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Leadership in Citizenship

There is great need today for instituting in our schools throughout our country an enlarged and improved program of youth education in the fundamentals of law in a free society and in the responsibilities of leadership.

We call on our young people for greater activity in undergirding our institutions of government; we give them greater responsibilities at an earlier age than in generations past, but are we fair to them and to society in these respects unless we also prepare them with the knowledge and the understanding necessary to discharge these obligations? The theme of Law Day, U.S.A., this year called on "Young America" to "Lead the Way" in regard to the changing of bad laws, the preservation of good laws, and the making of better laws. So far so good, yet how is this mandate to be executed unless there is present the ability to differentiate between good and bad laws? Whatever changes are made must be within the framework of law as it applies to our constitutional form of government, and if the basic principles that pertain to them are not thoroughly comprehended, the wrong course is likely to result. To discharge this duty of preparing our young people for the tasks that will be theirs, we must obtain in our schools, beginning as early as the elementary grades, a revitalized curriculum of education in the real meaning of citizenship.

We have experienced in almost all parts of the United States what can only be described as a breakdown in the teaching of the root principles of law in a free society. In saying that, I am not blaming the education system alone. It has in part been a failure of the legal profession and of society itself. We have not paid sufficient attention to what we now realize is a very basic component of preparing our youth for lives of constructive participation in a changing society; we have failed to impress upon the very young how the law functions to protect individual rights—how it provides for orderly, democratic change; what the difference is between dissent and violent protest; why individual rights must be balanced with individual responsibility to the total society.

The consequences of deterioration and neglect in this area became increasingly apparent in the 1960s. The stark fact of our experience during the past decade has been the prevalence of disorder. The disorder has been not only physical and material,

but as well, moral and philosophical—witness the studied indifference to the rights of others and the almost equally complete lack of elementary self-respect that is so casually displayed all about us . . .

The President's Commission on Law Enforcement and the Administration of Justice, commonly referred to as the President's Crime Commission, on which I was privileged to serve, found that there was a direct correlation between the incidents of violence in the 1960s and the declining emphasis in recent decades on the obligations of citizenship. In the words of the Commission, "unless society does take concerted action to change the general conditions and attitudes that are associated with crime, no improvement in law enforcement and administration of justice . . . will be of much avail." This places at least a part of the onus for the deplorable conditions that exist, not on the judges and the lawyers—as some are wont to do—but on the average citizen. It places a part of the burden on the citizen who sits in his chair and pontificates about the responsibilities of the judge, the lawyer, the law enforcement officer, and not once pauses to contemplate his own. Let's be quite frank about assessing the causes. As early as 429 B.C., when Athens was at its highest intellectual state, the statesman Pericles put it this way: "We alone regard a man who takes no part in public affairs not as a harmless but a useless character." I don't mean that in today's world everyone can be a legislator or a public leader. But

everyone can make his individual views known and lend his personal influence to causes in which he believes. And the least that we can do is to join in assisting the younger generation in being equipped to come to grips with problems we left to them for solution. Courses in the schools in the once familiar subject area of "civics" more often than not are inadequate to the interests of today's young people. In an era of profound evolutionary change in American life, we have failed to adapt course content and teaching techniques to pres-

Special Prosecutor Leon Jaworski delivered this address recently to the International Platform Association.

ent-day needs in this area of the

schools' curriculum. We have failed to impress upon children at a receptive age why a free people must rely upon law and its institutions in their relationships . . .

We devote unlimited energies and huge budgets to the development of faster means of transportation in the air and on the ground and on the sea—to the exploration of the oceans and the moon—and to the advancement of technology in so many of our areas of endeavor. I do not quarrel with the value of these undertakings, except to pose this question: Wherein do we strengthen our society by our successes in these directions while failing to undergird the generation of young with a sense of pride and appreciation in what is theirs and a resolve to preserve it for themselves and succeeding generations?

We have fared well indeed, yes, prospered for almost two centuries under our present basic system of government. It is a part of our responsibility to make certain that our young people understand what is at stake if our democratic institutions give way to other processes of government.

The French scholar and philosopher, De Tocqueville, in his prolonged studies of American democracy and our institutions, referred with unbounded admiration to the greatness and genius of our country. He concluded that America was great because America was good—especially in a sense of morality and in respecting laws and the rights of fellowman. But this greatness is not self-perpetuating. It can vanish much faster than the time that it took to win it. Are these not truisms that need to be imparted to our young? And is not the most fundamental of these that obedience to the rule of law is indispensable to a free and ordered society? . . .

In recent times, men in high places have acknowledged their involvement in official wrongdoing and have admitted breaches of sacred trusts reposed in them. Tragic as these events are, it must not be overlooked that there are legions of men and women in public service who are serving honorably and faithfully our institutions of government. In a real sense they are the unsung peace-time heroes of America's greatness at this hour. It would be tragic indeed if their contributions to the building of our society were not fully recognized and appreciated. And as for the line of succession, indoctrinations in good citizenship at an early age will enable oncoming generations to carry forward the work that must be done to assure that America will continue to be great. If this obligation is not discharged, history will surely record our failure.

Inasmuch as we will celebrate soon the bicentennial of our nation, whose constitutional form of government through law is recognized to be a triumph over the despotism and individual repression of authoritarian forms, the time to foster this program seems especially propitious. And let us ever remember the words of the English Prime Minister Disraeli: "The youth of a nation are the trustees of posterity."