

ORIGINAL

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UCLA SCHOOL OF LAW
44TH COMMENCEMENT

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ADDRESS TO THE GRADUATES
JANET RENO, ATTORNEY GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES

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SUNDAY, MAY 21, 1995
2:00 P.M.
DICKSON PLAZA
UCLA CAMPUS

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UCLA SCHOOL OF LAW
THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, LOS ANGELES

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1 (Presentation of the UCLA Medal by Chancellor
2 Young.)

3 CHANCELLOR YOUNG: The medal is accompanied by a
4 citation which you will receive as well as the medal. The
5 citation reads as follows:

6 Throughout a distinguished legal career
7 hallmarked by selfless devotion to public service, Janet
8 Reno has personified excellence and scrupulously adhered to
9 the highest ideals of professionalism and integrity. She
10 inspires the American people as a forthright champion of a
11 safe and just society, winning plaudits not only as a
12 lawyer but as a leader.

13 Born in Miami, Florida, Janet Reno was a debating
14 champion at Coral Gables High School, and earned a
15 bachelor's degree in chemistry at Cornell University in
16 1960. She graduated from Harvard Law School in 1963, and
17 embarked on a path that would lead three decades later to
18 her historic appointment as the nation's first female
19 Attorney General.

20 (Applause)

21 After several years in private practice and staff
22 assignments with the Florida Legislature and the Dade
23 County State Attorney's Office, she was appointed to the
24 post of State Attorney in 1978, and was subsequently
25 returned to that office five times by the Dade County

1 electorate.

2 Her adroitness in meeting the State Attorney's
3 challenges drew the attention of President Bill Clinton,
4 who on March 12, 1993 made her the 78th Attorney General of
5 the United States. At the helm of the venerable Department
6 of Justice, Janet Reno is making a unique and indelible
7 imprint. Her guiding vision is of a society unblemished by
8 violent crime, civil rights abuses, environmental blight,
9 impoverished families, and neglected children.

10 Propelled by unwavering belief in the power of
11 the community, she takes her message directly to the
12 American people, calling for cooperative relationships with
13 law enforcement authorities, and programs to insure the
14 well-being and protect the future of the nation's youth.

15 For distinguishing the office of Attorney General
16 with excellence, compassion, and the utmost probity, and
17 for being a tenacious champion of justice on behalf of all
18 Americans, we proudly bestow upon Janet Reno the UCLA
19 Medal.

20 (Applause).

21 ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Thank you, Chancellor
22 Young. Thank you, Dean. And thank you to this great
23 university for this extraordinary honor.

24 The wide range of disciplines, the issues that
25 this university confronts, are an example for all

1 institutions of higher learning. The issues that this law
2 school grapples with, and I've already heard a couple, the
3 tenacity with which you approach the hard issues of living
4 today, is an example for law schools across the country.

5 This is a remarkable student body. I've had the
6 opportunity to chat with some, to sit and look out on the
7 great diversity, to reflect on this variety of voices from
8 so many different places that have come together to learn
9 and to go forth from here to serve others.

10 Since I was five foot eleven when I was 12 years
11 old and was on the basketball team, I also have to
12 acknowledge your other great institution.

13 (Applause)

14 But from this institution, from this great land
15 of the West, so rich in its heritage, and yet so forward-
16 looking in its vision as it leads us into the 21st Century,
17 you are going to draw strength and courage and wisdom for
18 the rest of your life.

19 How do I know that? Because it was a little over
20 two years ago that I came to Washington, very suddenly and
21 very unexpectedly. I came there to assume the challenges,
22 one of the most different challenges that any lawyer could
23 face. But I was not alone. There were spirits and
24 memories and people who were with me every step of the way.

25 There was my law school dean, who had encouraged

1 women to go to law school, and who, after I graduated, made
2 a point each time he saw me at a Bar Association meeting to
3 come across and to congratulate me on what I'd been doing
4 or to encourage me to go further.

