

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25

SPEECH BY THE
HONORABLE JANET RENO,
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES
AT THE
WILEY A. BRANTON, SR. AWARDS LUNCHEON OF THE
WASHINGTON LAWYERS' COMMITTEE FOR
CIVIL RIGHTS AND URBAN AFFAIRS

- - -

Tuesday, May 25, 1993
Presidential Room
Capital Hilton
16th and K Streets, N.W.
Washington, D.C.

ALDERSON REPORTING COMPANY, INC.
1111 FOURTEENTH STREET, N.W.
SUITE 400
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20005
(202) 289-2260
(800) FOR DEPO

P R O C E E D I N G S

[1:47 p.m.]

1
2
3 GENERAL RENO: Ms Reid, I think they just did
4 what you told them to do.

5 [Laughter.]

6 Thank you ever so much for that generous
7 introduction and that wonderfully warm welcome.

8 When I walked in here, I just marveled. Nobody
9 can call Beltway lawyers cynical when this many come to a
10 luncheon in support of civil rights, and I think it's just
11 wonderful.

12 I think lawyers who engage in pro bono service
13 to protect those who cannot help themselves are truly the
14 heroes and the heroines of the legal profession. It's
15 fine to get paid and get a big verdict, but to go out and
16 represent people, sometimes in unglamorous ways, is really
17 what lawyering is all about. And as a new member of your
18 community, I thank you and I look forward to working with
19 you both individually and through the Department of
20 Justice in every way I possibly can.

21 One question we're going to ask in everything we
22 do in the Department of Justice is is it the right thing
23 to do. I look forward to working with you in deciding
24 what the right thing to do is and then trying to make sure
25 that we achieve that right.

ALDERSON REPORTING COMPANY, INC.
1111 FOURTEENTH STREET, N.W.
SUITE 400
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20005
(202) 289-2260
(800) FOR DEPO

1 As I have said before, what the right thing to
2 do is is sometimes a subject of fierce disagreement and we
3 may have discussions and disagreements, but I think most
4 of the time we will move forward together as a unified
5 effort, trying to secure justice for all in this community
6 and in this Nation.

7 Back in 1962, June of 1962 -- actually, it was
8 May of 1962, I went home to Miami, went to a law firm
9 where I was told I was going to have a summer clerkship,
10 was kept away and was told that people would get back to
11 me. They got back to me and said they didn't have a
12 position for me. One of the partners about six months
13 later told me it was because I was a woman.

14 14 years later that law firm made me a partner
15 and this June I will introduce the first woman chief
16 justice of Florida, who will swear in the first woman
17 president of the Florida Bar.

18 About seven years ago, I brought suit as State's
19 Attorney on behalf of the residents of public housing
20 projects with 12,000 public housing units in Dade County
21 against Dade County to declare public housing in Dade
22 County a nuisance and obtain an injunction to abate that
23 nuisance. We were successful.

24 You see the Kerner Report and its discussion of
25 violence, and you see efforts that have been undertaken to

ALDERSON REPORTING COMPANY, INC.
1111 FOURTEENTH STREET, N.W.
SUITE 400
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20005
(202) 289-2260
(800) FOR DEPO

1 try to avert that violence. I don't mean to cast cold
2 water on my efforts or yours, but I suggest to you that
3 now is probably the most important time in American
4 history for lawyers to rally and to understand that, for
5 all the advances that women have made, there are more
6 women and children living in poverty as a proportion of
7 the population than in all of American history.

8 As we have made advances in terms of ending
9 discrimination in housing and in improved conditions of
10 public housing, we have a significant number of our people
11 sleeping on the steps of the building of the Department of
12 Justice. We have people who cannot find housing in our
13 own city.

14 And most of all, with the Kerner Commission and
15 all those efforts to address violence, we have
16 unprecedented violence in America and probably the
17 greatest single crime problem we face is youth crime and
18 youth violence. It is a phenomenon that we have not seen
19 and that requires that we all rededicate ourselves as
20 lawyers in addressing the issues facing this Nation.

