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Speech of Attorney General Janet Reno

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THE CLEVELAND BAR ASSOCIATION
37TH ANNUAL LAW DAY LUNCHEON
MAY 3, 1994
STOUFFER TOWER CITY PLAZA HOTEL
11:30 A.M.

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Presented in Conjunction with
The Task Force on Violent Crime
and
The City of Cleveland

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1 MS. RENO: Thank you, Mr. Hammer.

2 Thank you, Mr. Mayor.

3 I was a Brooklyn Dodger fan, and my
4 first introduction to Cleveland was the fact
5 that if I had to have a favorite team in the
6 American league, it was Cleveland, and Bob Lemon
7 and Bob Feller and Al Rosen, who I think is from
8 Miami, and Lou Boudreau were the people that I
9 pulled for as they fought the Yankee's.

10 I didn't come to Cleveland until about
11 four years ago when I came to recruit the fine
12 lawyers that the State of Ohio law school
13 produced, many of whom have served with great
14 distinction in my office. I saw them beginning
15 to rise up.

16 I haven't been here in two years but,
17 Mr. Mayor, the difference in this city is so
18 exciting, it's catching. Just as you drive
19 through, feel the difference, look at the
20 stadium, look at the buildings, look at the
21 parks. You have built and rebuilt a really
22 splendid city.

23 Shortly after I became Attorney
24 General I started hearing about what you were
25 doing in Cleveland. I've heard more about it

1 ever since in terms of the task force on violent
2 crime, the initiatives of the Bar in bringing
3 people together, and since 1981 you have shown
4 that people working together can make a
5 difference in terms of crime and in terms of
6 giving our children a future. Government
7 doesn't have to do it by itself. The people of
8 Greater Cleveland have shown that working
9 together you can have an impact.

10 With your early drop out in violence
11 prevention program, your youth resource center,
12 the youth gang intervention, the miracle village
13 where you have mothers and young children at
14 public housing, giving them guidance and
15 support, community policing and your substance
16 abuse initiative are all examples that I am
17 citing around the nation of what can be done
18 when people care about their community and come
19 together.

20 Mayor, the creation of your office
21 since January 1 for violence reduction in crime
22 prevention is an example of how important it is
23 to pull the different entities together, the
24 prosecutor, the police, the schools and all
25 concerned.

1 And Attorney General Fisher, you have
2 been magnificent in leading this effort. You
3 were my introduction as Attorney General of Ohio
4 and what a wonderful conference you had in
5 Columbus this past summer and so much of the
6 good advice that you have given me as we have
7 met with attorneys general.

8 But the sense I have from the Attorney
9 General, from the Mayor, from Mr. Walker is that
10 it's the people of Cleveland themselves that are
11 making a difference. People that are
12 volunteering, that are reaching out, that are
13 doing something creative, and each one of you
14 here who have done so serve as an example for
15 people around the nation.

16 You have indicated and made clear that
17 it's not people in Washington with programs that
18 are going to solve the problems by themselves.
19 It's a community with people who care, who
20 understand the needs and resources of Cleveland,
21 who can develop plans based on what's here in
22 Cleveland and that we as the Federal Government
23 should come together with you as a partner, not
24 telling you what to do but trying to supplement
25 and enhance and enhance your efforts and provide

1 you with expertise and experience from other
2 jurisdictions that can support and assist you.
3 We're determined to do that.

4 One of the finest people that I've met
5 in Washington since I got there is the Secretary
6 of Health and Human Services, Donna Shalala who
7 says, of course, we should be working together.
8 Cleveland shouldn't have to come to five
9 different federal agencies. The federal
10 agencies should join together in a comprehensive
11 effort to support cities like Cleveland
12 throughout the country.

13 In terms of anti-violence law
14 enforcement, initiatives in health care, welfare
15 reform, family leave, the Family Leave Act, the
16 family preservation program, there are federal
17 initiatives under way that must be designed with
18 communities in mind. They can support your
19 efforts in the community, but what are the
20 ingredients of how we approach this partnership,
21 what are the ingredients of a federal community
22 partnership?