5 It was my American History professor in Cornell
6 who taught me about the joys of government service.

7 It was my grandmother talking me to sleep.

8 It was my babysitter who called me from all the
9 way across the country to tell me that he was proud of me.

10 There were so many people. It was my brother
11 calling me to tease me when I get too puff-headed, and make
12 sure that I come down to earth.

13 (Laughter)

14 So draw strength from this place. Draw strength
15 from the marvelous friends I see sitting here together
16 today, and go forth. And yes, you can change the world.
17 There is no doubt about it.

18 But you will change the world if you be known for
19 who you are: not for what your law firm's name is, not for
20 what your house is, not for the dollars you make, but for
21 who you are, what you stand for, and what you do for
22 others. This great law school has given you a firm
23 foundation in service.

24 It has given you a firm foundation in the law, in
25 the knowledge that the law is not paper. It's not stuff

1 written on paper. It's not process. It is human beings
2 and how they have come together to address the great issues
3 that mankind has to grapple with.

4 There is on the wall of the Justice Department's
5 building a statement chiseled into the stone, and it says:
6 "The common law is derived from the will of mankind,
7 issuing from the people, framed by mutual confidence, and
8 sanctioned by the light of reason."

9 We have got to make the law real for all
10 Americans once again. There are too many people who do not
11 have access to lawyers and to the justice system, and for
12 too many people in this country, the law means little more
13 than the paper it's written on.

14 Go out and make sure that as you stand before a
15 graduating class 30 years from now as the Attorney General
16 of the United States or as the President of the United
17 States, you can say that all people in America have access
18 to our legal system.

19 (Applause)

20 But the people in this country, most
21 unrepresented, most voiceless, in too many institutions in
22 this country, are our most precious possession: our
23 children. And one of the great issues that we face in this
24 nation, and that you will face as you practice law and
25 assume a leadership position in this nation, is:

1 How do we insure to our children a future in
2 which they can enjoy the rights and freedoms we hold so
3 dear? How can we insure them a peaceful society without
4 the violence in which children are killing children? How
5 do we construct a society that gives our children, all our
6 children, a chance to grow in a strong and positive way?

7 Now, I have heard of so much service here, of so
8 many people who are already setting an example for others
9 by reaching out to help others, that perhaps I don't have
10 to explain. But there are some of you who may say, fine;
11 what does this have to do with me? I intend to go with a
12 great law firm and practice corporate law; what do I care?

13 Some of you may want to be entertainment lawyers,
14 and you say, well, we'll entertain them.

15 (Laughter)

16 The answer is, we're all in this together. The
17 answer is that the destiny of our children is our destiny.
18 Let me tell you what I mean.

19 In 1978, when I became a prosecutor, I tried to
20 establish a juvenile division that was not Siberia, a
21 juvenile division that attracted the best lawyers who
22 wanted though make a difference in childrens' lives.

23 But as I looked at the division, as I was proud
24 of the people in it, I also looked at pre-sentence
25 investigations. And as I looked, I saw steps along that

1 child's life in which society could have intervened much
2 earlier, at far less cost to that child, at far less cost
3 to the government, and made a for more positive
4 contribution to that child's future.

5 I recognized that unless we started early, unless
6 we intervened early, unless we gave that child a childhood
7 that could build a firm foundation, we would never be able
8 to build enough juvenile justice institutions or enough
9 prisons to deal with that child or other children similarly
10 situated.

11 And so we tried to focus on intervention efforts
12 in terms of dropout preventions and early neighborhood
13 intervention programs. But then the doctors took me to the
14 public hospital to try to figure out what to do about
15 crack-involved infants and their mothers. And the child
16 development experts started talking to me about zero to
17 three, when a child learned the concept of reward and
18 punishment and developed a conscience. And they told me,
19 what good will all the prisons be 18 years from now if this
20 child doesn't understand punishment?

21 They taught me that 50 percent of all learned
22 human response is learned in the first year of life. What
23 good are the great institutions? What good is what we do
24 in terms of trying to provide diversity 15 years from now
25 if we don't give the people the foundation upon which to

1 build their learning?