21 Thus, I would like to respectfully offer you a
22 challenge. As I read about the Lawyers' Committee, it's
23 the Washington Lawyers' Committee on Civil Rights and
24 Urban Affairs, created in 1968 to ensure civil rights and
25 to address the issues of poverty. But as I read through

ALDERSON REPORTING COMPANY, INC.
1111 FOURTEENTH STREET, N.W.
SUITE 400
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20005
(202)289-2260
(800) FOR DEPO

1 the years, the "Urban Affairs" seems to drop off from the
2 title. I looked at the material that I found at my table.
3 On one "Urban Affairs" is there; on the other it's not.

4 Most lawyers aren't trial lawyers. Most
5 lawyers, even trial lawyers, don't get their problems
6 solved in a courtroom. We like to go to court. It seems
7 heroic to go to court. We think we're the new, great
8 advocates, better than anything we've seen on TV, and we
9 come home exhilarated by having gone to court. And when
10 we win we think we're a little lower than the angels and
11 it's for a good cause.

12 But the lawyers who legitimately solve their
13 clients' problems keep them out of court. The lawyers who
14 really begin to address the problems of their clients
15 address them without recourse to our courts, although that
16 recourse is absolutely essential in providing leverage.

17 I think that you and our colleagues around the
18 Nation have made it clear that our courts can ensure
19 justice, but we're not doing it often enough and we're not
20 offering our courts answers as to how to to reweave the
21 fabric of society around too many people for whom the
22 whole sense of community and maybe sense of family has
23 fallen away, leaving them bare and exposed.

24 We see an ever-increasing number of children in
25 poverty. The figure has gone from 20 percent a little

ALDERSON REPORTING COMPANY, INC.
1111 FOURTEENTH STREET, N.W.
SUITE 400
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20005
(202)289-2260
(800) FOR DEPO

1 over a year ago to over 21 percent of American children
2 living in poverty. Something is terribly wrong with such
3 a prosperous nation having the greatest percentage -- the
4 age group with the greatest percentage living in poverty
5 being children.

6 When we look at young American families under 30
7 and we see the terrible decline in the median income, we
8 understand the troubles we face for the future.

9 I would like to challenge you to take the
10 creative, innovative, bold abilities that exist in this
11 room, in the law firms and individuals represented in this
12 room, and turn them to creating new structures, new ideas
13 that can provide a framework around those who have been
14 cast out.

15 We can begin with specifics. I struggled in
16 Miami to make sure that all pregnant women who could not
17 afford it had prenatal care available to them. We focused
18 on children zero to five, children of the working poor who
19 were not eligible for Medicaid, whose parents didn't have
20 health care benefits.

21 We tried to get doctors involved. The doctors
22 wanted to be involved, but they were concerned about being
23 sued. They wouldn't do Medicaid work.

24 Somehow or another, lawyers and doctors working
25 together could create bold new systems on a local basis,

ALDERSON REPORTING COMPANY, INC.
1111 FOURTEENTH STREET, N.W.
SUITE 400
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20005
(202) 289-2260
(800) FOR DEPO

1 using waivers or other provisions of the law to allow us
2 to create a system where doctors could volunteer and
3 lawyers could work with doctors to make sure that the
4 people who want to help others can help them and that we
5 can develop a systematic means of delivering health care
6 to anybody based on people who want to help.

7 Child support. I did child support and divorce
8 work in Dade County and I kept stumbling through
9 regulations and misunderstandings. Lawyers can address
10 the problem and see what we can do in terms of how support
11 works so that we can avoid the courts, so we can minimize
12 the problems, that we can somehow or another provide the
13 procedures whereby that lady can know at the end of the
14 month that she's going to have the rent paid, the money to
15 pay the rent.

