

Georgetown University Law Center

April 15, 1994

AREEN: Please everyone you may be seated. Father O'Donovan, distinguished guests, alumni, faculty, students and friends of Georgetown, welcome. Our honorary degree recipient, the Attorney General Janet Reno, will now be introduced by the distinguished President of our university, Leo Jeremiah O'Donovan. Father O'Donovan.

O'DONOVAN: Thank you Dean Areen. From the beginning of her time in Washington, her lack of pretense and her willingness to take personal responsibility signaled to the world that Janet Reno would achieve far more in office than being the first woman to serve as Attorney General of the United States. Raised on the edge of the Everglades in a house built by her mother, Janet Reno attended public schools in Dade County, Florida. She later major in chemistry at Cornell University where she earned her room and board as a waitress and dormitory supervisor. She went on to show that she knew a great deal about the chemistry of human relations. In 1960, Janet Reno became one of only 16 women in a class of more than 500 students at Harvard Law School. Despite her Harvard degree she had difficult obtaining work as a lawyer after graduation. One of Miami's largest firms denied her a position because she was a woman. Fourteen

years later that same firm, you guessed the rest of the sentence, made her a partner. In 1978, Janet Reno was first elected the State Attorney of Florida with responsibility of an office handling 120,000 cases. She there worked on prevention programs to enable children to grow in a safe, constructive environment. She also worked to reform the juvenile justice system, priorities that she continues to focus on as the Attorney General of the United States of America. It is not an abstract sense of justice but her basic humanity and common decency that guide Janet Reno through the daunting ethical and moral issues of our day. Justice is not a mantle that she assumes but a simple express of who she is. Attorney General Janet Reno the chief law enforcement officer of this country provides hope and inspiration to a new generation of law students and lawyers seeking to define justice for the 21st century. By virtue of the authority vested in me by the Congress of the United States and the board of directors of Georgetown University I hereby confer upon Janet Reno the degree doctor of laws honoris causa.

RENO:

I promised Father O'Donovan I won't tell the story. The first time I ever walked into this

building was some six or seven years ago when I came early in the morning to interview people who had come to the third round as applicants for a position in the State Attorney's office in Dade County. I found the career placement division stuck off some place, I wandered around, got lost, spent the day here and felt the vitality of this law center, listened as students argued or complained about a professor, or slept. It was an extraordinary day. But the reason I came to the Law Center was because based on my experience in Miami as the State Attorney, this Law Center sent me some of the very best prosecutors that I ever had the privilege and the pleasure and the honor or work with. Professor Greenhalgh was magnificent. He would tell us, humpf, or it would be she's pretty good. She'll turn out all right and he was never wrong. This has been the most incredible year that any lawyer could ever experience. To suddenly to be picked up from that world as a prosecutor and placed in the position of Attorney General with little notice, to spend the next 3 1/2 weeks preparing to appear before the Senate Judiciary Committee gives you an opportunity to think of what your life has been like, to see the people who have touched your

life. In this room today there are poignant memories. A lady who was a distinguished public servant in Florida serving in the Florida legislature, I believe, is the first woman to be admitted to this law school, Senator Pat Frank. Sam Dash put up with me getting carried away with myself at various meetings of the Dash committee without ever dampening my enthusiasm and Professor Goldblatt made sure that all my earnest beseeching got translated into words that would convince the American Bar Association. I urge all of you, the professors, the students to remember that you are part and parcel of the people who have touched your lives. As you have a chance as I have had this past year to see people that you had not seen in many years, to review your life, you understand how important professors and colleagues and fellow students are. And I urge the professors to continue to reach out and touch your students and send them on their way as you have sent them to me in Miami and to me at the Department of Justice and students remember reaching out and touching somebody and caring figuratively and literally can sometimes make all the difference in one's professional career. Thus it is extraordinary for me to be standing here to receive this great honor

