

# *ACS Conference*

Saturday, August 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2003

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## ***Dinner Address: Presidential Ballroom***

***Teresa Wynn Roseborough***

Vice President, ACS Board of Directors

***Eric Holder***

Former Deputy Attorney General

### **Eric Holder:**

We are engaged in a battle for the soul of our nation. We are at a critical time in that battle. This country can take one of two paths over the coming years. We can continue down the road that threatens our civil liberties while not truly protecting us, down the road that challenges women's rights in the reproductive choices they make, down the road where the environment in which our children will live will be degraded, down the road that will not take us back- but take us to a place where this nation has never been before. There is an alternative to the fear, the mistrust, that seems to drive so much of our conservative brethren's agenda. That alternative, that other path, is rooted in our Constitution and found in the work of progressive men and women throughout our history. That other path runs right through the American Constitution Society.

In four short years ACS has spread to over eighty law schools and has lawyer chapters all over the country. This organization has clearly met a need. It is the vehicle through which we will develop a broader, more encompassing vision of the law than that which now predominates. It is the means by which we will give voice to the people in this country who want a nation that will truly embrace its diversity and, even in this troubled time, find a way to stay true to our immigrant heritage.

Our legal system has been used over the years to effect positive change. It was through the law that an American system of apartheid was ended, that women acquired the rights too long denied them, that our sense of privacy was firmly established. But much work remains to be done. Too many people in our land are still not truly free and the government is, too often, tied to narrow interests. Though we have changed our laws we have not been as successful in changing our attitudes and governing philosophies. Gender and racial discrimination are still too large a part of our lives. Children, especially those of color, are not truly valued. Justifiable environmental concerns are increasingly dismissed as an impediment to economic growth. And our current tax policies have led to economic inequities in the present that will decrease our future ability to deal with the demographically driven problems we will inevitably confront.

It is our responsibility to not only note these problems but to craft solutions to them. And that, again, is why the ACS is so important. As a mechanism for the development of progressive/liberal ideas, as a place where young people can put to good use the idealism that drives them, as a center where the great legal minds of our day can gather, the American Constitution Society can, and must, be a real force for the development of solutions that will benefit the greatest number of our people.

Let me be clear: we do not gather in reaction to any group or simply to oppose an agenda. We are a positive, affirmative force. We are here as the descendants of those people and movements that have made this nation adhere to the promise of its revolution. We are not satisfied with our nation's present governing philosophy and we are determined to change it. We are committed to the principles, once found in both our nation's major parties, of equality, individual and societal responsibility, and compassion.

Though by their actions our conservative colleagues seem to fear what is admittedly an uncertain future and look back toward an America that, in fact, never really existed, we, through organizations like the American Constitution Society, must embrace the coming years and make them our own. We must craft new solutions to old problems that continue to bedevil us and find innovative, contemporary, progressive ways to deal with future concerns. We must not look at our imperfect world and simply consign ourselves to merely existing in it. We are engaged in a battle for the soul, the heart, of this nation. I urge all of you to use your formidable skills and the power that you have, or will acquire, to make this nation better. As the

inheritors of the liberal/progressive tradition this is our duty. I urge all of you to play key roles in the coming years in advocating for both a new agenda and a new America.

Thank you.