

<title>10-04-96: Keynote Address at the 50th Anniversary of Unc-Charlotte</title>

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50TH ANNIVERSARY OF UNC-CHARLOTTE
KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY THE HONORABLE JANET RENO
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES
OCTOBER 4, 1996
10:00 A.M.

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1 Thank you, Karen. And thank you for this great
2 honor, to be with you today. Few institutions of
3 higher learning have done so much for so many in just
4 50 years. Think about these 50 years not in terms of
5 brick and mortar and plans and dreams, but think about
6 these 50 years in terms of real people. Think of the
7 people whose lives have been touched by what this
8 institution has done for them. The soldiers that came
9 home from the war and wondered what their future would
10 be became lawyers and doctors and helped build this
11 splendid city. The people who lived in Charlotte and
12 wondered how they would ever, ever go to college
13 because it was too expensive were given futures because
14 of this institution. And now, from across the country
15 and around the world, you give people future and a
16 sense of hope.
17 In these 50 years you have been a partner to a
18 splendid city that has become one of the great cities
19 of this nation, a city with a proud and magnificent

20 history that only makes more history for the future.
21 And you have been a part of it. But in these 50 years
22 you have made your mark on the communities where your
23 graduates live, where they work. I walk into the
24 Attorney General's office in Kentucky and there is
25 Jennifer Street Shaif, one of your graduates committed

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1 to public service because of the traditions started
2 here at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte.
3 And Karen Popp has been such a splendid public servant.
4 She is what a lawyer should be; committed to doing the
5 right thing and calling it like she sees it, and
6 committed to public service -- as you heard in her
7 words -- in part, because of what she learned here.

8 For these first 50 years I would like to thank and
9 honor the faculty, the students, Bonnie Cone, the
10 people who made this all possible -- the secretaries,
11 the people who built it, the people who cared, the
12 people who have contributed -- for you have created a
13 model for all institutions of higher learning in this
14 country by your academic excellence and, more
15 importantly, by your commitment to community.

16 Part of your mission says it best: As a
17 metropolitan-oriented university, UNC-C offers
18 instructional, research and public service programs to
19 provide for the educational, economic and social and
20 cultural advancement of the peoples of North Carolina
21 through on- and off-campus programs and collaborative
22 relationships with the institutional resources of the
23 region. Well, in these 50 years you've gone far beyond
24 your mission, because you have provided for the
25 advancement of peoples not just in North Carolina but

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1 around this country and around the world. Your mission
2 serves as a model. But as you have reached across
3 state boundaries and across oceans, you have also never
4 forgotten the communities that you originally meant to
5 serve. Just look at your contributions: the Urban
6 Institute, which makes university scholarships and
7 faculty expertise available to local governments and
8 public and private agencies to help solve urban
9 problems in the surrounding communities; the Ben Craig
10 Center, which is a program geared towards nurturing the
11 development of more than 60 start-up companies in the
12 region. You have not forgotten all of the people, for
13 through your Office of Continuing Education and
14 Extension and your Charlotte Uptown Branch you offer a

15 wide variety of workshops and short courses and
16 conferences for long life learning.

17 But most important, you continue to instill in
18 your students a commitment of public service. This
19 morning I had a magical half hour with about 30 of your
20 students, students who are dedicated to their
21 community, who told me how they serve by tutoring, by
22 providing food, by participating in Habitat for
23 Humanity, by dreaming of what they can do for their
24 community when they leave. There was a spirit in that
25 room -- a boldness, a sense of innovation -- that

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1 should make everyone who has anything to do with this
2 university proud. And it is that tradition that marks
3 this institution as so distinct.

4 You have done so much, but there is more to do.
5 We must encourage in all the people of this country --
6 not just students, but graduates -- a commitment to
7 community service. Too many people tell me: It takes
8 too long to drive across town to volunteer; I work too
9 hard to volunteer; I can't make a difference if I
10 volunteer. These students I spoke to today and so many
11 of your graduates are an example that public service
12 can make all the difference.

13 And public service and working for government can
14 be a magnificent tool. So many people tell me: Why
15 would I want to work for government? Well, I've been
16 cussed at, fussed at and criticized, but there is no
17 more rewarding experience than using the tools of
18 government the right way to help people help themselves
19 and become self-sufficient. In the course of your
20 careers -- those of you who have graduated and those
21 who are yet to come -- I urge you to consider public
22 service. The great lawyer who leaves his law firm to
23 offer his expertise in county government, if but for
24 four years, can make such a difference by bringing
25 boldness and a sense of innovation and a new

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1 perspective to what he does.

2 But in these next 50 years I would like to suggest
3 to you, respectfully, some challenges. Harness the
4 magic, the energy, the excellence that this institution
5 reflects, to spread it across this country to help
6 communities across this country prepare for the 21st
7 century. My first challenge is to teach the
8 communities of this nation, tiny and large, how to live
9 in a world where borders have shrunk and everything has

10 international implications.