and I am humbled and it makes me think I've got a lot to live up to and a long way to go. But by this honor you give me encouragement to try my best to do just that. I am especially pleased to be a part of the celebration of 40 years of women at the Law Center. Yesterday we stood in the great hall of the Department of Justice and watched the Deputy Attorney General of the United States being sworn in. Suddenly the Attorney General of the United States was a woman, the Deputy was a woman, and she was being sworn in by Ruth Bader Ginsburg. I turned to Jamie Gorelick and said, Jamie if you had asked Justice Ginsburg and I when we graduated from Law School whether this would have ever happened we would have shook our heads no. But this Law Center has contributed so much. There are more than 5,000 women graduates of the Georgetown Law Center. Many have embarked upon distinguished careers in public service. Others have been great private practitioners, still others have worked from the bench or at the law school lectern. The Department of Justice has been a constant beneficiary of the excellence of the Georgetown Law Center and I see it day in and day out. There are now 326 Georgetown Law Center alumni serving

at the Department of Justice. You have more law school graduates at the Justice Department than does any other law school in the country and I thank you. One of the people I met in those first cold days of March after the great blizzard as I struggled to figure out what had happened to me, was a person by the name of Mary Lawton who received her J.D. from Georgetown. Mary served as the counsel for intelligence policy and review from 1982 until her death last year. She began her career at the Department in 1960 as an honor graduate. Through the years Mary served the American people with dedication and honor that has seldom ever been matched, never surpassed. This year the Justice Department's legal activities book, our primary legal recruitment tool, will be dedicated to Mary. And the dedication reads and I want to share it with you. Mary Lawton is proof that you can be a vigorous pursuer of wrongdoers, that you can represent the government of the United States as the most vigorous prosecutor imaginable and at the same time make sure that the Constitution is adhered to every step of the way. Mary Lawton is an example to everyone she touched that service on behalf of the government of the United States is one of the greatest single

undertakings that anyone can experience. Her career illustrates that you can be a government lawyer and do more than any other person to serve the people to recognize their interests and to protect their rights and I urge you all to look at least for part of the time of your legal career at a career in public service. It is one of the most rewarding experiences that you can have. I have been in private practice and when I first got there one of the most troubling things that I ever had to do was to cite a fee schedule to somebody and to tell them that I had to charge them for protecting their rights. It is a wonderful experience to be able to protect the rights of the American people and not have to charge them. Today lawyers who studied at Georgetown or have worked there continue to serve the Justice Department in Mary's tradition. In the audience there are six distinguished Georgetown Law Center graduates and one very distinguished faculty member who are now working with me. Lois Schiffer who has been an adjunct professor at the Law Center since 1986; Gail Pagett the associate director of the Department's community relations service and a 1981 Georgetown Law Center graduate; Linda Martin Crawford, Georgetown 1982 and the

general counsel of CRS; Susan Liss, the deputy assistant attorney general in the office of policy development, a 1977 graduate, Noel Brennan assistant U.S. Attorney in the District of Columbia, and a pair of 1992 Georgetown Law Center graduates who have been so important to the Department, Elaine Greenfeld, special assistant to the assistant attorney general for civil rights and Joan Silverstein, special assistant to the associate attorney general. These women along with so many other Georgetown graduates beginning with Pat Frank have put their law degrees to work in the public interest. We owe them a great debt of gratitude. I also know that women of the Georgetown Law Center have devoted their time and energy to mentoring young women who are just beginning their careers but we have to reach out and mentor all minorities, people who don't know lawyers, people who don't know what it takes to be a lawyer, young high school graduates who wonder just what they can do to become a lawyer. Each of us has a role to reach out and open a door to others for whom the door has been closed. I appreciate how important women role models have been in my life. The only thing my mother forbade me to do was to be a lawyer. She taught that you



