

1 DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE
2 Address by
3 Attorney General Janet Reno
4 to the
5 School of Law
6 Inter-American University of Puerto Rico
7 San Juan, Puerto Rico
8 Transcribed from an audio recording.
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1 P R O C E E D I N G S

2 GENERAL RENO: Mr. Chairman, President Gonzalez,
3 King Ramos, Dr. Ruiz, the Justices and Judges who have
4 made me feel so welcome, faculty, students, friends, and
5 ladies and gentlemen: You have done me such a great
6 honor. I have been very privileged to have been invited
7 to address you here at the Inter-American University of
8 Puerto Rico, my first visit to this beautiful island and
9 this beautiful city. When I received the letter from your
10 chairman advising me that the Board of Trustees had voted
11 to confer on me an honorary degree, I was deeply touched.
12 I am more touched now, as I see this city and I see this
13 island.

14 You are positioned in such an extraordinary way

15 in history and in geography. 500 years or 400 years ago
16 you were the frontier of the old world to the new. And
17 the traditions of that frontier world still exist today on
18 this island. Now today, you are a frontier on the
19 Northern Hemisphere, reaching out to the Southern
20 Hemisphere and bring us together. And you are at this
21 point of adventure and pioneership just at a time that
22 technology and communication and science have brought us
23 closer together, but offered us more extraordinary
24 challenges than we ever dreamed possible through
25 technology and what technology can do for us and to us.

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1 With this backdrop it is extraordinary in terms
2 of one's opportunity in the law. I love the law, and I
3 love lawyers. I do not like greedy, indifferent lawyers,
4 but I find, fortunately, very few of those. Instead, I
5 have found lawyers who are protectors, who are advocates,
6 and all of us in the law who cherish it and prize it must
7 never forget our role as those who protect and advocate
8 for constitutional rights.

9 For as long as I live I will never forget the
10 instance in which the Governor of Florida asked me to
11 reinvestigate the case of a man who had been prosecuted,
12 convicted, and sentenced to death for the poisoning death
13 of his seven children in 1967. He had spent 21 years in
14 prison after the Supreme Court had set aside the death
15 penalty in Florida. I reinvestigated, and determined that
16 the evidence was insufficient to have charged him in the
17 first place, and I recommended to the court that he go
18 free. I will always remember looking over my shoulder as
19 that man walked out of the courthouse, a free man for the
20 first time in 21 years. And I will recall that as I
21 recall the duties and the obligations that each of us as
22 lawyers have to protect and to defend.

23 I look at lawyers as builders, as people who
24 help create businesses and companies and institutions, and
25 deals, good deals, that help promote the economy and

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1 commerce and trade. But I would like most of all to talk
2 to you today about the lawyer as a problem-solver. I am
3 sure you have been to a lawyer or to an accountant or to a

4 doctor. You worried that the doctor was going to tell you
5 you had to have major surgery, the accountant was going to
6 tell you it was going to be a horrendous audit, the lawyer
7 told you it would be a horrible litigation, that's what
8 you were worried about. But they sat you down, heard your
9 story, and in very sympathetic and understanding ways
10 said, oh, I think this is the way we can work it out and
11 do it just right, and it won't cost that much money, and
12 we can solve it. And you felt so desperately relieved and
13 so grateful for the problem-solver. I think too often
14 lawyers forget that they are in the role of problem-solver
15 for the people.

16 Some people perhaps pursue the law and pursue a
17 legal career to make money, but I suggest to you that
18 having spent most of my life in public service and having
19 now had the opportunity to meet again my colleagues as
20 they have come to talk with me as Attorney General, who
21 say I wish I had gone into public service. Some come into
22 it for status, and clearly recognize that status by itself
23 is not worth it. But this university recognizes so
24 clearly what we should really be in the law for, what the
25 law should be all about. Your school says the student's

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1 preparation for the betterment of the society in which he
2 lives forms part of the modern legal education.

3 Therefore, the school of law seeks to create in
4 students an awareness of the responsibilities of the legal
5 profession and of its obligations towards the problems
6 that confront Puerto Rico, society in an ever-changing
7 world. This is a marvelous foundation upon which to send
8 your lawyers out into this community to make a difference.
9 And again remembering the remarkable opportunity they have
10 in a frontier of time and space, but also with a tradition
11 of years that we should be so proud of.

