

Harry A. Blackmun

'I Do Not Like Very Much the Feel of Things Today'

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The following are remarks that Justice Blackmun sent to Sol Linowitz last June when Mr. Linowitz asked him for comments about the profession of law.

I ask rhetorically about your "concerns." Do you share with me a general but deep concern about the state of the world today? I am old enough to have lived through two world wars and a constant string of lesser conflicts that seem inevitably to follow closely one upon the other. And I do not like very much the feel of things today. There are improvements, of course, that have been made, but the continued stress everywhere and seemingly unending bloodshed, bloodshed that affects so many common people who want only to live out their lives in peace and understanding, deeply disturbs me.

Do you share with me a concern about our standards, professional and otherwise, these days? Are you bothered at all by the current emphasis in the legal profession upon the "bottom line," on billable

hours, on advertising and on a reluctance in many quarters to engage in pro bono work? Are you concerned about the overriding interest in some quarters of the medical profession with income, about that profession's decrease in patient confidence and about the proliferation of malpractice suits and punitive damages?

Are you concerned about the wretched events that took place in Los Angeles a year ago? Now, months later, we still cannot escape the grip and the significance of those events and what they hold for all of us in the days ahead.

Indeed, it seems as though the entire world—the Far East, the Middle East, much of Africa, South America, Europe and ourselves—is in turmoil.

Man's inherent inhumanity to man. Can we possibly rise above it and see to it that the flowering of new life somehow will rise, as it always has before, from the ashes of old disasters?

And then are you concerned with the blight of continued racism and antisemitism in this country? Nothing yet has convinced me that racism is not all around us still and at times seems to be growing stronger and more ugly.

And are you concerned about basic values—what they are and whether we heed them? Are you concerned about your country? Are you concerned about its seeming lack of outstanding leadership on so many levels? Are you concerned that many of those to whom we ought to be able to look up to appear now to have feet of clay? Are you concerned about the seeming deterioration of moral values, about the failure of the family and the schools and the synagogues and the churches to lead and to show the way? Are you concerned about what seems to me to be a lessening sense of integrity, the very thing that stands out so impressively in many of our past revered leaders?