



WESTERN REGIONAL HATE CRIMES SYMPOSIUM

ADDRESS BY ATTORNEY GENERAL JANET RENO

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Taken before WENDY E. ARLEN

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PROCEEDINGS

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Thank you, Paul. Thank you and the United States Attorney's Office for hosting this conference. You have worked long, hard and very effectively against hate crimes, and you have served as a great example for U. S. attorneys across this country, for you have shown how law enforcement and communities can work together, can work to effectively eliminate hate, teach understanding and bring people together.

I especially want to salute this area, Sacramento, the county, the surrounding municipalities, the people I have met here this morning. You have come together, you have come together to deal with crime, you have come together to deal with hate crime and you have done it in a spirited, thoughtful way that can serve as a shining example for the rest of the nation. I salute the Sacramento police and sheriff's

department, District Attorney's office, California Commission on Peace Office Standards and Training, Sacramento Human Rights and Fair Housing Commission, the Simon Wiesenthal Center Museum of Tolerance, and Sacramento State University at Sacramento for making this conference possible. It is an example of what people can do when they come together.

Sacramento serves as a place for us all to learn, and here is the outline of what I think we must understand. If we are going to deal with the issue of hate crime in this country, communities must come together. Federal, state and local law enforcement must come together as equal partners in addressing the issue. It's not just the chief of police or the district attorney. The schools must be at the table. The citizens must be at the table. All the community must be there if we are going to solve this problem.

Secondly, this is not a short-term effort. Sacramento saw hate crimes in 1994, and it did not give up. It formed a working group, and it has pursued this issue because it knows it will not go away overnight. It requires a persistent effort that says, "We will not tolerate this. We will not let you participate in this community." It must be continuing, it must be persistent and it must be comprehensive, but our first question should be what can we do to prevent it. That's going to require the most appropriate exchange of information possible, an exchange of information that recognizes people's constitutional rights while at the same time provides information to police agencies in an ordered way that will permit them whenever possible to take steps to prevent it. We must work together if it happens to solve the crimes and to do it in an orderly way.

One of the great moments I remember as Attorney General is having the FBI special agent in charge, the local District Attorney and the local sheriff from Jasper, Texas, come to my office to talk about how they as partners were working together to bring a person to justice. Nobody was claiming credit. They were not interested in credit. They were interested in justice. A classic example that has been mirrored here by activities of law enforcement who want to seek justice and not credit for bringing it about.

But our question should be why in this nation that has come so far do we have to tolerate hate. What can we do to eliminate it in the first place? What can we do to raise our children so that they do not react

with violence and with hatred? What can we do to raise our children so that they know how to solve problems and to make a difference?

We have got to teach our children to appreciate diversity. We've got to teach our children to work together to solve problems, and again this morning in this city I am learning from people who are in education, police chiefs, rabbis, other people what you are doing.

We have got to spread that whole word across this country, but one of the hardest things for any community to cope with is senseless violence, where an attack appears to be based on hatred of the person's race, ethnicity, religion or lifestyle, where an attack is committed because the victims look different, practice a different faith or have a different sexual orientation. It is in those instances that America's most cherished ideals are undermined and threatened.

Sacramento is like many cities across the country, but I don't know of any that's done better than you, has shown itself to be stronger than the hatred and intolerance that fuels the bigots and the bomb throwers. Sacramento has stood up and persistently declared that the voices of tolerance and community and unity will overcome the voices of hate. You have set an example to the country.

The Nation has learned from you. The centerpiece of the department's hate crime initiative is the formation of local working groups in each of the United States Attorneys' districts. Here in the Eastern District of California and throughout the country, these task forces are working hard bringing together the FBI, the U. S. Attorney's office, ATF, other federal agencies, local law enforcement, community leaders and educators to coordinate our response to hate crimes. These working groups recognize that while local law enforcement has the primary role in responding to and pursuing these crimes, federal law enforcement can provide additional resources and can assist with training.

Again, the role of federal law enforcement should be we are here as partners, how can we help, what can we do together to ensure that justice is done. As a result of these efforts, the Department of Justice now has available three law enforcement training curricula on hate crimes for all levels of investigators. I am proud of these curricula. They offer each level of officers an A to Z handbook for

approaching hate crimes as well as a general overview of the topic.

One person asked me this morning how can we spread the word. The word should come down from Washington. I try to spread the word whenever I can, but a conference like this as well-attended by so many different people from so many different aspects of community life is the best way to spread the word up and down the Eastern District. In bringing together local, state and federal law enforcement as well as community leaders for education and training, you are providing for coordinated community effort so essential to effective hate crimes response.