12 Your work reflects this connection, and your
13 work reflects action. Your work reflects what you are
14 talking about. This law school is taking action to
15 confront problems in Puerto Rico. Your clinical program
16 has represented thousands of low-income tenants of public,
17 subsidized, and private housing. Our Constitution secures
18 due process rights to all persons. That includes the
19 poor, the elderly, and those who are disadvantaged for one

20 reason or another. But if 70 percent of the poor and the
21 working poor in this country do not have access to a
22 lawyer, how can those promises of the Constitution be a
23 reality?

24 We each have a responsibility to make the law
25 real to all Americans, and if you say that is not my

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1 problem, that is somebody else's problem, let me remind
2 you that if people do not have access to the law they will
3 not believe in the law. They will violate the law, ignore
4 the law, and soon the law will not be the institution that
5 you and I prize.

6 I am so impressed by your street law program, in
7 which law students go out into the community, into public
8 housing and low income wards throughout San Juan, and
9 conduct clinics to explain the law to people so that they
10 can do more to help themselves. And so in some respects I
11 am preaching to the choir when I talk to you today about
12 public service and problem solving.

13 First, one of the great opportunities that any
14 lawyer can have is to serve in government, to serve at the
15 local level, to serve at the State level, or to serve in
16 the national government. I have been blessed with that
17 opportunity. But I have also had the opportunity to be a
18 partner in a major law firm, to have my own small firm,
19 and to do different things in the law.

20 I commend to all the students the opportunity
21 for public service. I commend to the faculty that
22 opportunity, as well. It has been so exciting to see my
23 colleagues in the Justice Department come from academia
24 and bring such a wealth of knowledge, such experience,
25 such insight to public service, such as Drew Days has done

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1 as Solicitor General of the United States coming from Yale
2 Law School. We don't have to spend our whole life in one
3 sector or another, but in working in each we gain an
4 experience, we gain a perspective, we recharge our
5 batteries, we make a difference in both sectors by
6 contributing in both sectors.

7 In the private sector, every lawyer should
8 undertake the responsibility to perform pro bono service.

9 I have just announced a pro bono policy for the Department
10 of Justice, the first ever, that encourages as an
11 aspirational goal, that every lawyer in the Department of
12 Justice will perform 50 hours of service during the year.
13 I am trying to encourage lawyers to be involved at every
14 level of their community, through whatever service they
15 think is appropriate based on the law and the regulations.

16 I urge all of you to community involvement, to
17 trying to figure out what works and doesn't work in a
18 community, to participating in your local government when
19 asked to serve on a commission. I have heard too many
20 lawyers say I don't have time for it. If you don't have
21 time for it, you're going to be spending more time undoing
22 what was broken because of public indifference to the
23 processes of government.

24 And lawyers as problem-solvers, as we focus on
25 the issues that confront us, must figure out how to

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1 resolve issues, how to negotiate a matter so it doesn't
2 have to go to court, how to learn the art of negotiation.
3 When I went to law school we didn't have courses in
4 negotiation. We learned how to be advocates. We learned
5 how to try cases. It is so important that we pursue that
6 marvelous art of negotiation to save our clients the time
7 and the money that litigation can incur for all of us. We
8 can make that difference.

9 Each of us as lawyers must learn how to use the
10 law the right way, in simple terms that people can
11 understand, with what Winston Churchill referred to as
12 small, old words. We lawyers use legalese far too much.
13 We confuse the public far too much. And if we used
14 simple, straightforward words we could make the law
15 available to so many more people who could use it for
16 themselves.

17 I am touched today to be here with so many
18 different disciplines. As I watched the academic
19 procession walk by I identified, or had identified,
20 various degrees, and it is so important that lawyers as
21 problem solvers reach out to other disciplines.

22 One of the most exciting developments of the
23 last 3 years has been to see the medical community join
24 with the criminal justice community in focusing on

25 domestic violence, both as a criminal justice problem and

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1 as a public health problem, to see doctors and lawyers and
2 social workers and parks and recreation specialists
3 developing community initiatives that look at a whole
4 picture rather than just the narrow perspective of one
5 discipline. To solve problems we must reach out to so
6 many, and help come together in identifying what the
7 problem is up front.

