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STATE OF NEW YORK

SPEECH OF JANET RENO
RE: WOMEN OF FORDHAM

May 19, 1993
New York, New York
Commencing at 9:05 p.m.

Reported by: Michael Williams

1 MS. RENO: Thank you so very much.
2 It's been a little over a year since I suddenly
3 found myself in Washington and it has been the
4 most incredible year that any lawyer could ever
5 have the opportunity to have, the most incredible
6 challenges, the most incredible opportunity to
7 serve. And when I stand here, I keep pinching
8 myself and turning around and remembering the day
9 we swore in the Deputy Attorney General of the
10 United States, and I turned to introduce the
11 Justice of the United States Supreme Court who
12 was going to swear her in and I said, Justice
13 Ginsberg, and then I turned to the Deputy and
14 said, Jamie, if you had told Justice Ginsberg and
15 I when we graduated from law school that we would
16 be swearing in a Deputy Attorney General and it
17 would be you and you would be doing it, we would
18 have said you were crazy.

19 And it has happened because of law
20 schools like Fordham who, long ago, gave women
21 opportunity, who, 75 years ago, said, of course,
22 yes. Women can go to law school. Women can be
23 great lawyers.

24 I had a sense before I came here
25 tonight that there would be a spirit in this

1 room, but the words that were sent to me cannot
2 begin to match the spirit that I have felt
3 tonight as I have met so many people. Beginning
4 with Frances Berco, who is a symbol to me of what
5 you can do and do it magnificently.

6 I've had my own Frances Berco in
7 Miami. She's a junior court judge, probably out
8 of law school 50 years. She sat under my rose
9 apple tree when I was a little girl and convinced
10 my mother that I could go to law school.

11 The spirit in this room must carry
12 forward from here for many generations to come
13 and each of you must set an example and let
14 people know you can be anything you really want
15 to. You can create miracles; you can open doors;
16 you can break down barriers; you can make people
17 freer, and the spirit of this room and the spirit
18 of Fordham Law School will see that that is
19 done.

20 You have made so many splendid
21 contributions to the law. I've said that you
22 really must get this book bound so that your
23 people can understand. It is so beautifully
24 done, but in terms of contributions to the bench,
25 to law schools, to teaching, to the practice of

1 law, it is so exciting.

2 I must admit in being somewhat
3 provincial in my development as a lawyer. When I
4 came to Washington, I really never heard the name
5 Bob Fisk or Pat Hynes or Maryjo Light or Zac
6 Carter, and I'm now learnig a whole new great
7 wonderful world of splendid lawyers. Splendid
8 lawyers who reach out and touch and make sure
9 that people are given the assist and support
10 along the way; and for you young lawyers just
11 coming out of law school remember, reach out.
12 Help somebody. It makes all the difference in
13 the world as you come through the practice of
14 law.

15 But what you have here tonight is an
16 extraordinary spirit, a spirit of heart and soul,
17 a spirit of lawyers who reach beyond themselves.

18 I love the law and I love lawyers.
19 What I can't stand are greedy and indifferent
20 lawyers, and the spirit in this room carried
21 forward from here to wherever you practice or
22 wherever you preside can do a lot towards
23 dispelling the image of greedy and indifferent
24 lawyers who have created so significantly to the
25 instability that we see so often in the practice

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1 of law.

2 It is important that that happen
3 because the law is such an extraordinary tool for
4 idealism and I suggest to the young lawyers and I
5 suggest to those who have practiced, Frances
6 Berco must be an idealist. Somebody said, Janet,
7 you're not an idealist. You have been in the
8 prosecution business for too long.

9 Unless you believe, unless you have a
10 sense that you can accomplish the unbelievable,
11 the law is just a paltry instrument. But if you
12 use the law the right way, if you continue to
13 fight, if you continue to believe that the law
14 can make a difference in people's lives, that it
15 can mean justice for all, not just a few, it can
16 make such an extraordinary difference.