Now, I go a lot of places and I talk to law enforcement and they tell me they're getting along, but on their faces it doesn't look like it. I had the best discussion I've had with federal, state and local law enforcement as we discussed this and other issues, and you should be so proud up and down this whole area of the efforts of law enforcement at every level. But then I was in a round table and the group was expanded and again there was an electricity and people were getting along and they wanted to exchange ideas, they wanted solutions and they wanted to find out what other places were doing. You have an energy in this community that can truly make a difference and can sometimes be far more effective than the federal government in spreading the word.

I know the value of coming together. I know the value of diversity. I was born and raised and served most of my public life in Miami. When I went away to college, it was a sleepy little tourist town. When I came home from law school permanently, it was on its way to becoming one of the great international cities with a tremendously wonderful Cuban community.

When the city's residents from different racial, cultural and religious communities came together to solve their problems, the problems got solved. When the many people of that community came together to recognize the greatness of each other's background, that community was blended into immeasurable richness. But when they argued with each other, when they fussed at each other, when they didn't talk to each other, we all hurt.

Now, when I go to communities and see neighbors that are isolated from each other, I do not see strength. When I go to communities and

see neighbors reaching across ethnic and social boundaries coming together to discuss the issues of crime, of improving the education of their children, of strengthening the local economy, I see a healthier, stronger, better community. I see a great community in the Sacramento area.

We must teach all of our children to rejoice in the magnificent diversity of this nation, to come together as you do. We must learn to appreciate each other's perspective and invest in each other's struggles, as you have done. In our own generation we have seen remarkable progress in our efforts to bridge the gap between the ideals of equality, opportunity and fair play enshrined in our founding documents and the harsher realities of daily experience for so many citizens.

But we know that we have not completed our journey when violent hate continues to ravage families and communities all over this nation. Yes, we have changed our laws, but we have not always changed our ways. Old habits die hard, attitudes evolve slowly, so we must follow the example of Sacramento, continuous, persistent, comprehensive efforts to eliminate hate crime and hate in our children and in all our citizens.

I have called on U. S. Attorneys across the country to reach out to state and local advocacy groups to explain the federal jurisdiction in these kinds of crimes, to explain the processes, to let them understand how these cases are handled. I also encourage local law enforcement to establish contact with the local field office of the FBI. By making these contacts, you will ensure that information about hate crimes and incidents reach the right authorities, that incidents of bias crime get focused attention and that victims of these crimes are encouraged to report them to a local prosecutor.

One of the things that we've learned is when you sit down with community members, meet with them, you work out the issues, but most of all you talk in good faith and with respect and you find that they become your greatest allies and strongest supporters.

It is imperative as we address the issue of race and hate crimes that we talk through what may be disagreements to reach our common goal of seeing that people who commit hate crimes are brought to justice, but that we do everything we possibly can to eliminate hate before it

produces hurt.

Our jurisdiction, however, in the federal government is currently limited, and for that reason last year President Clinton sent his Hate Crimes Prevention Act to Congress. This legislation has passed the Senate and we are very hopeful that this time it will become the law of the land. The act would extend our primary federal hate crimes law to cover crimes motivated by bias against sexual orientation, disability and gender and allow us to federally prosecute serious crimes against people because of their race, color or national origin regardless of whether a victim was engaged in a federally protected activity. These changes to current law are necessary if we are to effectively work together to prosecute egregious hate crimes cases throughout the country.

Let me give you an example. In 1994 in Fort Worth, Texas, three white supremacists went on a racially motivated crime spree in which they targeted and assaulted African-Americans. In one incident, these perpetrators knocked an African-American man unconscious as he stood near a bus stop. The federal government prosecuted the three men under federal law when state and local prosecutors did not bring state criminal charges, but the jury acquitted all three of the defendants on the federal civil rights charges. Some of the jurors revealed after the trial that although the evidence clearly proved the assaults were motivated by racial bias, there was no indication that the victim's participation in a federally protected activity was, as required by law, an additional motivation for the defendant's contact. That the government proved that the defendants went out looking for African-Americans to assault was not enough to satisfy the requirements of current federal law.

We need to work together to get that law changed so that we will have an opportunity to work together in the most complete way possible with state and local law enforcement when necessary.

But even with adequate laws, vigorous enforcement, we will have not done enough. Our efforts to confront the demons that breed hate and hate-based violence must begin very early. Just as hate crimes are a community problem, they require community solutions. Intolerance often begins not with a violent act, but with a small indignity, a bigoted remark, the African-American who is followed in the retail mall, the harassment of immigrants.