can build a house but the spirit of these women has driven me when the odds seemed very long indeed. Their example showed me the way when paths seemed impassable and the odds impossible. I would not be here today if it were not the women I have admired. I urge you all to support the dreams and aspirations of young women, of minorities who will someday owe their success to your guidance and to your thoughtfulness. That is why we should be so grateful for the work of the Women's Forum at Georgetown. The programs that the Forum encourage lawyers and especially women lawyers to participate in the full life of both the law and the community. The Women's Forum has provided an invaluable place for women lawyers to explore their role in public service, legal education, private practice, and the judiciary. I congratulate the Women's Forum for its continuing service to the Georgetown community and to us all. I swore up until 1972 that I would not be a prosecutor. I thought prosecutors were more interested in securing convictions than seeking justice. My predecessor said that I could do something about it and the first assignment I had was to set up the juvenile division of the State Attorney's office in Dade County. It was an

experience that I will never forget and it was one of the most rewarding experiences that I have ever undertaken. That is why I am particularly privileged to be here to help celebrate the 20th anniversary of the Georgetown University Law Center's Juvenile Justice Clinic. Year in and year out the clinic has performed with distinction and dedication in one of the law's most difficult fields. I know because I toiled there myself. But no legal work is harder and no legal work is more heartbreaking than representing troubled kids. To be able to go back to court day in and day out to pursue this as a career is one of the great challenges, one of the incredible undertakings that any lawyer can pursue. And I think the clinic represents the best in challenging us all to participate in the most difficult areas of the law. But there is no legal work more rewarding, there is legal work more wonderful after you have been state attorney for 15 years than to have a 30-year-old man come up to you and tell you made a difference in his life by getting him off on the right foot. You do so much for 20 years, you've been distinguished in your advocacy for children. The dean says that the delinquency area is now both the most crucial and

the most legally underserved area in the juvenile justice system. The clinic fields the brunt of the single greatest crime problem I think the greatest single public health problem in America today, the escalating incidents of youth violence, a national tragedy that we should not tolerate. The primary goal of the clinic and the staff have been in delinquency cases to provide competent counsel, but this clinic has gone far beyond. I have been critical of prosecutors who prosecute, convict and send a child off to some facility that they know is inadequate for reforming him and bringing him back to the community without a chance of success. I have been critical of people who get a kid off and are happy and think that they've won the battle when they get him acquitted on a motion to dismiss or a motion to suppress and then they don't do anything to address the problems that got the kid there in the first place. You do much more in this clinic and you serve as an example for all lawyers as to what we should be about when we represent people who are in trouble. Your holistic approach to the lives of troubled children is a model for lawyers everywhere. For those juvenile offenders who are convicted the clinic does everything possible with

the system to insure that the kids receive the necessary services. For those who are acquitted or released the clinic does everything possible to insure that those kids stay out of trouble. In an individual case, for example, the clinic's efforts routinely include seeking out and working with a concerned parent, providing legal representation and educational placement hearings so that at risk children receive the most appropriate educational services. Sending clinic lawyers and staff out to look for jobs for at risk kids, we can have the best program in the world but if the door to jobs is closed in their face they are going to be right back in trouble. Linking at risk kids with job training and job placement programs, placing children in after school programs such as Georgetown University's ASK, After School Kids program and generally staying in touch with kids after the juvenile justice system proceedings have finished. I applaud the clinic. I am just honored to be associated with an institution that has such an example for all lawyers. I am very proud of this degree. But I would like to challenge the Department of Justice, the federal government, Georgetown University, this law center and all lawyers to look beyond our narrow

specialty. There is on the east side of the Justice building on 9th Avenue inscribed in the stone a statement that governs much of my thinking. The common law is derived from the will of mankind issuing from the will of the people framed by mutual confidence and sanctioned by the light of reason. And for too many people in America there is no mutual confidence, there is no exercise of reason, but for most importantly the law is not derived from far too many American people because 80% of the poor and the working poor in this nation do not have access to legal services much less to the courts. For too many people in America the law is worth little more than the paper it is written on. Most of those people are single parents and their children. And the Juvenile Justice Clinic, the Department of Justice, the legal system of this nation will never begin to address the problem of juvenile justice if we wait for that child to be determined delinquent. I think it is imperative that we do everything in our power to insure justice. I will never forget for as long as I live being asked by the Governor of Florida to go to another jurisdiction as a special prosecutor to reinvestigate the case of James Joseph Richardson,