17 There is on the wall of the east side
18 of the building that houses the Department of
19 Justice in Washington, D.C., a statement that
20 says, "The common law is derived from the will of
21 mankind, issuing from the people, framed through
22 mutual compliments, sanctioned by the light of
23 reason.

24 "Issuing from the people": Ladies and
25 gentlemen, 80 percent of the poor and the working

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1 poor in the United States do not have access to
2 legal services. They feel disenfranchised. The
3 law does not issue from them. They feel
4 alienated from the law.

5 "Framed by mutual compliments": The
6 distrust that exists through so many young men
7 and woman who feel disenfranchised and alienated
8 from community, from neighborhood, from access to
9 government, from access to the law negates that
10 statement.

11 "Sanctioned by the light of reason":
12 There are too many youngsters in this world being
13 raised without reason, without sanction, without
14 love, without hope and without trust; and if we
15 are to make the law real for people, we must
16 remember people.

17 I think that too often in these last 30
18 years American lawyers have forgotten and
19 neglected people. They have become too taken
20 with the process, with the form and with the
21 written word and they have not remembered the
22 heart, the soul, the spirit, the intellect that
23 lies behind the people they represent.

24 They look at a courtroom. They look at
25 a judge. They don't look at their client. They

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1 look at the result of a motion, the result of a
2 prosecution and they don't look at what it means
3 for their client.

4 I think we must all rededicate
5 ourselves and take the spirit of this evening,
6 the spirit that is in this room, just a spirit
7 that is tangible, that you can touch, that is
8 supportive and says, yes, we can do it. We can
9 make a difference. We can move forward. We can
10 make the law real, and frame the law so that it
11 serves people.

12 Frame the law so that it serves people
13 to enable them to be self-sufficient, not
14 helpless souls clinging to some life raft of a
15 government program after crisis occurs.

16 Frame the law so that it searches
17 people so that it holds them accountable and does
18 not excuse their conduct but trusts them enough
19 to believe that they can be accountable.

20 I have read so many pieces of
21 jurisprudence that tries to define what justice
22 means. I think we have too often not heard the
23 word "justice" amongst lawyers in these last 30
24 years since I graduated from law school.

25 Too often we've heard the law, or

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1 motions or process or convictions or motions to
2 dismiss or motions to suppress. We've heard
3 about transaction; we heard about acquisitions;
4 we heard about mergers, but we haven't heard
5 about one beautifully eloquent word, "justice,"
6 because justice and the law have not come
7 together with the person and the people as a
8 focal point.

9 Now, how do we do this? Where do we
10 begin to make a difference?

11 Let's first take the area of criminal
12 law. The prosecutor so often thinks that they
13 are the person that has championed and won when
14 they get a conviction and walk out of the
15 courtroom having sent the person off to prison
16 for five years; neglecting to note that the
17 average sentence being served in that State is
18 probably 20 to 30 percent of the sentence because
19 we don't have enough prison cells; neglecting to
20 note that after that two-year sentence the person
21 will return to the community without drug
22 treatment, without after care, without follow-up,
23 without job training and placement. He will go
24 back to the apartment or the open air drug market
25 where he got into trouble in the first place and

1 guess what he is going to be doing a day later.

2 As prosecutors around this country, we
3 all have a responsibility to make sure that we
4 look beyond that convictions.

5 But the public defender often times
6 feels that they have won the battle when they get
7 their client off on a motion to dismiss or a
8 motion to suppress. That client turns and walks
9 out of the courtroom in a greater bondage than
10 any prison could create because they are a crack
11 addict; a crack addict who cannot afford
12 treatment, who does not have health insurance,
13 who does not have money and who will walk back to
14 the street to do it again and probably die in the
15 misery of his crack addiction.

16 Prosecutors and defenders have a
17 responsibility to look beyond the arena of that
18 courtroom and look to the people that they are
19 focusing on, whether they are prosecuting them or
20 defending them, and look to what we can do to
21 make that person self-sufficient, to make that
22 person a positive, constructive member of
23 society.