To move forward as one community, we must work against the stereotypes and the prejudices that spawn these actions. We must turn to our educators, to our religious leaders, to people who work with our children. We must engage our schools in the crucial task of teaching our young people moral values and social responsibilities. Educators can play a vital role in preventing the development of the prejudice and stereotyping that leads to hate crimes.

How do we do it? At the meeting I had this morning, I suggested we begin with the earliest of ages, zero to three, and I wondered if I'd get some quizzical looks. Instead, I got nodding heads, because that's the most formative time in a child's life, the time when the child learns the concept of reward and punishment and develops a conscience. That's when the child learns not to hit, how to solve problems when they are having a dispute. That's the foundation, but too many children do not have the supervision during this time that gives them the grounding and the framework upon which to grow and to know how to treat others. They don't learn to solve the problems, they don't learn to talk to each other, they talk past each other, they don't hear each other or they hear partially, and in hearing partially, they hear a slight that was not meant as a slight.

Sometimes they are alone. Where does hatred start? Oftentimes it starts with someone who is alone, confused and unloved. Hatred starts with somebody who doesn't feel they have control over their life and who lashes out at others. Hatred starts with somebody who doesn't have enough self-confidence to talk back in a respectful way but instead lashes back. The child who is put down at nine years old in school by somebody who teases him comes home and too often he comes home without supervision, without somebody to help him deal with the hurt and feelings that he has.

I say to you, we don't have to accept children having this type of life. We don't have to say that this is a fact of our life. We can make the difference. We can make a difference here in Sacramento and across this land.

For example, during the early 1990's increased racial tensions at a middle school in Volusia County, Florida, forced school officials to explore ways of reducing racial tensions among youth. They sought assistance from the sheriff's office, from Stetson University and the Florida sheriff's youth ranch and the police athletic league. They

came together in a project they called Project Harmony.

In its pilot phase, teachers selected 20 eighth grade male students who were considered natural leaders and who had been involved in racial conflicts. The young men received six hours of classroom change in violence diversions and multi cultural awareness, and they attended a weekend retreat at one of the sheriff's ranches following a cultural diversity curriculum. Each leader was paired with another student leader of a different ethnic background. Through experiential activities and through conflict resolution and facilitated focused dialogue these students began to lay aside long-held negative stereotypes and appreciate each other as individual souls.

The results were dramatic. Within one month, the number of racial conflicts dropped from 10 to four, and none of the project participants were involved. Project Harmony students had better grades, measurably greater awareness of cultural diversity as well as better group building and conflict resolution skills.

The program also had an effect on the entire school. After the project was implemented on a full scale, racial incidents declined by 30 percent, suspensions declined by 25 percent and overall discipline referrals declined by 31 percent.

These results demonstrate that just as you have to be taught to hate, you can be taught to be understanding. To work with people from different backgrounds, try to see through their eyes. This program shows us that a child that is free from hate is a child freer to focus on school, on band, on sports, on all other teenage activities.

We should do more, much more in this country to teach young people to appreciate and value each other and each other's diversity and to bring understanding.

Educators can play a vital role and it was exciting again this morning to have the first question out of the box from an educator saying how can we work together with the federal government, how can we find funds, what can we do to develop programs in our schools that can make a difference. I will go back to Washington to get back in touch with her and try to expand and give and share in a clearinghouse everything that is being done in this country.

But in a way, it is a larger question that we talk about. The question is, how do we end the culture of violence in this country. The child who hates and who acts out in violence may be the child who saw his parents in domestic violence. The child who sees his father beat his mother comes to accept violence as a way of life. In recent days you had a number of domestic violence homicides in this area.

We can't do this piece by piece. We can't deal just with hate crime or hate violence or domestic violence or gang violence. We've got to look at the whole picture and say that violence in and of itself is intolerable. We have got to teach people how to resolve their conflicts without knives and guns and fists. We've got to use Violence Against Women Act monies to make sure that states and communities develop the best possible systems through courts and through prevention programs with the medical community that end violence in the home.

We've got to look to that youngster who is violent and take steps before it is too late so that educators can share with others and find solutions before that child ends up in a juvenile court, and we have got to realize that some of the hate crime we have seen has been the product of mental illness. We have learned so much about how to treat mental illness in these last 40 years. Let us not let it go to waste. Let us look at the whole picture.