11 Through your Office of International Programs you
12 have done so much to enable students and faculty to
13 gain a better appreciation of the global issues of
14 today's economy and culture. But if communities are to
15 thrive, they must understand that we are and must live
16 in a world today as if the whole world was our
17 immediate neighbor. As I look, as Attorney General, at
18 the impact of international crime on communities across
19 this nation, as I watch a man able to sit in a kitchen
20 in St. Petersburg, Russia and on his computer steal
21 from a bank in Chicago, I understand that the Attorneys
22 General of the 21st century are going to have to deal
23 not just with local and national crime, but
24 international crime, as it affects every community.

25 We're going to have to address the issue of

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1 migration. My great-great-great-great grandfather came
2 to Mecklenburg County in the late 1700s an immigrant, a
3 person who was the beneficiary of this nation's
4 tradition of immigration, a nation of immigrants. And
5 we are going to have to understand that the world
6 changes and shifts and moves, and we're going to have
7 to be prepared for it. You're addressing the issue of
8 the economy, but as we look at trade agreements we
9 realize that trade and the economy will no longer be
10 solved just domestically, that if we are to be a
11 thriving nation and our communities are to thrive in
12 this world we must understand how we participate in
13 international, economic and trade features.

14 And the environment. I came to this land for the
15 first time this morning and looked out and understood
16 why my grandmother always wanted to come back to
17 Mecklenburg County. The trees are so beautiful, there
18 is such a greenness, there is such a wonderful,
19 luxuriant, green and thriving quality to this great
20 land of the piedmont plateau. And yet, you cannot
21 protect them unless we join forces together around the
22 world to make sure that the environment around the
23 world is protected.

24 So, as my first challenge to you: Let the
25 University of North Carolina at Charlotte lead the way

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1 in showing the smallest communities of North Carolina
2 and this great urban metropolis where you partner how
3 to live in the world where we must all live together.

4 The second challenge relates to technology. How

5 do we master it? We live in one of the most exciting
6 times in the history of the world. The technological
7 changes that have given us new tools stagger the
8 imagination, but they convert vanity to prayer. They
9 give us the opportunity to communicate and they open
10 new doors, but they also give us the opportunity on the
11 Internet to defraud, to convey hatred, to convey ideas
12 that most of us don't want to hear. How can we deal
13 with these issues while remaining true to our
14 constitution, freedom of speech, to due process? How
15 do we make sure that our communities -- the small
16 communities -- are able to continue to live the way
17 they want to live, using the world as their neighbors
18 without having the impact of the Internet and
19 technology to create adverse impact that the community
20 does not support?

21 How do we master technology? That will be your
22 great challenge. It will be teaching all your students
23 not to be afraid of the technology, not to run away
24 from it, but to master it and to understand it. It
25 will be working with others across the country, law

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1 schools and others, to figure out how we control
2 without violating any of our precious constitutional
3 rights; how we protect our privacy and yet, at the same
4 time, respect the privacy of others. These are the
5 challenges that this institution can face because you
6 have done so much in just these 50 years.

7 The third challenge to this wonderful, wonderful
8 university is to teach people how to live with each
9 other without a lot of fuss; to teach people how to
10 talk to each other without talking past each other but
11 at each other, so that people understand what each
12 other is saying. We put it in fancy terms. Lawyers
13 call it "alternative dispute resolution." School
14 teachers call it "conflict resolution." Community
15 advocates call it "dispute resolution," and other
16 people call it "negotiations." I call it getting along
17 without knives and guns and fists in schools, without a
18 lot of expensive lawsuits and lawyering, without a lot
19 of disputes in business, and without a lot of community
20 fraction among different ethnic groups.

21 Now you say: What can a university do there?
22 When I went to law school they didn't teach
23 negotiations. Since then, they've started teaching it.
24 And the Department of Justice has recently developed
25 alternative dispute resolution programs that are

1 proving very successful and law schools are starting to
2 teach how to resolve conflicts. But if I came back in
3 50 years, if I could live that long, I'd love to see
4 the University of North Carolina at Charlotte as the
5 leader in teaching Americans how to live together
6 peacefully and respectfully and with honor towards all
7 of our people.

8 But there are further challenges, because no
9 matter what we have all done to try to make things
10 better, there are still problems in this great nation.
11 Youth violence is slightly down, but youth violence
12 continues to be one of the great crime problems we face
13 in this nation. Too many young people drop out of
14 school, too many people have their lives ruined, too
15 many people do not have the opportunity ever to
16 experience the wonders of this great institution
17 because we fail to invest in community and children and
18 in family up front.

19 I have a challenge for you: If I came back, if my
20 ghost came back in 50 years, I'd like to make sure that
21 you had incorporated a course that Glen Hutchinson is
22 going to design for the chancellor called "Not Only How
23 to Serve the Community But How to Organize and Build
24 Communities That Can Become Self-sufficient and Insure
25 All Their Children and All Their Families Real Equal

1 Opportunity to Participate As Constructive Citizens."
2 That's going to take some doing because it's easier
3 said than done. But with Glen's permission, I will
4 give you some outlines of that course.