2 The Council for Economic Development, about the
3 same time, came out with a report called "Children in
4 Need." The Council is reflective of businessmen across
5 this country, businessmen what put their name on the line
6 to say that unless we invest in children 0 to 5, we are not
7 going to have a workforce with the skills that can fill the
8 jobs that can maintain America as a first-rate nation.

9 Doctors started pointing out to me that unless we
10 started providing health care for children early on, we
11 were going to bring health care institutions to their knees
12 because we failed to provide preventative care up front.
13 Law firms in some instances started losing clients because
14 companies started folding or fading away to other
15 communities because there was not a workforce.

16 Youth violence, teen pregnancy, drop outs,
17 unskilled graduates, drugs, gangs: all of symptoms of a
18 deeper problem in American society, that for too long
19 America, too many of us in America, have forgotten and
20 neglected our children.

21 Just look at the violence. One in five personal
22 crimes of violence is committed by a juvenile. From 1984
23 to 1993, arrests of juveniles more than doubled for murder
24 and nonnegligent manslaughter, an increase of more than ten
25 times the rate of increase for adults in the same period.

1 And young people are increasingly the victims of
2 crime. In 1992, more than 2,600 young people under the age
3 of 18 were murdered. That's seven children murdered a day.
4 That is something that we should not tolerate in this
5 community. But it is again an example that for too long,
6 America has forgotten and neglected its children.

7 We preferred to invest in buildings and roads and
8 superstructures and technologies, and we have forgotten how
9 to invest in our people. Our future depends on us pulling
10 together, to invest in childrens' lives and in their
11 future, in their safety, to give them a safe and
12 constructive future.

13 What does that have to do with you? Lawyers are
14 the most creative, innovative, boldest people in the world
15 when they've got a mind to be. They can also be very
16 provincial and selfish when they want to be, and I don't
17 like those kind of lawyers.

18 (Laughter and applause)

19 How can we do it? You're going to be practicing
20 so many different types of law, how can you focus on
21 childrens' interests?

22 First of all, one of the first steps we've got to
23 take is to make sure that children of America have strong
24 and healthy parents, supporting family preservation
25 legislation, supporting child support enforcement

1 mechanisms.

2 Now, lawyers don't like to do that. I can
3 remember when I first started practicing, and lawyers
4 didn't like to fuss with child support cases. They didn't
5 make very much money; they were often contentious; and they
6 just kept spinning them off.

7 So government had to step in and set up a child
8 support mechanism, because the lawyers weren't doing it the
9 right way. And I participated in that government effort,
10 and I can tell you that handling child support enforcement
11 cases can be very discouraging.

12 When the lady calls you at 7 o'clock in the night
13 on a Sunday night at home to scream at you because she
14 can't pay her rent because she hasn't received her child
15 support, you can imagine what it's like. But when somebody
16 comes up to you five years later and says, "You helped my
17 mom get my child support, and you helped me go to the
18 University of Miami," you understand what lawyering is all
19 about.

20 It's not the fancy great litigation. It's
21 people. It's children. It's representing people who need
22 services.

23 (Applause)

24 Some of you are going to handle domestic
25 relations cases. You're going to be divorce lawyers. And

1 there are some wonderful, wonderful, wonderful lawyers that
2 represent people when they're splitting apart, and they do
3 it with kindness and sensitivity.

4 But too many people litigate it and forget the
5 children, and forget how they can work together with
6 opposing counsel to try to minimize the impact of this
7 separation on children.

8 Yesterday I was in a restaurant in San Jose,
9 California, when our waitress came up to us and said, "I've
10 been thinking about going to law school, because I want to
11 work against domestic violence. But people tell me they
12 don't need anybody in that area."

13 And I said, "Here is my telephone number; we
14 desperately need lawyers who want to do something about
15 domestic violence." Unless we end domestic violence in the
16 home, we are never going to end it on the streets of
17 America, for the child who sees a parent beat the other
18 parent is going to accept violence as a way of life.