23 First, and you have exhibited it here,
24 trust the people. Trust the people enough to
25 know that if you give them the tools to do the

1 job up front, they can be self-sufficient. They
2 can be strong and constructive. Trust the
3 people enough to hold them accountable.

4 It was so wonderful last night to hear
5 Elizabeth Niehaus read her essay at the American
6 Bar Association's Just Resolution Conference and
7 to realize that students would be honored here.
8 Students have so much to say. The young people
9 of America have so many good ideas, and we must
10 listen to them and involve them as well.

11 But for the Bar Association to take
12 this role that it has and to commit this
13 afternoon to this initiative speaks volumes for
14 lawyers.

15 For you who want to bash lawyers I'm
16 sorry. I love lawyers and I love the law, but
17 there is nothing I hate more than a greedy or
18 indifferent lawyer, and it has been so exciting
19 to see the American Bar Association putting
20 children first, to see bar associations across
21 the country forming children's commissions,
22 reaching out to see what lawyers can do to make
23 a difference in the legislature, committee
24 courts, in the city council, on the streets in
25 the communities, in the schools.

1 Lawyers can make a difference because
2 they understand what is written on the east wall
3 of the building of the Department of Justice in
4 Washington. The common law is derived from the
5 will of mankind issuing from the people frame
6 through mutual confidence and sanction by the
7 light of reason. For too many people the law is
8 not a reality, and all of us must join together
9 to make sure that every resident of Cleveland,
10 everyone in this country understands and
11 appreciates the law and feel, indeed, that the
12 law is derived from the people. We have got to
13 look at each person in the context of the
14 family. There is no better care givers than a
15 strong family.

16 I will never forget walking into the
17 nursery at our public hospital to try to figure
18 out what to do about crack-involved mothers and
19 their infants. It was as the crack academic hit
20 Miami, we didn't know what to do. Children were
21 in bassinets because we had no place to send
22 them. They had not been held or talked to
23 except when changed or fed, and across the room
24 there would be children severely deformed
25 through birth defects but with parents with her

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1 around the clock, and she was beginning to
2 respond through her crippling pain with human
3 responses and smiles and gurgles, and you
4 understood what parenting and family meant.

5 In all the efforts that we undertake
6 in terms of crime prevention and in building a
7 future for our children we must put the family
8 first and take every step we can through family
9 preservation programs, child support enforcement
10 and family and crisis centers to help family
11 stay together and give their children a chance
12 to grow. We must begin to focus this nation's
13 attention on the fact that it should be
14 prevention and not crisis.

15 This is a nation that has for too long
16 waited to provide tertiary care at a lot more
17 cost than provide medical care up front. This
18 is a nation that would rather grapple with the
19 problem of homelessness after it's occurred than
20 provide prevention programs up front.

21 We should shift the focus to giving
22 people the tools to do the job up front and
23 trusting them and knowing that they can succeed
24 if they're given a handhold in this world.

25 But one of the most important points,

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1 and this is where all people of Cleveland must
2 come together, is to make sure that we look at
3 child development and family rearing as a
4 continuum.

5 The great head-start program isn't
6 going to work that well if the child comes to
7 the head-start program without an adequate
8 foundation in the years of zero to three, and
9 all the work of the best head-start program
10 won't succeed if there's no program for that
11 child left unsupervised afternoons, in the
12 evenings and if there's no skill training that
13 can lead them into developing an opportunity to
14 earn a living wage.

15 We've got to look at the key
16 intervention points along the way and bring it
17 together. We have got to understand that we're
18 all in this together.

19 When I first became State Attorney
20 people would say, Janet, that's not my problem.
21 I'm a businessman. The doctors out in the
22 suburbs who say that's not my problem, I don't
23 take care of those patients. Unless we
24 understand that it's everybody's problem, we're
25 not going to have the jobs, the people to fill

1 the jobs. They won't have the skills to fill
2 the jobs to maintain this nation as a first-rate
3 nation.

