeat it because I've been  
13  repeating it to myself ever since I came to Washington:  
14  "The common law is the will of the mankind, issuing from  
15  the life of the people, framed through mutual confidence,  
16  sanctioned by the light of reason."

17           I have the sense, having been a prosecutor in  
18  Miami for 15 years and now coming to Washington, that too  
19  much of what we as lawyers are doing is not the will of  
20  mankind, not the will of the people of the United States,  
21  but the will too often of special interests, the will too  
22  often of lawyers devoted to a particular attack, not the  
23  will of the people.

24           I have the feeling that too much of what we see  
25  in the law is not from the life of the people, too much of

1 what we see in the law is developed by special interest  
2 lobbyists, by staff, by lawyers, by people who have not  
3 one sense of what is happening on the streets of America.

4 Have you walked through the streets of America  
5 lately? Have you walked through the inner cities? Have  
6 you walked through where the majority of people are living  
7 in the United States?

8 Have you walked into an elementary school in  
9 this District where children say: When am I going to be  
10 able to walk home and not be afraid? When am I going to  
11 be able to go out and play?

12 Have you walked into your largest public  
13 hospital lately and talked to the victims of gunshot  
14 wounds and talked to crack addicts and talked to people  
15 who have virulent tuberculosis and AIDS? Have you walked  
16 through the streets of Middle America at 4:30 in the  
17 afternoon and seen the number of children who are  
18 wandering around unsupervised with nobody there because  
19 one parent or both parents are working?

20 Have you walked through the streets of America  
21 and have you lived the life of the people?

22 "Framed through mutual confidence." Mutual  
23 confidence too often is the lobbyist talking with the  
24 legislator, the high-powered lawyer talking to his client,  
25 the prosecutor talking to the judge..

1                   Mutual confidence. Mutual confidence is  
2 something that you build up in a neighborhood, where a  
3 neighbor relies on his friend, where, as one judge's wife  
4 told me last night: Ms. Reno, I have this woman who lives  
5 next door to us and she's almost a bigot, but she's my  
6 friend and I put up with her and we deal with each other  
7 because we ultimately have confidence in each other.

8                   But there are too many that cannot reach beyond  
9 that first initial impression and so are split, and the  
10 tension increases and increases and we get angry and we  
11 fight and we become single-issue in our orientation  
12 towards each other.

13                   "And sanctioned by the light of reason." What  
14 have you heard in these last years, both from Democrats  
15 and Republicans, about crime? Who can build the most  
16 prisons, who can fight the best battle for truth and  
17 justice. But who has talked with the light of reason  
18 about what it costs to build a prison cell, what it costs  
19 to house a person for a year, what it means to return that  
20 person who has been in prison to the community without  
21 appropriate backup and follow-up?

22                   I suggest to you that we should all walk down  
23 Ninth Street every day and remember that: "The common law  
24 is the will of mankind, issuing from the life of the  
25 people, framed through mutual confidence, and sanctioned

1 by the light of reason."

2 And if it's not the criminal justice side, look  
3 at civil rights and look at what magnificent lawyers have  
4 done in the last 40 years in America to make civil rights  
5 on paper and in constitutional decisions a reality. But  
6 then turn around and look at what civil rights means, when  
7 we see an ever-increasing number of children living in  
8 poverty, when we see the hopes and dreams of civil rights  
9 activists vanish as there is no reality to a child's  
10 future.

11 And then let's look at civil justice. What is  
12 justice if you can't get into court? What is justice if  
13 you can't afford a lawyer? When the American Bar  
14 Association tells me that 80 percent of the working poor  
15 and the poor in America don't have legal assistance, what  
16 does that mean, particularly since we see an ever-  
17 increasing number of people living in poverty?

18 We have got to make that Constitution, we have  
19 got to make the laws of this country, mean something more  
20 than a legal opinion or the paper it's written on or the  
21 hopes and dreams of our lawyers. We've got to make the  
22 law a reality again, not as something that divides people  
23 and gives one person a sense that another has gotten an  
24 advantage on them or that another is being kept back  
25 because of affirmative opportunities for another.