5 How do you organize doctors and lawyers and this
6 institution and community colleges and the religious
7 communities and the parks and recreation specialists to
8 give our children an opportunity to grow in a strong
9 and positive way? You start by making sure that every
10 parent is strong and healthy and that that child has
11 prenatal care -- because it's going to save you a lot
12 of money down the line -- if you don't care about
13 anything else. It's going to be to insure that parents
14 know how to raise children. Raising children is the
15 single most difficult thing I know to do.

16 It's going to be to insure that all our children
17 have proper preventative medical care. Something is
18 terribly wrong with a nation that tells its person 70
19 years of age "You can have an operation that extends
20 your life expectancy by three years," and then turns to

21 the child of a working poor person and say, "Sorry, you
22 can't get preventative medical care because you're
23 making too much money to be eligible for Medicaid and
24 you don't have health insurance." Let us reach out for
25 our children. Let us learn how, and let this

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1 institution take the lead in developing courses that
2 can organize to make sure that every child has proper
3 supervision and sound educare in those formative years
4 of zero to three.

5 Let us focus on our schools, not just the schools
6 of Charlotte, but the schools in the small, rural
7 counties where children want to grow up to be somebody
8 and want to make a difference but there are not enough
9 teachers and there's not enough resources to give those
10 students an opportunity to participate. Let us again
11 focus, and if I come back as a ghost in 50 years, let
12 the University of North Carolina at Charlotte take the
13 lead in changing this nations's attitude, an attitude
14 that now pays its football players in the six digit
15 figures and pays its school teachers what it pays them.

16 Rather than waiting for our children to get into
17 trouble, to drop out, to be truant, to become
18 delinquent, let's start investing in solid education
19 for them from the beginning. Let us make sure that
20 they have afternoon and evening programs that can make
21 a difference in their lives and provide supervision as
22 both parents or single parents are working.

23 I heard today of so much that students are doing
24 as tutors, as mentors. Let this tradition go forth
25 after graduation, so that we do not forget how to tutor

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1 and how to mentor every single one of our children.
2 Let us make sure that our children are prepared for the
3 jobs of the future. So many want to be self-
4 sufficient, but they are graduating from high school
5 without the skills necessary to fill the jobs to
6 maintain this nation as a first-rate nation. Let the
7 University of North Carolina at Charlotte accept the
8 challenge to join as partners with our high schools and
9 make sure that we develop educational systems that can
10 send our youngsters out to be prepared and to be
11 prepared to go on to college if they want.

12 But all of that won't make much sense if we don't
13 do everything we can, and that leads me to my fifth
14 challenge. I think about my afternoons after school,
15 and in the evening, and the summertime. My mother

16 worked in the home. She taught us to play baseball,
17 she taught us to appreciate Beethoven's symphonies,
18 She punished us hard sometimes, and she loved us with
19 all her heart. She taught us to play fair, and there
20 is no child care in the world that will ever be the
21 substitute for what that lady was in our life.

22 I watch the young people today struggle to get
23 breakfast on the table for their children, the children
24 off to school. They go to work, they try cases, they
25 interview witnesses, they get home at 7:30 at night,

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1 get dinner on the table and the children bathed, the
2 homework done. They run errands on Saturdays, go to
3 church on Sunday morning, and start preparing for trial
4 again on Sunday night. And those children are going to
5 be grown before they ever knew them and before they had
6 ever really appreciated them.

7 Let the University of North Carolina at Charlotte
8 take the lead in working with industry and business
9 around this state to develop workplaces where both
10 parents, both the father and the mother, can spend
11 quality time with their children through flextime,
12 through flexible work schedules, through telecommuting.
13 Let us use this technology to our benefit, in terms of
14 putting family first in the workplace, by the use of
15 common sense and sensible technology.

16 Raising children is the single most difficult
17 thing I know to do. It's a lot harder than being
18 Attorney General. A friend died about 12 years ago,
19 leaving me as the legal guardian of her 15-year-old
20 twins, a boy and a girl. The girl was in love, and
21 I've learned an awful lot about raising children. It
22 is one of the most rewarding experiences in the world.
23 And so, let us work together to put family first in our
24 workplaces with technology, with good management, with
25 good sense.

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1 My grandmother left North Carolina in about 1905
2 after both her parents died from illness. She was only
3 about 17. She never forgot that family. For all her
4 life, her family was the centerpiece of everything that
5 she did, and she always remembered the story of how her
6 father could find the harness in the barn in the middle
7 of the night without a light. She remembered where the
8 trees were, she remembered the tone of her mother's
9 voice. It never, ever left her, so that even at 91 she
10 was wanting me to take her back to Mecklenburg County.

11 From these hills, from this great city that she
12 would not recognize today, from this great institution
13 that she would be so proud of, let us draw strength to
14 go forward and meet the next 50 years in this great new
15 century coming upon us, remembering first what's
16 important: family and friends and people. This
17 institution, this great, wonderful university, will
18 lead the way, based on your track record of the first
19 50 years.
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