4 If the senior citizens say it's not my
5 problem, we've got to educate them to the fact
6 that pensions won't be worth the paper they're
7 written on unless we have a work force that can
8 continue to fuel this economy.

9 Prosecutors understand that unless we
10 make an investment in children today, we will
11 never, ever be able to build enough prisons 18
12 and 20 years from now for children who have been
13 neglected along the way. We are all in this
14 together.

15 Lawyers can get more focused than any
16 group of people I've ever known except maybe
17 doctors, and they get into their little
18 specialty and they stay focused on that.

19 Lawyers have got to break beyond the
20 bounds of the law to link with doctors and
21 public health, criminal justice initiatives.
22 Police officers must work with school teachers.
23 School teachers must work with neighborhood
24 leaders and activists. Preachers must work with
25 police officers. All of us must work together

1 and make a difference putting the people that we
2 are serving as central to every effort that we
3 undertake, and we have got to understand that
4 living is an extraordinarily difficult job in
5 this world, but it can be a lot easier if we
6 live by simple values, and those simple values
7 can be taught by reading books to young
8 children, by setting examples, by opening our
9 doors and making our children understand that
10 there is a future.

11 Now, some people tell me, Janet, the
12 past is just too big. It's too daunting.
13 Ladies and gentlemen, we are Americans. We have
14 stood against the greatest tyranny of the
15 world. This task is not too daunting for people
16 like the people of Cleveland who care.

17 Some people say we've lost the
18 generation, and I say to you never, ever give up
19 on any young people in America and never, ever
20 give up this fight.

21 In the essay portion of this book on
22 Law Day Charles Bohatka, whose description of
23 what it's like growing up in Cleveland, told us
24 that young men and women can grow up in
25 Cleveland and every other community being able

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1 to walk to the store, walk to the school and not
2 worry about their kid brother.

3 Every single one of us have got to
4 renew our efforts, our dedication and our
5 commitment to make our community safer
6 throughout this nation.

7 It's not that daunting if you take it
8 and look at each type of violence and understand
9 how we approach it and what we do and then you
10 just do it simple. You take it child by child,
11 family by family, block by block, community by
12 community and build the safer Cleveland and then
13 city by city and state by state and build a
14 nation that gives its children a future where
15 they don't have to worry about who is around the
16 corner, where they can look to working in the
17 city, where they can look to getting a job that
18 can give them a living wage and give them an
19 opportunity to raise the family the way they'd
20 like to raise the family. It's possible if we
21 only recognize the strength in each of us to
22 make a difference, and you have done it here in
23 Cleveland.

24 What are the building blocks to this
25 effort? First of all, we've got to make sure

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1 that we do everything in community planning to
2 make sure that our children are old enough, wise
3 enough and financially able enough to take care
4 of their children.

5 Surely this nation can come to grips
6 with this problem of babies having babies, and
7 we can ensure that parents will be strong and
8 wise and ready for the task. We can do it
9 through teaching parenting skills courses in our
10 schools, in our churches, in community centers
11 and even, indeed, in our prisons.

12 I have been through a prison where a
13 nursery was placed in the prison. Women who had
14 lost children to dependency proceedings outside
15 prison doors for the first time were learning
16 the skills of raising children. They were
17 better, stronger mothers with the aid of
18 nurseries, with the aid of child development
19 experts in those prisons. We take it child by
20 child, family by family, and we can make a
21 difference.

22 We must focus on the problem of
23 domestic violence. When I first took office as
24 State Attorney in Miami too many people said,
25 Janet, that's just a domestic. We have got to

1 let people understand that unless we end
2 violence in the home, we will never end it on
3 the streets and in the communities of this
4 nation.

5 Lawyers linked with doctors in
6 emergency rooms and with police officers can
7 lead the way to developing domestic violence
8 centers, to educating everybody in the criminal
9 justice system on how important it is to
10 interrupt this cycle of violence, to reaching
11 out to doctors and participating with doctors in
12 intervention programs that avoid the trauma in
13 the first place.