Toronto had 100 gun homicides in a five-year period this decade. In the same period Chicago, a city of similar size, had over 3,000. We do not have to accept violence or hate. We can do so much if we use the examples of Sacramento and this whole area to come together, to never give up, to be persistent, to reach out, to bring understanding to an entire community.

Sometimes public service can be a bit difficult. Sometimes you get figuratively cussed at, fussed at and beaten around the ears. But when you see the spirit and the energy that I have seen this morning represented by your law enforcement, your citizens, all I can say is public service is so worthwhile, and to work with you and to address these issues is one of the most important things that we can do. I salute you. You are an example for the nation. Don't stop now.

(Applause.)

(Question from the audience.)

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: One of the areas that I have learned about is when I say implement programs on high school campuses, it's going to be the communities that do it, but I am anxious to find out what's working and not working across the country. And one of the things that we need to do is to develop web sites, clearing houses and exchange of information so that people will know. If I can get a card or something from you, I'll let you know what we have in terms of high schools and what we plan to do.

(Question from the audience.)

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Not that I know of in terms of dollars, but I think that both local law enforcement and federal law enforcement would be happy to confer with you on what steps might be taken.

(Question from the audience.)

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Right now, the Federal Bureau of Prisons is at a high overcrowding rate, and we are looking at that as well as what we call the SCAT monies which are for state agencies.

Let me tell you what my bias is. As the local prosecutor in Miami back in the '80's, I used to think, hey, wait a minute. This is the federal government's responsibility. Why do I have it? At the same time we are all significantly enriched as a nation of immigrants. I don't see monies increasing significantly as we deal with budget caps in Washington, but I want to try to do everything I can to get these offenders out of your prisons as quickly as possible in an orderly way through deportation and through immediate deportation upon the completion of their service. They are not all satisfactory answers, but I sometimes have shared your frustration.

(Question from the audience.)

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: We are making some progress, not as fast as I would like, but it has passed the Senate and I think people's voices -- I can't ever suggest to people that they talk to Congress, but I can suggest that you speak out here.

(Question from the audience.)

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: One of the things we want to do is, as we assist, we want things to get started and then ultimately stand on their own. There should not be the long-term dependence on the federal government. I am very intrigued by the notion of the Center For Understanding, and I am going back to Washington to see how we might work together, what might be available in terms of research. I'm particularly interested in research on what is the most effective way of teaching a child not to hate, what works and what doesn't work, what programs have been evaluated, how can we share that information, what can be done, what are the other -- one of the members of the group this morning urged us to consider 10 points that might identify problems about to emerge. How can we do that without labeling, what can we do, how can we more effectively share information?

I do urge that however you set it up it be not just for the community, but that it use the web and other means of communication to share this information across the country. So I'm going to be back in touch with people on that to see just what we can do. I can't make any commitment except that I'm exploring it and I'm very interested.

(Question from the audience.)

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: It is going to be different from each jurisdiction. In one state the state law may not be such, and the sheriff may say and the local District Attorney may say because of this evidentiary law it's better that it be prosecuted in federal court, and we're just going to have to look to see which jurisdiction is best.

What I want to do is make sure that we make a decision in partnership with the local District Attorney and the local sheriff, just as we did in Jasper where we said we will help you in every way that we can and we will work with you as a partner. We're not interested in credit, we're interested in seeing that justice is done; and that is the message that Paul has sent and that Ally has sent in Los Angeles and that I am trying to make sure is sent around the nation.

(Question from the audience.)

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Send me some information on it first so I know

what I'm talking about.

(Question from the audience.)

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: GRATE is an ATF program and a Treasury Department program and Treasury is in a different section of the appropriations bill than we are. So we don't have any influence over their funding, but what we are trying to do is to develop every way that we can provide alternatives to gangs. One of the most encouraging signs that I have seen lately is a program of the Department of Education, HHS and the Department of Justice in which we have combined funding streams and the President has just announced grants to a number of cities for the Healthy Children/Safe Schools grants that could provide for additional programs such as you talk about.

Again, what we're trying to say is that communities understand their needs and resources better than we do, and we're trying to shape grants so that they give the community some of the flexibility to deal with the problems that they've got.

(Question from the audience.)

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I think I'm the one that should be thanking you and all the citizens of Sacramento and up and down the long valley and the whole of the Eastern District and those that have come from elsewhere. You really give me just another example to take back to Washington of the greatness of the American people, of their commitment and their dedication. When it comes together as something like this, it is really pretty powerful.

(Applause.)

(Whereupon the Attorney General's remarks were concluded at 11:00 a. m.)