19 (Applause)

20 And lawyers have got to use that creativity, that
21 boldness, that fearlessness, to say, "Well, if somebody
22 won't give me a job, I'll go out and learn how to do it and
23 help people anyway on my own." We have got to make the law
24 real for people.

25 As you go to the law firm, to the prosecutor's

1 office -- I've met my new colleagues at the Department of
2 Justice -- challenge every place you go, and ask them, what
3 are you going to do to make this workplace family-friendly
4 for my family?

5 What are you going to do about telecommuting?
6 What are you going to do about flex time? What are you
7 going to do about paternity and maternity leave? What are
8 you going to do to let me achieve my professional goals
9 while at the same time putting my family first?

10 Ask those questions, because more and more law
11 firms are realizing that those questions are being asked,
12 and they count greatly to so many, many lawyers across this
13 land.

14 Now, there's a lot of debate about health care;
15 but if we're going to make an investment in children, we
16 ought to make sure that they're healthy. First of all,
17 it's common sense. It's going to save money down the line.

18 But secondly, too many lawyers get involved in
19 their particular issue of health care, whether it be
20 medical malpractice or they're representing a doctor or
21 they're defense lawyers; it just gets ridiculous how
22 single-issue we become.

23 Let's acknowledge the fact that we have got to
24 have health care reform so that all Americans can have
25 access to preventative medical care, and that our children

1 can be assured a healthy future.

2 Something is wrong with a nation that says to its
3 individual 70 years of age, "You can have an operation that
4 extends your life expectancy by three years," and then we
5 turn to the family of working poor and say, "Your child
6 can't get preventative medical care because you don't have
7 insurance and you don't have cash that can pay for it."
8 That's just plain silly, and lawyers should speak out and
9 start talking with common sense about how we deliver
10 services that make sense.

11 (Applause)

12 Those doctors told me that zero to three was the
13 most formative time in a person's life, and I've been
14 quoting their information ever since. I have been
15 challenging the press to say, if you've got anybody that
16 disagrees, let me know. And in the two years I've been in
17 Washington, nobody has disagreed.

18 If those years are so important, as we look to
19 educational reform, let us make sure that all the children
20 of America have not just education from K through 12, but 0
21 through 5, that Head Start is expanded, that child care is
22 provided in a safe and constructive way.

23 And that goes back to, what is your law firm
24 doing about child care? What is your Department of Justice
25 doing about child care? How can we achieve both

1 professional development and at the same time make sure our
2 children are okay?

3 Make sure you go to your children's school. I
4 try to go to my -- the school I adopted in Washington on
5 the average of once every two weeks. I don't see many
6 parents there. Too many lawyers get too busy. They get
7 caught up with their billable hours; they get caught up
8 with meeting a client rather than going to see their child
9 perform at the school assembly. And principals tell me
10 again and again, the thing they miss most is parent
11 involvement.

12 Don't just criticize the public school system.
13 Get involved. Use your talents as a litigator, use your
14 talents as a negotiator, to help streamline the bureaucracy
15 and make our schools as effective an instrument for
16 learning as possible.

17 But something has happened. When I went to
18 school, to the public schools, I can still tell you the
19 name of all my elementary and high school teachers because
20 they meant so much in my life. There is something very
21 wonderful about the teaching profession, and there is
22 something very wrong in a nation that pays its football
23 players in the six digit figures and pays its
24 schoolteachers what we pay them.

25 (Applause)

1 And I can't just talk, and you can't just clap;
2 we've got to go try to do something about it.

3 But you are doing something about it. I feel so
4 good being here today talking to you, because you, I think,
5 know exactly what I'm talking about. As I understand it,
6 Professor Bergman's street law class has been teaching law
7 and different issues of relevant law to high school
8 students in this area, and the Black Law Students
9 Association has an adopt-a-school program, and La Raza has
10 provided career counseling and opportunities for so many
11 young people in our schools. This is what can make a
12 difference in the lives of our young people. Law firms are
13 providing internships for disadvantaged youth, and making
14 such a difference in their lives.