16 A year ago this past April, we developed a
17 neighborhood team composed of community members, highly
18 respected, an HRS social worker, and a public health
19 nurse, along with a community organizer dedicated by HUD.
20 These were four public sector people who met together as a
21 team in a public housing development to start family by
22 family, trying to re-empower the residents of this public
23 housing development.

24 When I first walked into that development, you'd
25 walk in and all the doors were closed and people looked at

1 you suspiciously if they did peer out around the door.
2 They didn't think anybody was going to help them.

3 Slowly, they began to see change. Slowly, they
4 began to see the neighborhood cleaned up. Slowly, they
5 began to see their child brought back from the edge of
6 delinquency by a police officer and a social worker that
7 cared. And they started coming out. They started coming
8 to meetings. They began to believe in us.

9 I went to Harvard Law School and in some
10 instances I couldn't advise these ladies about HUD
11 regulations, the food stamp regulations, the Medicaid
12 regulations, and every other regulation that seemed to hem
13 them in rather than free them up and provide service.

14 But we tried, and we asked various Federal
15 agencies to come to meetings with us and they started
16 coming on a weekly basis. There'd be somebody from HUD
17 there and somebody from food stamps and somebody else from
18 AFDC. And we started talking about the problems that
19 these women faced.

20 They were beginning to believe in us, but they
21 were puzzled as to how come we didn't know all the
22 answers. One lady said: I got myself a minimum wage job,
23 but I'm going to lose my benefits pretty soon and I'm
24 going to be worse off than if I hadn't gone to work in the
25 first place; why should I bother to go to work?

1 I checked and checked and checked and finally
2 found some little program that would give her an extra
3 stipend so that she could work, and she wanted to work and
4 she carried forward.

5 But somehow or another we have got to make sure
6 that lawyers come to that table in every community around
7 the Nation to help people work through the bureaucratic
8 red tape that people get snarled with, whether it be
9 social security or an auto insurance problem or an AFDC
10 problem or a Medicaid problem.

11 Most of this can be worked out if we have
12 creative solutions rather than going to court, and unless
13 we work these things out and make the law as simple for
14 people and easily accessed we are never ever going to
15 address the problems that caused this Nation to burn in
16 1968.

17 I had one lady that figured out how she could
18 run a lawn service. She had it all figured out. She had
19 a volunteer truck, she was ready to go. But she was told
20 by HUD management that she couldn't do it because she
21 didn't have this insurance, this certificate, this
22 license. And after she listened to him for a while, she
23 threw up her hands in disgust.

24 We got a lawyer working on it, a volunteer
25 lawyer, and the last I heard as I left Miami I think it

ALDERSON REPORTING COMPANY, INC.
1111 FOURTEENTH STREET, N.W.
SUITE 400
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20005
(202) 289-2260
(800) FOR DEPO

1 might happen. She might get that lawn service going. I
2 suspect she'll be doing very, very well in three or four
3 years.

4 People have to look at 18 to 30 year olds.
5 There are a whole bunch of people out there who had every
6 single right guaranteed, they've had some of the best
7 public defenders available, they've gotten due process
8 from our courts, they have one prior record, they have two
9 prior records, oftentimes for drug involvement. They're
10 25 years old. They've been drug-free for a year.

11 They want to go to work. They want to make
12 something of themselves, and every time they knock on a
13 door the door is closed because of their prior records.
14 One of them, rather than going to court to end
15 discrimination, one of them needs a lawyer to help them
16 figure a whole new way to persuade people, whether it's a
17 community board that says, look, we'll trust this guy, or
18 some other system we can use to give these people a chance
19 to get off on the right foot, or otherwise we're going to
20 lose an entire generation.