8 Let me give you an example. I have often looked
9 at young prosecutors, joyous because they got a conviction
10 of an 18-year-old. He gets probation. Nothing happens
11 because the probation officer has too big a case load,
12 nobody addresses his drug problem, nobody counsels him,
13 and he is right back in the court again in no time flat.
14 All of us as lawyers have an obligation to go beyond the
15 conviction to do something to identify what caused the
16 problem in the first place and solve it.

17 The public defender who is elated because he has
18 gotten his client off on a motion to dismiss too often
19 ignores the fact that his client walks out of the
20 courtroom a free man for the first time in one sense, but
21 in the throws of an addiction that is a worse prison than
22 any bars that man could create for him. We must all work
23 together to solve the problems, and I would like to
24 suggest to you one of the greatest public services that
25 all of us, whether we be faculty, the attorney general,

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1 students, or people who care about our communities.

2 About 10 years ago I started looking at the
3 presentence investigations of juveniles that we were
4 prosecuting. I was concerned because they were committing
5 more serious crime, more violent crime, and there were
6 more of them coming into the system. I would look at the
7 presentence investigation and see five points along the
8 way where we could have intervened to have kept that child
9 in trouble to have kept that child from dropping out, to
10 have made a difference in that child's life. But society
11 stood by and did nothing. Now, that child does not in
12 most instances have a lawyer. That child, at that point,
13 is voiceless in terms of somebody speaking out for him or

14 her. We have got to make a difference.

15 I started looking at what caused it, and looked
16 at drop-out prevention as a key, but learned quickly that
17 if we wait until a child is in sixth or seventh grade
18 before we start focusing on drop-outs, that is too late.
19 The child has already fallen a grade level behind, and is
20 beginning to act out in other ways to attract attention to
21 himself. So we developed a neighborhood intervention
22 program.

23 But at that point the crack epidemic hit Miami
24 in 1985, and the doctors took me to the public hospital to
25 try to figure out what to do about crack-involved infants

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1 and their mothers. And I clearly learned then that we
2 have got to start at the beginning, and build carefully
3 from a strong foundation for our children of tomorrow.

4 They taught me that the first 3 years were the
5 most important in any human's life, that 50 percent of all
6 learned human response is learned in the first year of
7 life, that the concept of reward and punishment and a
8 conscience is developed during the first 3 years of life.
9 What does that mean to all of us? That means that unless
10 we invest in children up front, and we as lawyers and as
11 people in academia and as citizens who care about our
12 university and our island and our nation, that unless we
13 invest up front we will never be able to build enough
14 prisons for a child 18 years from now if he never learned
15 what conscience and punishment was all about.

16 Unless we invest in children up front and health
17 care that can make a difference, we are going to bring
18 health care institutions to their knees for failure to
19 provide preventative medical care, which is a lot less
20 expensive than the tertiary care down the road. Unless we
21 make an investment in children up front in that first year
22 with 50 percent of all learned human responses acquired,
23 we will never have enough dollars to spend in remedial
24 education to make a difference that can educate our
25 children and that can produce people with the skills

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1 necessary to enable them to earn a living wage.

2 Now, you say, well, I am a businessman and I

3 don't care, but that businessman must understand that
4 unless we invest in children he will not have a workforce
5 in this nation in 15 years with the skills necessary to
6 match the wonderful technology that we have created
7 through man's genius. In short, we have got to figure out
8 how we as lawyers, as people who care, can make a
9 difference. And I would just offer five areas where I
10 think all of us can make a difference.

11 First, and I speak particularly to the students,
12 your family. Your family will be one of your most
13 precious possessions. You may go to a law firm that
14 requires that you do a certain amount of billable hours.
15 Try to find a law firm that understands that billable
16 hours are important, but quality time with family is just
17 as important.

18 I remember my afternoons after school and in the
19 evening. My mother taught us to play baseball, to
20 appreciate Beethoven symphonies, to bake a sponge cake, to
21 play fair. She loved us with all her heart, and there is
22 no child care in the world that will ever be a substitute
23 for what that lady was in our life. When you go talking
24 to law firms, find out what they do about parental leave.
25 Find out what their policy is about letting you spend time

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1 with your children's school. Find out what their policy
2 is about telecommuting. Find out just how much they value
3 family. And then spend time with your family. They grow
4 up so very fast.

