

Department of Justice Installations, New and Permanent

*John Q. Barrett**

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On March 27, 2009, more than 400 people witnessed the public installation of Eric H. Holder, Jr., as Attorney General of the United States. The ceremony, held before an audience of United States Department of Justice personnel and guests, occurred in George Washington University's Lisner Auditorium. President Obama delivered opening remarks, including a powerful definition of the Attorney General's job: serving as "the American people's lawyer." Associate Judge Robert Richter of the Superior Court of the District of Columbia—on which then-Judge Holder served from 1988-93—administered the oath to his former colleague.

Attorney General Holder also spoke. At one point, looking both at his audience and to the past, he described commitments to the rule of law, equal protection and due process as "the foundation" upon which today's DOJ personnel and generations of their predecessors have built the Department's great history.¹

In President Obama's remarks, he referred to the 1930s murals that are a notable feature of the main Department of Justice building in downtown Washington. He noted that one mural, painted in the era when schools in that city and in much of the United States were racially segregated by law, shows black and white children attending school together. The President explained that this mural "is, to this day, a moving

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For a selected archive of Jackson List posts, see my homepage at www.law.stjohns.edu. To subscribe to the Jackson List, which does not display recipient identities or distribute their email addresses, send a note to barrettj@stjohns.edu.

¹ Streaming video of the event is available at www.c-span.org/Watch/Media/2009/03/27/HP/A/16839/Attorney+General+Eric+Holder+Installation+Ceremony.aspx. A transcript of President Obama's remarks is at www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Remarks-by-the-President-at-the-Installation-of-Attorney-General-Eric-Holder/. Attorney General Holder's prepared remarks are at www.usdoj.gov/ag/speeches/2009/ag-speech-090327.html.

reminder that sometimes law lags behind justice—and it is up to us to bridge that distance.”²

Attorney General Holder and his colleagues can easily, and I hope that they do regularly, view the Department’s murals for grounding and inspiration.

The Attorney General also can view every day, perhaps for a little guidance, the portraits of selected predecessors. In his private office, he works beneath the portrait of Attorney General Janet Reno (1993-2001), with whom he as Deputy Attorney General worked closely. And in his—and, as his clients, our—conference room, he can look to four others: Attorneys General Edward H. Levi (1975-77), Elliot L. Richardson (1973), Robert F. Kennedy (1961-64) and Robert H. Jackson (1940-41).³

² A January 5, 2009, National Public Radio report on the DOJ murals is available at www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=98783331.

³ See Mike Levine, *Holder Frames Future at Justice With Portraits From the Past*, www.foxnews.com/politics/2009/03/25/holder-frames-future-justice-portraits-past/ (Mar. 25, 2009).