24 We have an opportunity with the crime
25 bill. We lawyers can sit on the sidelines and

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1 let it go by. We can let people talk about
2 prisons until they're blue in the face and
3 promise prisons and note that prisons have been
4 built and promised and sentences have been
5 created, or we can take a constructive role in
6 fashioning a crime bill that balances punishment,
7 policing and prevention in a reasoned way, to
8 make sure that we have enough prison cells for
9 the truly dangerous offenders so they are housed
10 for the length of time that judges are sentencing
11 them so that people can have confidence in the
12 system. But for those that are not dangerous,
13 that there are alternative sentences, such as the
14 drug court we initiated in Dade County.

15 There are provisions in that crime bill
16 that can do that, that can provide after care to
17 the youthful offenders to get them back to the
18 community. We need to get that bill passed to
19 provide community policing. Not police officers
20 that are distrusted by a community, but police
21 officers that are part and parcel of a
22 community.

23 Police officers, such as I saw today,
24 working in the child care center and the
25 neighborhood around it, making a difference

1 because they were at the cutting edge of bringing
2 a community together, not apart.

3 But most of all prosecutors and public
4 defenders have got to speak out loud and long and
5 let this nation know that we will never be able
6 to build enough prisons; that the criminal
7 justice system will never be able to address all
8 its problems unless we start early when children
9 are born and raise them to have a conscious, to
10 develop the concept of reward and punishment and
11 to have a chance at a safe, constructive,
12 positive future.

13 We talk so much about civil rights
14 enforcement, and I said, as I stood in the Rose
15 Garden on February the 11th, that one of the
16 highest priorities of my office would be the
17 enforcement of the civil rights law of this
18 nation.

19 It was a moment I will never forget to
20 stand with so many people who had been part of
21 making Brown versus Board of Education a reality
22 40 years ago just two nights ago in Washington.
23 I remember the day when I was 16 years old that I
24 heard that decision and the vista that it opened
25 for me in terms of what it meant for justice for

1 all.

2 I have seen so much, so many doors
3 opened for so many people because of our civil
4 rights laws. But, ladies and gentlemen, what
5 good is an equal opportunity for education if a
6 child is shot down on the streets of his
7 community at 13? What good are housing laws that
8 prevent discrimination in housing if the person
9 doesn't have the money or doesn't have the will
10 to get in the housing.

11 It comes back to community, to building
12 communities, to giving our children and family an
13 opportunity to grow in a strong, constructive
14 way.

15 Where have lawyers been? Too often on
16 the sidelines, too often fighting the battles in
17 court, too often walking away going to a suburban
18 community and not fighting the battle that brings
19 a community together.

20 And in terms of civil practice, I look
21 at people who litigate, and for as long as I will
22 remember, I will remember first meeting Miss Kate
23 Walton. She was the lawyer who handled the case
24 of Kason versus Baston.

25 Selma Kason brought a suit against Miss

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1 Margaret Ken Rollins for her description of Miss
2 Selma Kason as a census taker in central
3 Florida. It's reported in one sudden second. It
4 was one of the great cases defining the right of
5 privacy when I was in law school. It was a
6 magical case to me because it represented to me
7 the case of the person who wanted to be let
8 alone. It was something special to me.

9 Twenty years later, I walked into the
10 office of that lady in Palatka, Florida. I
11 congratulated her and said that I had always
12 wanted to meet the lawyer responsible for
13 defining that right of privacy.

14 She looked up at me in her blue-eyed
15 fierce way and said, I was young then. I didn't
16 know what it would do to my client. I did more
17 damage to my client by that lawsuit than I could
18 every do in terms of the dollar damage that she
19 recovered.

20 And we so often fight our battles
21 without remembering the person. We too often
22 pursue the process, no matter the cost, no matter
23 the delay, forgetting that the person comes out a
24 lesser person, either in dollars, or in emotion,
25 or in spirit, or in heart and their soul because

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1 of the damage done by the civil process.