5 In your law firm you can make such a difference
6 by addressing those concerns, by recognizing that if we
7 can send a man to the moon, surely we ought to be able,
8 with modern technology and high speed communication,
9 faxes, and computers, to enable parents to spend quality
10 time with their children. Be competitive. You may not be
11 able to offer the starting salary, but you may be able to
12 offer something far more important for a young law school
13 graduate.

14 As a lawyer, as a prosecutor, think beyond the
15 arena in which you are working, and solve the problem.
16 Solve the drug problem. Galvanize the community together
17 to get treatment opportunities for that child, even if his
18 parents can't afford it, and even if there is a waiting

19 list for drug treatment in the community. As the public
20 defender, don't just address the child's drug problem.
21 Look at what is happening in the family, and bring
22 community forces together to try to reweave the fabric of
23 society around that kid before it is too late, before he
24 has hurt somebody, before he has killed somebody.

25 Youth violence is increasing dramatically. It

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1 has increased dramatically since 1985, while violence is
2 going down generally in this country. The figures on
3 youth violence are made even more striking by the fact
4 that in the years of 1985 to about 1991 or 1992, the number
5 of young people in this country was decreasing. Since
6 about 1992, the number of young people are increasing
7 substantially, and will so over the next 20 years. Unless
8 we intervene now, we will never be able to turn it around
9 if we wait and fail to invest in our children.

10 In community and government, get your community
11 and your governments to take stock, take inventory of what
12 is there. The major complaint I hear from government is
13 you've got a lot of good ideas, Janet, but we cannot
14 afford them. But then I start pointing out to them, you
15 say you need a community center at 4:00 in the afternoon.
16 But there is a school standing idle there. Open up your
17 school in the afternoon and evening. Let the city use the
18 school. Let's work together. Let's provide opportunity
19 with what we have.

20 You will find a police officer sitting in a
21 squad car. Get that police officer out of the squad car
22 and start letting him be a mentor to the kids in the
23 community so that they come to respect him as a police
24 officer. Get the social worker, the public health nurse,
25 the teacher, and the police officer to work together as a

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1 team, and you get the resources moving.

2 Make sure that we look at a child's life and
3 build on it: good parenting in the beginning, educare,
4 medical care, afternoon and evening programs, mentoring
5 programs for children at risk. It is going to save us so
6 many dollars down the road if we invest up front.

7 And finally, as an individual we can all do so

8 much. I was the mentor to a young woman in Miami. She
9 continues to keep in touch with me. She is working and
10 doing well. She sometimes hopes that she will go to law
11 school, but she is enjoying herself too much in terms of
12 being a self-sufficient human being who is making a
13 difference. We can be a mentor. We can make a
14 difference. We can participate in the Little League team.

15 On the plane down here yesterday, parents and
16 children were coming for a basketball tournament. Young
17 people, young parents who were spending time with their
18 children, but people who were also coaches, who
19 volunteered their time to make a difference in these
20 children's lives. And you looked at the children, their
21 first plane flight, having won the tournament, coming to a
22 new land, they were so excited, and you could see the
23 difference that each one of us can make in the life of a
24 child.

25 Some people say the problem is too big. But I

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1 beg to differ with them. I have watched this Nation
2 respond. In my own home town in August of '92, I watched
3 us respond to Hurricane Andrew. In those first 2 or 3
4 days the world seemed to have fallen apart, and fallen
5 away from us. There was no cohesion, there was no
6 community, there was no society. People looked stunned
7 and adrift. But then people came together. They started
8 directing traffic on their own, and delivering materials,
9 and bringing in water, and reaching out and caring and
10 helping. And that community is stronger and better and
11 more wonderful for it today.

12 And then almost a year ago, on the Sunday that
13 followed the terrible tragedy in Oklahoma City, I went and
14 watched the people of Oklahoma City start to come
15 together, to speak out against the violence that had
16 spawned that blast from hell, to work with law enforcement
17 to hold those who had done it accountable and to help the
18 survivors begin to heal.

19 After 3 years in this office, my faith in the
20 American people and their ability to deal with adversity
21 and their ability to deal with the critical problem of
22 youth violence and how we build the structures of society
23 for our youth, I have never been so sure that we can do

24 it. And together we can, child by child, block by block,
25 family by family, school by school, because lawyers and

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1 doctors and other people care, and are willing to do
2 public service to make a difference.

3 (Applause.)

4 (End of transcript.)

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