



Department of Justice

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ADDRESS BY

ATTORNEY GENERAL RAMSEY CLARK

to the

WOMEN'S FORUM ON NATIONAL SECURITY

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"We suffer most of the crime, vice, disease, ignorance, poverty, hopelessness and misery of the whole city. Every advantage and opportunity, like all leadership and power, is absentee. Our landlords don't live here. Store managers and clerks and others who work here drive back and forth from their homes. Even politicians and preachers are absentee. They don't live in our part of town. When the sun goes down, there ain't nobody here but us and the police."

This was the voice from Watts in 1965. This is why the policeman is the most important man in the United States today. It is not because he caused, or is responsible for the conditions that exist, but because, like the mountain, he is there. Performance of the police during this and the next several years will vitally affect the course of this nation, for better or for worse, for decades to come.

To the policeman falls the duty of maintaining social order under law in isolated environments of fear and hatred. He must work daily in the midst of ferment, frequently the only symbol of a law thought foreign.

The poor, the young, the minorities are alienated in this house of ours and none more than the poor, young Negro.

In a nation where only 3.5 percent are unemployed-- 3.2 percent among whites and 6.8 percent among Negroes-- one-fourth of the Negro boys and one-third of the Negro girls cannot find jobs and, for many who do, there is low pay and little chance to advance.

The poor, young Negro lives in physical segregation and psychological loneliness. He is cut off from his chance. Fulfillment, the flower of freedom, is denied him. A small disadvantaged and segregated minority in a mighty and prosperous nation, he is frustrated and angry.

Riots are as old as mankind. They are the antithesis of humaneness, intelligence, faith and charity which are the hope of civilization.

We fear them more than most because our lives have been more comfortable and secure than most. Our fear exaggerates what we have experienced and can anticipate.

Our very constitution was written in the shadow of riot and rebellion. Perhaps ten times more people were killed in four days of draft and racial rioting in New York City in July, 1863 than in the four years 1964 through 1967--and that at the height of the Civil War, only a week after Gettysburg. The 1930's, 40's and 50's all witnessed rioting.

Nor are we alone today among nations: China and Japan, Indonesia, Spain and Italy, the continents of Africa, Asia, Europe and North and South America are all experiencing rioting.

The causes are many, but foremost among them is change. Change is the fundamental fact of our time. Chief among the dynamics of this change is vast population increase, more than 2-1/2 fold in our country this century with more people to be added in the last one-third than in the first two-thirds. Urbanization: a people largely rural in 1900 is now 80 percent resident in urban centers of 50,000 or more.

Scientific advance doubles our knowledge of the physical world each decade. Who among the 76 million Americans in 1900 dreamed of television, much less the 70 million sets we now have; or 80 million automobiles? Not even Wilbur and Orville Wright conjured a supersonic air transport which is nearly upon us.

No one has experienced greater change than the Negro. More rural in 1900 than our people as a whole, he is more urban today. Among the most mobile people who ever lived, he is the most migrant and anonymous. Eric Hoffer has said, ". . . When a population undergoing drastic change is without abundant opportunities for individual action and self-advancement, it develops a hunger for faith, pride and unity. . . We are told that revolutions are set in motion to realize radical changes. Actually it is drastic change which sets the stage for revolution. . ."

The tensions and frustrations arising from change most affect the poor. A French cleric, Lamennais, who lived through Napoleon's time and the revolution of 1848, observed that every stable government in history has depended on the resignation of the poor to being poor. When in history has there been turbulence within a nation that the poor were not in turmoil? The poor have been the great majority throughout history. Today, finally, the poor are a small minority in our country. It may be more difficult than ever for the poor to be resigned both because they are a minority, and because they know of their poverty as have none before. Television and magazines portray the affluence which surrounds them in the very midst of the poverty and misery in which they live.

But for all the change we have experienced and the frustrations and anger generated, the overwhelming majority of our people in all sections of the country and all parts of every city, of all ages and races and religions, believe in these United States, believe in order under law, know our purposes are just and have faith that we will attain equal justice.

Riots can be prevented. If we are to realize the American dream, riots must be prevented.

Every effort must be made to prevent riots. We are eliminating injustice as few people have ever done within the framework of social order under law. Legal rights are largely, though not entirely, secure. Open housing, fair employment, protection against the violation of individual rights, indiscriminate jury selection--these are the chief remaining areas of imperfection in the law.

Now we must create the opportunity to exercise, to fulfill, those rights. An immense and growing economic effort is underway: to rebuild cities, to educate all our people, to give

every American the chance to live where he wants, to do whatever his abilities and energies make possible for him. We are only beginning in these last several years, but we can clearly succeed. We can succeed, if we have time, and in terms of history a very little time.

Whether we have the time needed will depend more on the policeman than on anyone else. This is why he is the most important American in 1968. He works in a highly flammable environment. A spark can cause an explosion. He must maintain order without provocation which will cause combustion.

The need is for balance; firmness without fear; a careful control with minimum friction. He must be fair. He cannot be repressive.

If he overacts he can cause a riot. If he underacts, he can permit a riot.

He is a man on a tightrope. Powerful forces from both sides would push him off. Some would taunt him to overact, to be excessive. Others would urge him to underact--to wait too long. Either can bring disaster. Some would purposely anger him, provoke him; seeking violence. He must be a professional, a firm and fair enforcer: a man in the middle who will not yield to pressure.

As never before, he needs full community support just as never before the community needs him. Police-community relations is the most important law enforcement problem of today and the years ahead.

Every officer must be a community relations expert. He must serve the public and the public must respect, support and compensate him for the vital role he plays.

Open communications with the entire community must be developed. He must reach the unreachable. He must know the man whose name nobody knows. He must make another country, our country. In the final analysis police-community relations measures the difference between an authoritarian government executing its will by force and fear and a free society protecting the lives, the property and the liberty of its citizens through public service.

Police-community relations is a two-way street. The community must work for it as hard as the police. It is both ironic and tragic that we have given so little to the support of those on whom so much depends. Underpaid, undertrained, and overworked, they are called on to perform hard, unpleasant and dangerous work, all too frequently midst suspicion and hostility.

It is imperative that we strive now to professionalize all our local police. Substantial salary increases are essential; higher standards and vigorous and continuing training a must. Our best research and development must be applied to police needs. Most of all we must integrate the policeman into our total community life and give him that respect and status deserved by him on whom both liberty and safety chiefly depend.

If the policeman succeeds in his assignment, we shall have a chance in ours.

For us the essential things are to create ways for the exchange of views that are still possible to prevent disorder. Governments and people must keep repression from further dividing us. Our law, our purpose as a people, must have a clear and generous meaning of equality for all. We must strive to fulfill the obligations of a great nation; to achieve the needed reforms; to bind the nation's wounds.

Strong Negro leadership must help relieve despair and anger which lead to violence, riots and death; to disorders we know can be prevented. For these divide the nation more than all else. Suicidal for the small Negro minority, they can destroy the American dream. A few precious years to build and this nation finally united, perhaps truly indivisible, will offer liberty and justice for all.

Nor can we forget that when this is over, as it will be some day, whatever the terror of the storm through which we pass, as Camus observed of Algeria a dozen years ago, "We shall still have to go on living together forever on the same soil." Nothing else is possible.