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1           We've got to make sure that the laws of this  
2 nation and the Constitution of this nation mean something  
3 to all American people. And lawyers have got to then  
4 approach this from a new point of view: How do we make  
5 the law real? How do we make it work, not just for  
6 corporate America, not just for the Department of Defense,  
7 not just for the Civil Rights Division of the Department  
8 of Justice, but for all America. How do we make it work?

9           I think we can do it. I think one of the first  
10 things we do is return lawyers to being civil to each  
11 other. I must say I have detected a notion of civility  
12 amongst the very professional members I have met of the  
13 D.C. Bar. It is refreshing.

14           But your members tell me that there is a lack of  
15 civility amongst lawyers, and I have certainly seen it  
16 increase in Dade County over the last 20 years. My  
17 grandmother and grandfather encouraged me to be a lawyer  
18 and they taught me that a lawyer could be the most fierce  
19 advocate in the world, but after you got through  
20 advocating against that lawyer you walk out and let him  
21 buy you a cup of coffee and you had a good discussion and  
22 you let him hire you to be his staff director of the House  
23 Judiciary Committee three years later, as Sandy D'Alembert  
24 did after we litigated against each other.

25           Somehow or another, we have got to go back to

1 litigating against each other, of working with each other  
2 to restore civility to the practice of law, to make it as  
3 wonderful as it should be.

4 Secondly and as importantly, lawyers have got to  
5 start using the small old words. We've got to abolish  
6 alphabets from our vocabulary. We've got to abolish  
7 legalese from our vocabulary. We have got to talk in  
8 words that the people will understand, that can translate  
9 the life of the people into reality.

10 And most of all, we've got to figure out how we  
11 go back to the community, how we take the inherent power  
12 that is in this small confine of community here that  
13 exists between 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue and the Capitol  
14 and the Supreme Court and translate that back to the  
15 people.

16 I look at history and I think one of the most  
17 exciting times in history must have been the New Deal time  
18 in this city. I can't imagine a more exciting time except  
19 probably in Philadelphia at the Constitutional Convention  
20 or at the time the Declaration of Independence was  
21 written.

22 Lawyers were part and parcel of that, but people  
23 were there, too. But lawyers were helping people  
24 understand and people were helping lawyers understand.  
25 And we saw what lawyers and other committed people could

1 do to make this government do absolutely heroic things  
2 during World War Two.

3 And then we saw changes and we saw differences.  
4 And then in the late sixties, seventies, and early  
5 eighties we saw great things happen in the state capitals.  
6 I think the great things that are happening in America  
7 today are happening in communities. They're bold, they're  
8 innovative, they're creative. They haven't been beaten  
9 down by stereotypes. They are the people speaking.

10 Somehow or another, we have to take this  
11 tremendous might that's here, all these agencies that  
12 haven't talked together for a long time, to blend the  
13 fabric of Federal society together to help the people.  
14 And we've got to challenge the people of America and the  
15 communities of America to tell us what they know better  
16 than we do, which is what our needs are, what our  
17 resources are, how they can be pieced together at the  
18 local level.

19 If you in Washington will only break the  
20 bureaucratic shackles so that we can piece these things  
21 together that you have created so beautifully, so that a  
22 lady who's living in public housing doesn't have to say to  
23 me: Janet, I could go get a minimum wage job, but I'd be  
24 worse off than if I hadn't gone to work in the first place  
25 because I'd lose my benefits. We've got to give that lady

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1 a chance to work her way out in a sensible fashion. We've  
2 got to give her children a chance to grow as strong and  
3 constructive human beings.

4 We have got to challenge the communities of  
5 America in a new era of Federalism to tell Washington, not  
6 how they can help us, but how we can work together to help  
7 ourselves to build this as a stronger, better nation.

8 I told my mother when I was a little girl that I  
9 wanted to be a lawyer and she told me that that was the  
10 one thing that she would forbid me to do, because she had  
11 helped my grandfather when he was very ill and she had  
12 gone down and almost gotten disbarred before she'd gotten  
13 barred for the practicing of law.

14 There is nothing finer in all of human history  
15 than lawyers, lawyers that remember that: "The common law  
16 is the will of mankind, issuing from the life of the  
17 people, framed through mutual confidence, and sanctioned  
18 by the light of reason."

19 (Applause.)

20 (End of speech at 9:23 p.m.)

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