15 Some lawyers are suspicious of police officers.
16 But there's a new breed of police officer coming out; we're
17 seeing them on the streets of America: community police
18 officers who want to serve their community, who want to
19 work with young people, with the principal of the school,
20 with the parks and recreation specialist to make a
21 difference.

22 That police officer needs help. He's being asked
23 by the grandmother who has the child that has been left
24 with her, "What do I do? How do I get my welfare?" He
25 needs somebody to answer those questions. He needs

1 somebody to answer the questions of the tenant who says,
2 "This landlord won't do anything for me, and the plumbing
3 hasn't worked in ages." There are so many police officers
4 who are the people closest to the citizens in a
5 neighborhood that need your help, and can make that
6 difference.

7 But there are going to be children that still get
8 in trouble. All of us as lawyers have got to start
9 focusing on the juvenile justice system and give it the
10 resources and the tools to do the job.

11 Too many times I see lawyers in state
12 legislatures lobbying for more judges, but not for more
13 judges for the juvenile division. Too many times I've seen
14 lawyers in the state legislature lobbying for more prisons,
15 but not detention facilities that can give young people a
16 positive chance while at the same time providing security.

17 If we care about this nation, we have got to
18 help, as lawyers, shape the juvenile justice system so that
19 it can serve, so that it can punish that serious juvenile
20 offender, but punish them fairly, certainly, and firmly.

21 But not just punish; realizing that that young
22 person is coming back to the to the community sooner rather
23 than later, and it doesn't make any sense to send them back
24 to the community without job training, without addressing
25 the drug problem, without providing them aftercare and

1 followup and support. Let's start demanding that the
2 system make sense, and that we preach it in a common-
3 sense way to save our children.

4 (Applause)

5 But if you're not interested in doing any of
6 that, just find any child that needs help and make a
7 difference in their life. Think of what would happen if
8 all the lawyers in the world became responsible for just
9 one child who needed help, and started giving them a hand
10 along the road to a positive future.

11 But while you're doing it, do not forget the
12 people closest to you. I remember my afternoons after
13 school and in the summertime. My mother worked in the
14 home; my father worked downtown. My father didn't have
15 enough money to hire somebody to build a house, and one
16 afternoon, mother said she was going to build it, and she
17 did, with her own hands.

18 But the other thing that she did, more
19 importantly than that, was to teach us to play baseball, to
20 appreciate Beethoven symphonies, to play fair, to love her
21 favorite poets. She loved us with all her heart and soul,
22 and there is no child care in the world that will ever be a
23 substitute for what that lady was in our life.

24 (Applause)

25 I look at the young lawyers in the Justice

1 Department. I'm reminded of my young lawyers at home in
2 Miami. I saw them struggle to get the breakfast on the
3 table, the children off to school, come to work, try a
4 case, prep witnesses after the trial, get home at the end
5 of rush hour, put dinner on the table, get the children
6 bathed, the homework done. Saturdays they ran errands;
7 Sundays they collapsed, and then started to prepare for
8 trial again. And suddenly, those children are going to be
9 grown before they know it.

10 Stop, and make sure that you spend time with
11 them. Raising children is more difficult than practicing
12 law. Ten years ago, a friend died, leaving me as the legal
13 guardian of her 15-year-old twins, a boy and a girl. The
14 girl was in love, and I've learned an awful lot about
15 raising children in the last ten years.

16 (Laughter)

17 It is the most rewarding thing I've ever done.
18 To see her off to college, and then to see her graduate cum
19 laude in three years, and on both occasions have her throw
20 her arms around my neck and say, "Thank you, I couldn't
21 have done it without you" -- don't miss the opportunity,
22 and have fun while you're doing it.

23 (Applause)

24 (Attorney General Reno's commencement address was
25 concluded.)