2 We can do far better. We can do far
3 better in learning how to negotiate rather than
4 litigate, knowing that litigation is a last
5 resort. We can learn far better how to resolve
6 our disputes peacefully; and even if we learn to
7 do this, we must remember that the law is not
8 real to a significant number of American people.

9 When the American Bar Association
10 estimates that 70 to 80 percent of the poor and
11 the working poor in America do not have access to
12 legal services, it challenges you and me to help
13 redefine the legal system that makes the law
14 accessible and makes the law real for all
15 Americans.

16 I look at a young welfare mother in a
17 housing project that I will visit regularly in
18 Dade County. I went to Harvard Law School and I
19 don't know how to work my way through all the
20 welfare laws to help that lady.

21 I would bring down friends from legal
22 services or bring down friends from law firms in
23 Miami and they weren't much better at it, but
24 there was some savvy street people that
25 understood it; and it made me think that we got

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1 to think in bold new directions of a new
2 four-year degree, not a law degree, but a
3 four-year degree in community advocacy that
4 teaches people about AFDC and WICK and all the
5 welfare laws and teaches them about landlord
6 tenant laws and teaches them about the real world
7 and teaches them what they already know about
8 people and give them the tools to do the job, not
9 people that want to make 70 and 80 and 100 and
10 \$200,000 a year, but people who want to serve
11 their fellow man and do it the right way and a
12 sensible way. Let us be bold and think beyond.

13 But remember what that statement on the
14 east wall of the Justice Building says: "The
15 common law issues from the will of mankind."

16 If we are to make that law real, we
17 must make sure that there is a community and a
18 neighborhood and a sense of people from which it
19 can issue, and lawyers throughout America must
20 lay down their motions, lay down their pleadings,
21 lay down their law books and go back to the
22 communities and neighborhoods of America. They
23 must join with community police officers, with
24 teachers, with social workers, with school
25 children and all work together to rebuild

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1 America.

2 Some may say that's not my problem;
3 that's in another side of town. It's everybody's
4 problem now, because unless we focus on children
5 and family and rebuild the community and
6 neighborhood around them, we are never going to
7 have enough prisons 18 years from now for all the
8 children that would have been neglected along the
9 way.

10 Unless we focus in rebuilding community
11 around family and children, we will never have
12 enough people with the skills necessary to fill
13 the jobs to maintain America as a first rate
14 nation.

15 Unless we focus on making children
16 strong and healthy, we will never have health
17 care institutions that can cope with the problem
18 created by the lack of preventive medical care.

19 How do we rebuild?

20 Last Saturday, I went to an elementary
21 school that I had adopted in Washington. I go
22 there about every two weeks to read, to teach, to
23 assist teachers.

24 A law firm in Washington spent a
25 Saturday with a massive amount of effort with the

1 senior partner and the lowest associate and the
2 secretary working there to repaint that law
3 school, clean the girls' room, clean the boys'
4 room, sweep the place, dig up the plants that had
5 died, put in new plants, plant.

6 I had been going to that school, and
7 when I walked in I could not believe what they
8 had done in just a few hours on that Saturday. I
9 could not believe how they had galvanized that
10 community around them so that you had kids who
11 said, hello, Janet Reno, as I walked in because I
12 had been in their class and they were standing
13 there painting.

14 These were third graders so motivated
15 by people who had come in and cared that they
16 were not splattering paint all over the place.
17 They were rolling the paint in the right way and
18 they were cleaning up after themselves. They
19 were kids who were planning and doing it right,
20 who were not shooting the hose at each other and
21 throwing mud at each other, but pitching in and
22 caring. These were kids who were making a
23 difference because adults cared and were helping
24 to create a new community.