a man who had been prosecuted, convicted and sentenced to death 21 years before for the poisoning death of his 7 children. A crime he claimed never to have committed and many people believed him. I reinvestigated and I will never forget standing in the courtroom in DeSota County, Florida telling the court that the evidence had been insufficient to charge him originally with the passage of time and the death and incapacity of witnesses, it was clearly insufficient now, that he was probably innocent and that he should go free. For as long as I live I will remember walking out of that courthouse and watching that man who had been prison for 21 years walk out behind me free for the first time and I went back to what I was doing and every day since then I have tried to remember the awesome responsibility that lawyers have to insure justice. I sit in a conference room almost every working day of the year at some point and look up to two great murals done as part of the WPA project. On the east wall of the Attorney General's conference room is a mural entitled Justice Granted, the model of the justice in black robes is Harlan Fisk Stone leading people up into greater heights of learning of industry, of scholarship. On the other wall in

1937 done in 1937 and put on the wall of the Attorney General's conference room is a mural entitled Justice Denied. The hills are barren and blown up. The factories are closed and shut, the violin is broken, the papers and the pen are taken away and people in brown shirts are leading people off into bondage. And that mural and the fact that it was on that wall for years before we went into the war to defend against the tyranny and the horror of fascism is a further example to me that all of us as lawyers have an awesome responsibility never ever to let that occur again. But as much as we have responsibilities to prevent injustice, lawyers have always had a responsibility to weave the fabric of society around all our people so that they will have equal opportunity. It is important that we vigorously enforce our civil rights laws. Yesterday we saw Duval Patrick sworn in as assistant attorney general for the civil rights division. He gave a remarkable address, talking about the moral imperatives of the civil rights movement and the desire of our department to return it to its highest and best tradition. But all the civil rights laws in the world won't work if a child dies on our streets in violence. Laws entitling

people to equal opportunity for education won't work if a child never learns when he is zero to three. We have got to look at how we reweave the fabric of society around children at risk. When I started at State Attorney and became the state attorney I said I want to develop a juvenile justice system that is the very best. We focused on energies. We put good people in it. But I soon realized that if we waited until a child was 16 or 17 we would never have enough dollars in this nation to change all children in the same boat if we waited that long, so we started focusing on drop out prevention programs in the middle school. If we waited until then it was too late, the child had already fallen two grade levels behind and was beginning to act out to attract attention to himself for other reasons. We started in an early neighborhood intervention program and that became too late because the crack epidemic hit Miami and suddenly I was called to the public hospital to try to figure out what to do with crack involved babies and their mothers. And it became clear to me that lawyers and all of us in our different professions have got to come together in a comprehensive effort to give children and their families a chance to grow in a



strong constructive way. This great university, this magnificent university that has contributed through all its disciplines in so many different ways must start bridging the gap between law and medicine, between law and social work, between law and city planning. When I went to law school they didn't talk, ten years ago they weren't talking, now the disciplines are beginning to talk and they are beginning to come together in the communities as they reweave the fabric of society, but unless we all come together it won't make any difference. If we wait to focus our interests on a juvenile justice program it's going to be too late. We can far more if we focus on the whole spectrum and develop community programs that can make a difference. What people do when I come to communities to say this but how do we do it, where do we begin, I don't know how to access these programs, I don't know where to go, the door gets shut in my face, how do I do it, how do I make a difference and I turn around and there are too few lawyers out there doing legal services to tell them. Each one of us even if we pursue a career in private practice must contribute pro bono time to communities, must adopt a block, must make a difference, must adopt a school, but if each

lawyer in America as they graduate from law school understood to be the mentor of one child at risk we could make such an extraordinary difference in this nation. We must consider how we design new programs that include community advocates who are trained in poverty law to help people break the cycle of poverty so they can become self sufficient and make a difference because what I learned was that unless we start focusing on children as they are conceived we will never build enough prisons 15 years from now or 18 years from now to house those children. We will not have a work force with skills necessary to fill the jobs to maintain America as a first rate nation. We will have senior citizens whose pensions will not be worth the paper that they are written on. How do we reweave the fabric of society? The first thing we've got to do is to become advocates. Not just advocates in the courtroom. For too long lawyers have thought they won their battles in the courtroom. But most lawyers I know and every client that I've ever met knows full well that it is far better we resolve the problem before we ever get into court in the first place. Thus lawyers have a special responsibility to go to their communities whether they are the most

