



# Department of Justice

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TV PRESS CONFERENCE

ATTORNEY GENERAL RAMSEY CLARK

DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

WASHINGTON, D. C.

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 14, 1968

QUESTION: Mr. Clark, how do you feel about becoming a political issue in the campaign thanks to Mr. Nixon?

ATTORNEY GENERAL CLARK: It was something of a disappointment to me. I think there are real issues in this election that are very important and the American people need to know where the candidates stand on each issue. I know where I stand and I have tried to tell the American public.

I stand for effective gun control and I stand for professionalization of police. I stand for massive new efforts to control delinquency among juveniles. And these are the issues that need discussing.

I hope all the candidates will address themselves directly to the issues and not to personalities.

QUESTION: Mr. Attorney General, Mr. Nixon in Miami Beach drew enormous applause when he denied that "law and order" are the code words for racism. Do you agree with that denial?

ATTORNEY GENERAL CLARK: I think it is an oversimplification to say that "law and order" are the code words for racism. Unhappily, there is an element of truth there. But there are many who speak of law and order when they are really thinking of equal justice, and America has to maintain order. America also has to provide equal justice for all of its citizens. And we will.

OVER

QUESTION: 'Mr. Clark, were you really surprised to find out that you may be a lame duck Attorney General?

ATTORNEY GENERAL CLARK: No. It came as no great surprise. I believe there is a tradition going back to George Washington that this would follow.

QUESTION: May I get in another question, sir? Governor Agnew has said that police must be allowed to take some form of action against looters, shooting, or whatever is appropriate in order to maintain respect for the law. Do you agree with that?

ATTORNEY GENERAL CLARK: The way you put it, when you say "some sort of action," of course, you have to agree with it. Looters must be arrested. But to shoot looters in lieu of arrest is to engage in a course of conduct that would damage this country immensely. Law enforcement knows this. We have never shot thieves. We arrest thieves. And we present them to the courts with evidence. If they are guilty, we hope they are found guilty and sent to prison.

QUESTION: How do you suggest they be stopped if you cannot shoot?

ATTORNEY GENERAL CLARK: The way you stop looters is with adequate manpower and law enforcement, professionally trained manpower that acts quickly and whenever any disturbance that can lead to any lawlessness arises. Law enforcement knows this throughout the United States and thank God law enforcement of the United States has not resorted to shooting looters. We arrest them.

QUESTION: Are you confident that the Chicago convention can be conducted peacefully without disturbances outside the hall, in the city?

ATTORNEY GENERAL CLARK: I am confident that the convention in Chicago can and will be held without any significant civil disorders. Disturbances of a minor nature there may be, but there is most careful planning and preparation, and there will be no significant disturbance.

QUESTION: What measures are being taken?

ATTORNEY GENERAL CLARK: Well, the local law enforcement, the Chicago Police Department under the direction of Superintendent Conlisk, one of the great chiefs of police in the United States, and one of the great police departments in the United States, 12,000 men strong, is thoroughly preparing as are a variety of state and local law enforcement agencies that have manpower that could be used if necessary and as necessary.

There is a Federal role. The Secret Service has the primary responsibility, what we call the lead agency role, in seeing that Federal responsibility is performed with excellence.

QUESTION: Mr. Attorney General, your Republican critics seem to suggest that this Administration has advocated going easy on rioters and dissidents and criminals because they are expressing some form of social protest. Is that your point of view?

ATTORNEY GENERAL CLARK: Well, hardly. My point of view is that whosoever violates the law should pay the price of society, and that those who loot and those who destroy property and those who injure people must be apprehended and must be prosecuted, and I have said so consistently throughout my career, and I have fought for resources for police and the processes of criminal justice to see that this is done.

QUESTION: You are saying, though, you are misunderstood. Why should you be so misunderstood? What is there inherent in these times or the character of America that makes this happen?

ATTORNEY GENERAL CLARK: I didn't say I was misunderstood. You say I was misunderstood. I am not at all sure that the people of America misunderstand me. I think maybe some people want to misunderstand me to raise a false issue rather than addressing themselves to the very real and critical problems that we have in these United States.

QUESTION: A false issue that is being raised would be what?

ATTORNEY GENERAL CLARK: Well, the false issue that you suggest is that I am soft on crime or that I believe looters should be permitted to go free, both of which are absurd.

OVER

QUESTION: Are you charging that Richard Nixon is raising a false issue, then?

ATTORNEY GENERAL CLARK: To the extent that he has engaged in the conduct that has just been described, yes. I think the real issues are what we do to professionalize our police; how much effort we engage in to work with the problems that underlie, such as mental health, such as alcoholism; what we do with our courts to make them more efficient and more effective; what we do in the field of corrections where we know we can cut recidivism, crime repetition, in half, knowing also that four out of five of all serious crimes committed in the United States are committed by repeaters; what we do in the area of juvenile delinquency, a critical, important area today and tomorrow, because by all of our statistics, all increase in crime in the United States in this decade has been among juveniles, among minors, among people under 21 years of age.

QUESTION: Thank you very much.

ATTORNEY GENERAL CLARK: Thank you.