
Ramsey Clark

‘If You Are Marching, You Better Be Singing’

Ramsey Clark was Attorney General during the Johnson Administration 1967-69. He was instrumental in the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and the Civil Rights Act of 1968. He worked on the legal defense of Lyndon LaRouche and his associates when they were railroaded to prison in the 1980s.

Good afternoon. Words seem, if not useless, feeble, after music, as we have just heard it. I have a little saying by the chair where I sit most of my time, when I’m sitting. It says: “Without music, life would not be worthwhile.”

I’m not sure that there would really *be* life without music, because I think it’s a big part of life—maybe the best. It rarely gives you a headache, like thinking. It *can* give you a headache, too—some I’ve heard—it’s just the decibels, if not the rhythm. I’d like to think that music is a major road to peace. If we would listen to music together, we would find our souls at peace with each other, I think. But we listen separately, when we listen, and probably not often enough.

The constant presence of the harshest violence—I started to say, throughout all my adult life, but I went into the Marines when I was 17, so it started before I was an adult—it’s the most demeaning thing to the character of humanity, and raises the question about the worthiness of our character, which determines our conduct, whether we understand it or not.

And we have—when I say “we”—institutions that we live with, that we are responsible for, however remote our ability to affect them seems to be—those institutions threaten life on the planet. With all the means we have now for total destruction, we’ve still got some of our most imaginative—imagination can be harmful as well as helpful—scientists, looking for better means of mass destruction; our military research and development is always anxious for

new weapons that can wipe out a new sector of our brothers and sisters and children, that we have decided, or circumstances have caused us to believe are our enemies, and we can see the extremes to which it goes.

From Iraq to ISIS

There is a clear connection between our destruction of Iraq, beginning in January of 1991, and the capacity of a group of people that we know as ISIS for a total disregard of any humane sensitivity: You not only kill, you kill to hurt; you kill to hurt as hard and painfully, and broadly and widely and indiscriminately as you can. You kill to kill. It’s almost a disease.

But it’s a disease that comes from a long period of cultivation, or however diseases come to be, of dehumanization. We watch—I use ISIS because it’s in the forefront right now—but it seems you want to seek what you might call the cruelest, the most inhumane, the most unacceptable, form of death, of killing, perhaps in the belief that terror can cause conformity, or at least destroy resistance, the capacity for resistance. But we’ve been at it for such a long time, thinking that by the creation of more effective means of mass destruction and violence—

If we took all the money we put into the means of killing people, and that we spend on it, and put it into



Schiller Institute

Ramsey Clark: “I’m an optimist. That’s one of the reasons that people don’t take me very seriously. But I’d rather not be taken seriously than refuse to believe that we shall overcome.”

health, or education, or things that are good for children, it'd be quite a different world. But our military expenditures go on, and our scientists still seek cheaper means, more effective means, more widespread techniques, of *killing people*. And, we have to wonder—God bless our children, they are amazing—you think they're going to be little demons if they look at what we do. But there's still hope with our children that they can rise to the spirit of humanity that has always promised the possibility of peace; I mean real peace, where you simply refuse to hurt somebody else, individually or collectively.

And for some time now, attention has to be paid, because our capacity for destruction is, if not total, very, very close to it, and we are still trying to find ways for making more promising, as to the totality of whoever it is we've decided are our enemies. We need to address the presence of the acceptability of solving problems by force.

[What] we need to recognize as the greatest threat to human values and human life, is militarism. And I say that as a person who, at the age of 14, just a few weeks before my birthday, on Dec. 8, 1941, went all the way downtown—it was seven miles to Los Angeles—and tried to join the Marines. And they booted me out: “Get out of here, kid!! We got a war.” And I was saying, “I want to be part of it.” “Get out!” So I had to wait until Dec. 18 of 1944, actually, when I became 17.

I know we, here, talk about peace, desire peace, believe in its possibility, but we haven't yet brought together the sharp focus in our thinking, in our capacity to organize people, to even stop research and development for better forms of mass destruction. And that has to become a priority. It doesn't have much fun and appeal to it, but it's the only way we are going to end the capacity of technology to destroy life on the planet, before we destroy ourselves.

And, the way is clear: It's through the human heart, the human mind, and the realization that we love each other—and I find this [event] very lovable—or we'll die. Not a peaceful death, in the midst of loving friends, but by violence, and proud of the cunning that enables us to devise such wonderful means of mass destruction; that we can take out half a people, or half a continent, or finally the essential elements that we found on this planet when we arrived, for a good life, with love and music in our hearts. For somewhere within, music is the key to love, and the key to joy, in life.

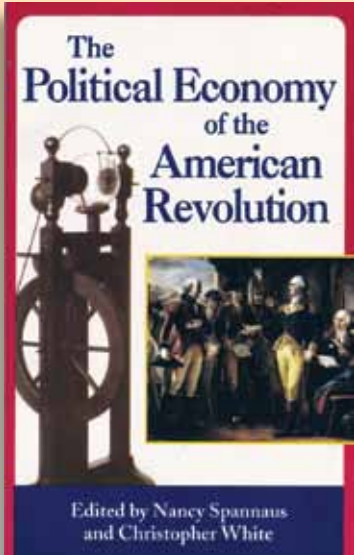
We're on the Brink

And we're on the brink. We don't see the massive wars, although they are lurking, but we see a new and significant element that sees killing, just killing, as an end in itself. And that has been created by the value systems of societies that have not only endured, but celebrated war after war. The moral worth of a people can probably be better determined by the size of the military budget in the country where they live than by any other, because it says, “We'll kill you to have our way.”

I'm an optimist. That's one of the reasons that people don't take me very seriously. But I'd rather not be taken seriously than refuse to believe that we shall overcome. I saw us marching toward that in race relations. It was *beautiful*, and it showed the possibility of marching and singing. And if you're marching, you better be singing, because otherwise you would probably be carrying a big gun. We *can* overcome, but we are in a race between education and catastrophe. And catastrophe is closing in.

And on that optimistic and happy note I say, let's sing our way to peace.

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