

ADDRESS

by

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Attorney General of the United States

at

Class Day Exercises
of the Class of 1940

New York University

Gould Memorial Library
New York, N.Y.

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2:00 p.m.

It would occasion my deep gratitude at any time to be chosen, with Senator Wagner, for an award from this class for meritorious service. But there are reasons why just at this time it is a cause of unusual satisfaction. A storm of violence and poison is sweeping over the world. The thoughts of men are turned to feats of strength and new achievements in destruction.

Yet your award can only be a recognition of effort in a wholly different field. Whatever of service I have been, or ever can be, able to render is in trying to bring about peaceful and reasoned adjustments in the law, which is the foundation of our social order.

Your award is significant, too, because it is in this field that my generation must have failed. Had we not failed in our peace adjustments, we could not be undergoing the present trial by ordeal. Only twenty years ago the democracies of the world had in their possession complete victory. In less than a generation it has been wasted away until again they are in a struggle for their very existence. Certainly we have not been wise in the ways of peace.

Even in this time of tumult we should recognize that the ultimate test of our civilization is in ordering our peace-time life to prevent conflicts or to adjust them before they reach violent proportions. Unless we can do that, all victory is empty and illusive. When force has spent itself, the problems inherent in the creation of a more just and progressive order will remain.

When the world sits down to gather up the pieces and reconstruct the order for the world to come, it will have to work out relationships that will be sustained by reason, not by force alone. A bruised and wounded world will seek a return to some kind of rule of law, and the duration of peace will depend on the justice and equity of the rule it sets up.

Democracies can never prevail by force of arms alone. The power of weapons still depends on the judgment and courage and devotion of the men who wield them. You cannot mechanize loyalty or the will to sacrifice. These qualities are not aroused in men by any abstract concept of a democracy. They are aroused only when they feel that the democracy is their democracy, a satisfying way of life, a symbol of real opportunity for themselves and their children, an equality in substance not just in words, a plan of freedoms which respect the dignity of the individual. These loyalties are dampened and these enthusiasms cooled by every long-standing injustice or oppression and by every privation and insecurity which affect masses of men.

Your awards today can only be construed as encouragement to the efforts we have made in the field of legislation and legal interpretation to enlarge the capacity of the law to deal with social insecurity and economic injustice. In this, our country was late in beginning - its steps have been slow and faltering. But we have in these recent years set about the task of bringing the strength and protection of democracy to every fire-side and the justice of democracy to every workbench in the land. It is there that democracy must look for its strength, and to them it owes the simple justice of our recent social and labor legislation and court decisions. Those short-sighted persons who would seize our present emergency to strike down these gains would break the heart of democracy at the very time they are demanding of it new sacrifices and exertions.

Of course to your generation rather than to ours falls the responsibility and the opportunity to organize a successful peace time democracy - a far more difficult task than to organize a successful war. Its pattern is in your unfettered minds, not in ours so saturated with the philosophy of the status quo. Its hope is in your fresh spirits, not in our weary ones. Your heavy and delicate task is to bring peace and stability, thru justice and fair dealing. Peace between individuals, between nations, between races, between classes, between creeds and opinions rests only on the ancient foundation of government by consent of the governed, supremacy of the rule of law, applied to the individual with impartiality and justice. Face it with hope and determination. If some of our work you find good, we shall be happy. But to borrow from Kipling:

"Though all we know depart
The old Commandments stand:-
'In courage keep your heart,
In strength lift up your hand.'"