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## Remarks On Accepting Presidency (of ABA)

Lewis F. Powell Jr.

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REMARKS ACCEPTING PRESIDENCY

Mr. President, Distinguished Guests,  
Members of the Bar, Ladies and Gentlemen:

Walter Craig - in a few days I shall have to call him Judge Craig - and I have shared a number of platforms during the past year. Occasionally it has been my privilege to introduce him. This was his first opportunity to get even. He has done so with typical generosity and - for a judge (if I may say so) - with remarkable disregard of reality.

I am not merely returning the compliment when I say with deep sincerity that Walter Craig has been a great President of the ABA.

But Walter has done me no favor - or you either - by asking me to speak following the inspiring program this evening, and particularly after the superb address of Ambassador Stevenson. He is one of the very few men of this century who can match the eloquence of Sir Winston Churchill.

Lord Birkett, in perhaps his last appearance in America, spoke here to the Association of the Bar of the City of New York. In acknowledging what he thought was an over-generous introduction he told this story of a friend:

His friend, visiting in South Carolina during the depression days of the mid-1930's, was attending a small rural church. Posted on the church

bulletin board was a sign in large print which said:

"Annual Strawberry Festival"

But when one examined the sign more closely, he found - in very small print - the words:

"Owing to the depression,  
prunes will be served."

Any further speaking tonight would be in the category of serving "prunes" on top of the "strawberries" we have already enjoyed.

Thus, I will not follow the precedent of taking this occasion to outline the program of the incoming President. I will merely say - lest you think there is no program - that our top priorities for 1964/65 will include

1.  
(i) a comprehensive re-evaluation of the ethical standards of our profession;

(ii) An acceleration and broadening of efforts - already having high priority - to assure the availability of legal services, in both civil and criminal cases, to all who need them; and

(iii) the launching and financing of the newly authorized Criminal Justice Project, which is charged with the task of formulating minimum standards for the Administration of Criminal Justice - standards which will preserve a vigilant concern for protecting the rights of persons accused of crime, and at the same time assure that law enforcement is not unduly hampered in protecting the rights of society against those who would prey upon it.

The details of each of these programs have already been outlined to the House of Delegates, and will unfold as the year progresses.

In mentioning three areas of priority, it must not be inferred that there will be any lessening of emphasis upon the myriad of other activities of the Association. These will be carried forward, in the service of the profession and the public, by our 19 sections and 66 committees.

Having kept my promise not to make a speech - at least not a long one - about the Association's program, perhaps you will be interested, as our 87th Annual Meeting draws to a close, in hearing what a competent independent

observer thinks of an American Bar Association Convention. An article in the New York Times, following our meeting in Chicago last summer, written by a distinguished reporter, gave this account of what our members do at annual meetings:

"Lawyers, like other middle class characters, devote a lot of their conversation to money, spots, wives - and other women. There has also been plenty of talk about golf scores. And much time has been spent lining up lucrative exchanges of legal business."\*

It must be comforting to wives to know that they were mentioned in the same sentence with "other women". And I know that partners who remain at home, wondering whether the firm's money is being spent here in New York on high living, will be encouraged by the thought

\*New York Times, August 18, 1963.

that - in addition - this is a bartering place for the exchange of lucrative law business.

But happily, the New York Times article went on to say:

"But on the whole, bar meetings are surprisingly serious affairs, and the lawyers talk about serious things."

Tonight is not the time to talk about serious things, and so I will bring this to a close - on a somewhat personal note. A great Virginia lawyer once said:

"To be a lawyer, is honor enough for any man."

Each of us who is privileged to call himself a lawyer shares this honor, not so much because of anything he individually has done, but because he has been admitted to membership in one of the



great professions - a profession which for centuries has distinguished itself by its standard of ethics, its sense of public responsibility, and its dedication to man's highest aspiration, justice under law.

I know of no new words to express to you my emotions and sentiments in assuming the Presidency of the national organization of the legal profession. I can only say - as others before me have said - that from the bottom of my heart I thank you for this privilege, and I pledge to you my utmost devotion to carrying forward - in the best interest of lawyers and the public - the work of this great Association.

Annual Banquet  
American Bar Association  
New York, August 13, 1964  
Lewis F. Powell, Jr.

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