prominent practitioner in the best law firm in town, the university professor, the prosecutor, the public defender, the Department of Justice employee and start making a difference in their community, looking at the picture as a whole and helping to initiate programs that make sure that parents are old enough, wise enough and financially able enough to take care of their children. That there are family preservation programs that can give kids a chance to grow up in a family that is self sufficient. That child support enforcement mechanisms are not impediments to support but are real mechanisms for insuring that both parents contribute to the support of their children. We have got to make sure that lawyers join in the effort to get the health care reform passed and look at it in terms of simple justice. We may debate what belongs in it but something is terribly wrong with a nation that says to a person who is 70 years old of age you could have an operation that extends your life expectancy by 3 years and then we turn to the working poor family and say sorry your kid can't have medical benefits that are preventative because you make too much money to be eligible for Medicaid and you don't have health care benefits.

Most of all as the Carnegie Foundation has reported this week in a remarkable report called Starting Points we've got to start with the starting points of zero to three, the most formative time in a person's life and we've got to understand how we can develop programs and system that insure kids are protected during those years. If you think people don't like to get involved in the juvenile justice system, if you think people don't like to get involved with delinquents, the last thing they want to get involved with for the most part from my experience are small children. But our whole system is coming slowly down upon us because we have not made an investment in children. We have not made an investment in family. If you had told me back in 1960 that I could not go to law school because I was a woman I would have been outraged and I would be even angrier now, but surely we ought to be able to pursue our professional dreams while at the same time providing appropriate care for our children in those early years. We've got to make sure that there is safe, appropriate educare for all our youngsters and lawyers have got to be bold. Remember there was Thomas Jefferson who didn't like to practice law at all but he had bold and

creative visions that gave us a sense of what this nation could be. We need to be bold and creative now. We're stuck in K through 12 but what good is kindergarten or K through 12 if a child doesn't learn the human responses that are so important to a foundation for learning in zero to three. Is this the new way to go? We've got to become advocates in the legislature, we've got to become advocates in the bar associations, we've got to become advocates in the university for focusing on these early years and making a difference. We have got to help people understand how important a teacher is, an elementary school teacher. When I was a little girl the teachers were wonderful. They were inspiring. They motivated us. Today they would all be lawyers or doctors. Something is wrong with a nation that pays its Wall Street lawyers coming out of law school what we do and pays football players six-digit figures and pays it school teachers what we pay them today. We can make such a difference if we start talking about what the real priorities of America should be. We've got to understand that it does no good if a parent is working or if a parent is indifference if we have the best teachers if we don't have afternoon and evening programs for our children.

Programs that can make a difference. Again lawyers can lead the way in developing new procedures and lawyers have a special challenge. We like to go in and sue people. We like to recover for slip and fall cases on the school corridor and that is causing a serious problem because there are a lot of schools that would like to remain open in the afternoons and evenings and they don't have liability insurance. Lawyers should stop worrying so much about the slip and fall cases and the recovery for one person and start worrying about the school children of America and their afternoon and evening programs and we have as much a responsibility to look to the whole of this nation and the good of this nation as we do to the one slip and fall case. We've got to start looking at the whole issue in terms of how do we make our streets and schools and homes safer. Lawyers have for too long said okay I'm going to prosecute and lock them up or I'm going to prosecute and adjudicate a delinquent and get him into a program, but if we started earlier and started focusing on domestic violence we could make a difference. Domestic violence is the most frequent crime in America today. It happens every 15 seconds. For too long police and