21 I would like to challenge the Department of
22 Justice, myself, the Washington officials, the people of
23 Washington, and this Committee to see if we couldn't take
24 Washington block by block or neighborhood by neighborhood
25 and start working as individual lawyers block by block to

ALDERSON REPORTING COMPANY, INC.
1111 FOURTEENTH STREET, N.W.
SUITE 400
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20005
(202) 289-2260
(800) FOR DEPO

1 reach out and help people create a fabric around those
2 less fortunate, a fabric based on democracy, a fabric
3 based on people working together, empowering our
4 community, making a difference, so that when we come back
5 25 years from now we will see our children with a future,
6 our children, our great, great numbers of our children
7 with a future, rather than now, living in poverty, our
8 children with a future that ensures them a constructive,
9 healthy, human life, rather than what we see now.

10 Let us all work together in whatever capacity we
11 have to establish a national commitment to the poor, that
12 will ensure every child in America parents strong enough,
13 healthy enough, financially able enough to take care of
14 them, that will provide prenatal care for every pregnant
15 woman, that will provide preventative health care for our
16 children -- something is terribly wrong with a nation that
17 says to a 70 year old person, you can have an operation
18 that will extend your life expectancy by three years, and
19 yet we turn to a child of a working poor person who has no
20 health care benefits and say, sorry, we can't provide you
21 with preventative medical care because your parents make
22 too much money to be eligible for Medicaid -- that will
23 provide for all of our children safe and constructive
24 care.

25 Lawyers have got to understand that the age from

ALDERSON REPORTING COMPANY, INC.
1111 FOURTEENTH STREET, N.W.
SUITE 400
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20005
(202)289-2260
(800) FOR DEPO

1 zero to three is the most formative time in a person's
2 life, in the development of the concepts of reward and
3 punishment, the development of a conscience. All that we
4 do later will not make a difference unless we have whole
5 and strong human beings capable of understanding
6 punishment and capable of understanding right from wrong.

7 Let us develop conflict resolution programs in
8 our schools. All the rights in the world aren't going to
9 make any difference if that young man dies on our streets
10 at age of 15 because we haven't addressed the issue of
11 violence, and conflict resolution programs for peaceful
12 resolution of disputes between children can be
13 instrumental in the solving of the riddle.

14 Let us look at our public schools and let us
15 challenge ourselves to represent a 13 year old who says:
16 Somehow or another I want to graduate from high school
17 with the skills that enable me to earn a living wage, but
18 I don't know how to, I don't know how to get the work
19 experience during the summer, I don't know where to go, I
20 don't know how to blend school and work experience so that
21 I can do that.

22 Let us challenge our youngsters. I look at the
23 Civilian Conservation Corps monuments around this Nation
24 and I think of the opportunities we gave our young people
25 in one of the hardest times in our history. This past

ALDERSON REPORTING COMPANY, INC.
1111 FOURTEENTH STREET, N.W.
SUITE 400
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20005
(202) 289-2260
(800) FOR DEPO

1 Saturday I went to Sweetwater, Texas, to celebrate the
2 fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the Women's Air
3 Force Service Pilots, who flew B-25 bombers and I saw all
4 those 70 or 80 year old ladies who remember how they
5 evolved and helped their Nation during the wartime, and
6 some of them still wore the original uniforms.

7 They were so proud. They still felt the spirit
8 and the pride and the honor that they had had going off to
9 the war. One had served behind Patton's army in North
10 Africa as an Army nurse, and to the day she died she
11 always felt that she had done something for her country
12 and she was so proud.

13 Let's create some programs in our communities
14 where kids can serve our Nation on our streets. But let
15 us remember that if people are given half a fighting
16 chance, they can do so much. Lawyers across the country
17 and here in Washington, with the Department of Justice and
18 with private law firms, have got to join together to mold
19 a new spirit that creates new opportunity for all, based
20 on one concept: Trust the people.

21 [Applause.]

22 [End of speech at 2:04 p.m.]

23

24

25

ALDERSON REPORTING COMPANY, INC.
1111 FOURTEENTH STREET, N.W.
SUITE 400
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20005
(202) 289-2260
(800) FOR DEPO