14 But all of us have a special
15 responsibility in our work place and in our law
16 firm of helping parents to put their children
17 first. We can do it. If we can send a man to
18 the moon, certainly we can structure our law
19 firms and our work place that can give with
20 modern technology our parents time to spend
21 quality time with their children.

22 We have got to make sure that every
23 child in America has preventative medical care.
24 Something is terribly wrong with the nation that
25 says to a person 70 years of age you can have an

1 operation that extends your life expectancy by
2 three years and then we turn to the working poor
3 family with three children and we say your five
4 year old can't get preventative medical care
5 because you make too much money to be eligible
6 for Medicaid and you don't have health care
7 benefits. We have got to make health a priority
8 for our children.

9 You say, well, look at all that debate
10 on health care reform. Let's try to get health
11 care reform, but we can do something about this
12 up front.

13 We can, with doctors linking with
14 public health nurses in developing better
15 primary care initiatives in the community, make
16 a difference, nurses and doctors volunteering,
17 police officers coming with them to make sure
18 that they are safe. We can do so much if we
19 reach out and understand that each one of us can
20 undertake the skills we possess and make a
21 difference for one other person.

22 We've got to make sure that the
23 children of America are properly supervised,
24 loved and cared for and taught in the ages of
25 zero to three, and we too often forget these

1 years.

2 But as I tried to wrestle with the
3 problem of crack involved babies, the doctors at
4 Jackson Memorial Hospital taught me something
5 that I've never forgotten, and in this wonderful
6 and incredible year that I've had an opportunity
7 to serve the American people nobody can refute
8 that zero to three is the most formative time in
9 a person's life, the time the person learns the
10 concept of reward and punishment and develops a
11 conscience. Fifty percent of all learned human
12 response is learned in that first year of life.
13 What good are all the programs if we don't build
14 a foundation there.

15 And again we can renew our commitment
16 in our work places to make sure that there are
17 child care provisions made in our churches. And
18 everyone, we can make sure that we focus on
19 children at these ages and make a difference in
20 their lives.

21 But again and again I hear people
22 telling me but, Janet, I don't feel safe going
23 in some communities you ask me to go into.
24 People are going though because they are going
25 with community police officers, an effort that

1 the task force supported long ago, an effort
2 that has proven itself throughout America, an
3 effort that involves police officers with their
4 community to develop the trust, to develop the
5 spirit of the community, to develop an
6 understanding of what the community's problems
7 are and what the community's priorities are. It
8 helps in problem solving, but it also helps in
9 creating a new and different atmosphere in our
10 community.

11 A child in Dallas told me that police
12 have been her enemy, but now with these
13 community police officers that she had come to
14 know they were her friends. They were her
15 mentors.

16 Young men from Dorchester told me the
17 same. Young people in South Central Los Angeles
18 in an elementary school want to be a cop just
19 like the community police officer in their
20 area.

21 We are forcing a new vision of law
22 enforcement, and community police officers are
23 on the cutting edge of bringing communities
24 together rather than dividing them, but we need
25 to provide more mentors because young people

1 again and again who have been in trouble tell me
2 what I really needed most to keep me out of
3 trouble was somebody to talk to and something to
4 do in the afternoons and in the evenings.

5 Each of us can reach out. They want
6 somebody to talk to who understands how
7 difficult it is to grow up. They want somebody
8 to criticize them when they deserve it and does
9 it the right way without hassling them,
10 demeaning them and putting them down. We want
11 somebody who will give them a pat on the back
12 when they do a good job, and they want somebody
13 who's consistently there for them. Each one of
14 us can make a difference in family.

15 I became a mentor for a young lady who
16 graduated from high school just before I became
17 Attorney General and is now at Cal. Rad.
18 University. Each one of us can make a
19 difference.