judges and others considered it a diminimus crime and paid no attention to it. And laughed at me as I tried to press domestic prosecutions in our courts. But unless we end domestic violence in the home we will never ever begin to end violence in the streets and in our communities. We can make a difference by developing domestic violence courts, domestic violence programs in this university with public health people working together with lawyers can do so much by bridging the gap and coming together and approaching these problems from a point of view of a number of disciplines. We can make our streets safer by talking about new ways of policing. A policeman doesn't have to be a kid's enemy. A policeman properly trained by people who are sensitive can be a wonderful force in the community. We can make such an incredible difference. Housing is another problem. All you have to do is walk around this city and look at homelessness and look at what we do. We have laws that say sorry lady you can't come into this public housing unit because you've got five kids and this is an apartment for only a family of two and that lady and the five kids are out on the streets. Something is wrong. We have developed so many

rules and regulations that we tie ourselves in knots, limit our freedom and make the whole system seem absurd. We say to people who are trying to get off welfare, look you can go get a job, make minimum wage, sorry you lose your welfare benefits and you're worse off than if you hadn't gone to work in the first place. We as lawyers help to create the system and we've got to undo it and make it real so that people can have access to programs that enable them to be self sufficient. We have got to look at the juvenile justice system and become advocates when we go out to our communities. You can become the best juvenile advocate in the world but it will do no good if there are no programs to send the child to and even if there are the best programs in the world there are no after care programs that can make a difference. I mean we go through stupid cycles. We send a kid to a program, a great program and then we return him to the community to the apartment over the open air drug market where the child got into trouble in the first place, without job training and placement, without addressing the drug problem, without providing supervision, without taking away the guns in the apartment, or the drugs in the apartment where his family is



living and we expect that child to succeed. Let's as lawyers start talking sense to the American people and start talking about solutions that work and when they don't work let's be innovative and bold and creative and move on and try something else. But let's stop talking in hackneyed terms about procedure and process that doesn't begin to go to reweaving the fabric of society around our children. Let us give them opportunities for work. We pass laws in Congress that say here's this great jobs program and we put jobs on the street that are make work jobs. Let's instead have everybody join together with teachers working with community activists to define programs that identify skills and aptitudes and then match afternoon work opportunities and summer work opportunities with school courses so these kids can graduate with skills that can enable them to earn a living wage. We have a system in most educational centers in this country that say you've got to graduate from high school, you have to have certain amount of language, you have to have a certain amount of arithmetic and math, what about a certain amount of parenting skills, what about a skill that can enable you to earn a living wage. And you say but I'm going to college. How

many people do you know that have graduated with a B.A. in English literature that are sitting around because they can't find a job because they don't have a skill that can enable them to earn a living wage that will help us all. Let's start working together with our colleagues in other disciplines to make a difference, but none of this will work unless we understand that children are our most precious possession. None of this is going to work unless we change the work places of America to put children and family first. None of this is going to work unless law firms stop being so obsessed by billable hours and start talking about investing in the future of America by investing their lawyers' time in family and children as well as in the billable hours. We can do so much. I watched the young lawyers in my office in Miami struggle to get breakfast on the table, the children off to school, tried a case, finished at 6:30, interviewed witnesses till 7:30, got home, got dinner on the table, the children bathed, the homework done, and repeated it day in and day out and Saturdays ran errands and Sundays they slept late and started over again that night preparing for trial again, and they didn't have quality time with their children. If we can send a man to the

moon we ought to be able to become far more productive in our work places while at the same time getting parents, both parents the opportunities to be with their children. I remember that lady who forbid me to be a lawyer. She taught me to appreciate Beethoven's symphonies. She taught me how to bake a cake, how to play baseball, she taught us how to play fair and she punished us, but she loved us with all her heart and there is no child care in the world that will ever be a substitute for what my mother was to us four children. Somehow or another we can give to the young lawyers of America to the young people of America both mothers and fathers the opportunity to engage in the single most difficult job of all, raising children while at the same time being the greatest and the best and the most effective lawyers possible. We can do it because we're lawyers.

AREEN: Thank you, thank you all. May I ask you to remain at your places until the academic process has left the room. Thank you.