25 Lawyers have got to get out of their

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1 law office, got to get out of their courtrooms,
2 got to go back to the communities throughout
3 America and use their skills, whether it is
4 painting skills, or a call to a recalcitrant
5 landlord to fix the toilet that's not been fixed
6 in three years because the processes are so slow,
7 and start making a difference for all Americans.

8 The response from America will be the
9 response of those kids and their families who
10 rallied to that school because they saw a sense
11 of hope and a sense of purpose.

12 But as we look inward towards
13 community, lawyers have got to turn from the
14 courtroom; they've got to turn from the law
15 office, and they've got to look to a world
16 beyond.

17 I come from Miami that obviously has
18 faced international influences and impacts, but
19 when you come to Washington after being a local
20 prosecutor, one of the things that becomes clear
21 and certainly has become clear in this great
22 city, crime is global. The economy is global.
23 Migration is global. The environment is a global
24 problem now and we cannot remain isolated on our
25 continent. We are one world in terms of

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1 influencing each other and we have got to look
2 beyond.

3 And as we look beyond in terms of the
4 technology that is mind boggling, that brings us
5 closer together than we ever dreamed we can be,
6 we also see people retreating to their past,
7 looking to tribal and ethnic tradition to a sense
8 of belonging, a sense of being; and as they look
9 back in history, they see tribal conflicts that
10 are causing dissension and tragedy and violence
11 that we thought might be passed.

12 We have got to look beyond to a world
13 and all of us have got to exercise the
14 responsibility that makes us understand that it
15 is not just our community; it's not just our
16 nation, but we have a responsibility in this
17 world to do what we can to bring peace.

18 As we look back and forward, I think
19 it's important, if you had told me in 1960 that I
20 couldn't go to law school because I was a woman,
21 I would be furious. I would be even angrier now,
22 but now we face some new challenge.

23 I remember my afternoons after school
24 and in the evenings. My mother worked in the
25 home. She taught us to play baseball. She

1 taught me to bake a cake. She taught me not to
2 like Dickens, and I'm still trying to overcome
3 it, and she taught me to appreciate Beethoven
4 symphonies. She taught me how to play fair and
5 she loved us with all her heart, and there is no
6 child care in the world that will be a substitute
7 for what that lady was in our life.

8 If we can send a man to the moon, if we
9 can do the extraordinary things we've done in the
10 law, if we can achieve the positions we have,
11 then somehow or another we can put family and
12 children first in the workplaces of America.

13 We can get out of this concept of
14 billable hours and start looking at results. We
15 can get out of the concept of developing and
16 marketing and start looking at the people we
17 serve. We can get out of process and form and
18 start looking at families and children and
19 understand that through bold and new techniques
20 we can put children and families first.

21 It basically comes -- I look at the
22 young lawyers in the Department of Justice and in
23 the office I left in Miami. They struggle to get
24 breakfast on the table, the children off to
25 school. They come to court; they try the case;

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1 they interview witnesses until 7 o'clock at
2 night. They finish in the dregs of rush hour
3 getting home. They put the dinner on the table,
4 get the children bathed, the homework done and
5 everybody collapses in bed.

6 Saturdays they run errands. Sundays
7 they sleep late or go to church. Sunday night
8 they start preparing for trial again and there is
9 no quality time with their children.

10 Tomorrow I hope to see my almost
11 two-year-old grand niece and her little sister
12 who I expect to be born tomorrow.

13 Their father is 6'9". It is just like
14 yesterday that I was rocking him in a chair on my
15 mother's front porch. Time is too short. We can
16 be Attorneys General. We can be judges. We can
17 be great lawyers, but we can enjoy this
18 wonderful, wonderful time with our family.

19 (Time noted: 9:30 p.m.)

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C E R T I F I C A T E

I, MICHAEL WILLIAMS, a Registered Professional Reporter of the State of New Jersey, do hereby state that the foregoing is a true and accurate transcript of my stenographic notes of the within proceedings, to the best of my ability.

MICHAEL WILLIAMS