



Department of Justice

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REMARKS BY
ATTORNEY GENERAL NICHOLAS deB. KATZENBACH
on receiving the citation of the
MASSACHUSETTS COMMITTEE, CATHOLICS, PROTESTANTS, and JEWS
STATLER HILTON HOTEL, BOSTON
Thursday, May 19, 1966

I will prize the citation you have given me this evening not only for myself, but for the many men and women in the Department of Justice, and especially in our Civil Rights Division, who are giving the best years of their lives--sacrificing not just leisure but precious family life in endless working hours and continual travel--to help make America keep the promise of civil rights to all citizens.

It is a great honor to be here and to have been chosen for this award. What would any kid give to hold anything in common with Joe Cronin? What would any aspiring musician give to share something, as I now do, with Jack Benny? To be cited with these men for this award, in a tradition that has included such figures as the late Herbert Lehman, Mrs. Roosevelt and Cardinal Cushing, is something I will remember with great pride.

Through the efforts of this Committee and groups like it, we have come to take the harmony of ethnic and religious groups almost for granted in America. It is now hard to conceive of the anti-Catholic passion that led to the burning of the Ursuline Academy here in the 1830's. Anti-semitism, once so virulent that resort hotels proclaimed in pamphlets "No consumptives, no dogs, no Jews," is almost entirely a memory. And the bitter old warning, "Irish Need Not Apply", is no longer posted.

Boston may well have led other parts of the country in achieving productive harmony of different groups. Walter Whitehill recounts in a very entertaining new book about Boston that in 1917 Martin Lomasney, the great Irish boss of the West End, posted handbills in Yiddish urging Jewish voters in the ward to elect Charles Pelham Curtis, Jr., a Yankee lawyer from State Street, to a constitutional convention.

Differences of nationality and religion are associated less and less with rancor and discrimination, but rather more, as in this city with a rich vitality. The recent history of Massachusetts--the state which leads all others in its percentage of foreign-born and first-generation Americans--is a striking illustration of the richness of diversity in a community. Yet this same recent history has revealed how different and how much more challenging is the process of absorbing into full citizenship the Negro American.

As President Johnson said at Howard University last Spring, the other ethnic minorities "did not have the heritage of centuries to overcome, and they did not have a cultural tradition which had been twisted and battered by endless years of hatred and hopelessness, nor were they excluded, these others, because of race or color--a feeling whose dark intensity is matched by no other prejudice in our society."

Today, when religious discrimination is in effect a relic, racial discrimination and strife still disfigure the life and name of our country. And Massachusetts, though it has a relatively minute percentage of Negro citizens, now finds itself very much involved in aspects of the national problem.

Clearly, the problem has not been solved here and it will not be solved without the continuing efforts of many citizens, dauntless in their dedication to victory over prejudice and fear. But just as clearly, Massachusetts has made a creditable start that other states could well imitate.

Massachusetts passed one of the first equal employment statutes and one of the best fair housing statutes in the country. I have been told of the private METCO experiment to organize a pupil transfer program between city and suburb to help ease congestion and severe imbalance. And I know that many of you here this evening helped to draw up the impressive and forthright Report of the Advisory Committee on Racial Imbalance.

This is a remarkable document. Produced by an admirably broad range of state leaders, it is frank about the problem, and hard-headed in its thinking about feasible solutions. That Report and the historic racial imbalance law that grew from it have put Massachusetts in a position of leadership in one of America's central contemporary efforts for racial justice and equality. Now, as you go about putting the law into effect, you have an opportunity to make this city and this state a model for all the other major communities in the country.

Earlier this month, Cardinal Cushing, speaking here about the cluster of public problems associated with poverty, urban deterioration and the desperation of minority groups, observed that "slowly but surely, all these problems have led inexorably to the issue of housing." What Cardinal Cushing said about poverty and the problem of inadequate housing has a clear parallel in the relation between the many forms of racial inequality and injustice in American life, and the problem of housing discrimination in particular. Eventually, inexorably, we must come to the problem of housing.

And so, we in President Johnson's Administration have now embarked on an effort to make fair housing not only the goal of civic groups and leaders such as yourselves, not only the objective of state laws like those in Massachusetts and 16 other states, but in addition, the mandate of federal law throughout the United States. As President Johnson declared last month in his Civil Rights Message, "The time has come for Congress to declare resoundingly that discrimination in housing and all the evils it breeds are

a denial of justice and a threat to the development of our growing urban areas."

We firmly believe that a remedy lies in the law. By remedy I do not mean panacea. No statute alone can trumpet down the ghetto walls. No statute alone can provide the hope, the education, the skills and the applied resources that actually fulfill opportunity.

But President Kennedy's historic and decisive engagement of the nation's resources on the problem of civil rights, and President Johnson's massive efforts since then, have taught the most skeptical that the law can lead and the law can protect in this vital area.

And so we look to you for vocal support for the Civil Rights Act of 1966. And, as all of our concern about progress in real integration turn increasingly to the North, we look to communities like this and to men and women like you for leadership.

By making your views known to Congress, you can play a powerful role in the enactment of fair housing legislation. Any by speaking out forcefully in this community, as you have in the past, you can make Massachusetts a standard of racial justice.