20 Just think of what would happen if
21 every single person in this room became a mentor
22 for a child at risk in America and then every
23 one of the 95 thousand people in the Department
24 of Justice did the same thing and then every one
25 of the whole Federal Government did the same

1 thing and then the government of the State of
2 Ohio and Cleveland sit down child by child,
3 family by family. We can make a difference. We
4 can make a difference in supporting our schools,
5 our schools that have one of the toughest task
6 of anybody in the world, trying to keep up with
7 the safety of the school, with the educational
8 challenges, with teaching conflict resolution,
9 with teaching children how to resolve conflict.

10 One of my favorite stories is of an
11 84-year old man who stood up at a meeting and
12 said, Do you know what I do three mornings a
13 week for three hours each morning? I said no.
14 He said I volunteer as a teacher's aid, and a
15 young woman stood up next to him and she said,
16 I'm the first grade teacher for whom he
17 volunteers and the kids can't wait for their
18 time with him because he challenges them far
19 beyond my ability to do so, and the kids with
20 learning disabilities can't wait for him because
21 he has the patience of Joe, and I see
22 volunteering to help younger students and
23 tutoring younger students and participating in
24 athletic programs.

25 I don't care whether you're 84 or 18

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1 or 8. Each one of us can reach out and make a
2 difference. We must prepare our young people
3 for the jobs of the future by developing skills
4 that can give them an opportunity to earn a
5 living wage. With schools working with
6 businesses and law firms we can make a
7 difference.

8 I watched a young woman come into my
9 office awkward, absolutely ill at ease in the
10 work world. She didn't know anything about how
11 to read the paper, about checkbooks, about how
12 to compose a letter. Two years later, because
13 one prosecutor took her under his wing and
14 worked with her as she volunteered, that young
15 woman had won an all expense paid scholarship to
16 the University of Miami, and some day she will
17 be a judge in Miami.

18 Each one of us can reach out and give
19 somebody a work opportunity that can make a
20 difference. We can adopt a community. We can
21 adopt the block. We can reach out and volunteer
22 in a homeless shelter. We can raise money,
23 donate a computer, take our clout to City Hall,
24 get electric lights turned on, get heat turned
25 on when the school's heat is not working right.

1 Through pro bono assistance we can seek to
2 reform the laws, not just win our battles in the
3 courtroom. We can do so much in terms of
4 supporting our employees and letting them know
5 that they should have the opportunity to
6 volunteer as well. We can work in our own
7 neighborhood. We can speak out, we can talk for
8 children and we can make a difference, but where
9 we must remember to do most of our efforts is to
10 remember our own children.

11 I think raising children is the single
12 most difficult thing you do. About nine years
13 ago a friend died leaving me as the legal
14 guardian of her 15-year old twins, a boy and
15 girl. The girl was in love. I've learned an
16 awful lot about raising children in the last
17 nine years. It is the single most difficult job
18 I know. It takes hard work, love and
19 intelligence and an awful lot of luck, but it is
20 the most rewarding thing that anybody can do.

21 My mother worked in the home. She
22 taught us to play baseball and to bake a cake,
23 to appreciate Beethoven's symphonies. She
24 taught us how to play fair. She spanked us.
25 She loved us with all her heart, and there is

1 child care in the world that will ever be a
2 substitute for what she was in our world.

3 I look at other mothers and children
4 going off to work and trying to get the homework
5 done and the dishes washed, and they don't have
6 quality time with their children. For us all to
7 make a difference we can start in our homes by
8 reaching out to make sure that we give our
9 children the time they need to grow.

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CERTIFICATE

I, Karen E. Fisher, do hereby certify that as such Reporter I took down in Stenotypy all of the proceedings had in the foregoing transcript; that I have transcribed my said Stenotype notes into typewritten form as appears in the foregoing transcript; that said transcript is the complete form of the proceedings had in said cause and constitutes a true and correct transcript therein.

Karen E. Fisher

Karen E. Fisher, Notary Public
within and for the State of Ohio

My commission expires August 29, 1994.

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