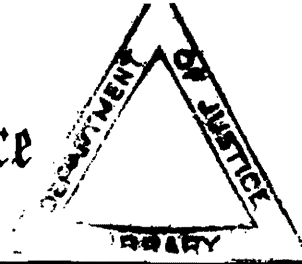




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REMARKS

by

ATTORNEY GENERAL ROBERT F. KENNEDY

To The

ADVERTISING COUNCIL

WASHINGTON, D. C.

MARCH 12, 1963

The President's Committee on Juvenile Delinquency, upon which I serve with Secretary Celebrezze and Secretary Wirtz, believes that the problems which face our Nation's youth have never been more critical nor more important to our national well-being.

To suggest the size of this problem, let me outline some facts which California recently discovered in an intensive study of thousands of delinquents.

Six of every 100 California young people aged 10 to 17 are arrested each year.

In one recent year 25% of its boys aged 16 and 17 were arrested for non-traffic violations, and that 10% of the boys in this age group were under the supervision of a probation department.

61% of the delinquents live in homes which rent for less than \$80 a month.

50% have moved to new homes five times since their birth.

62% have parents who are either not married, separated, divorced, or one parent is dead.

23% have no father in the home.

73% have records of persistent school misbehavior.

18% have a drinking problem -- and these are children under 18 years.

26% have had psychiatric or psychological care.

20% have fathers with police records.

23% have brothers and sisters with police records.

25% have lived in foster homes.

These figures come from a state, I might add, in which delinquency rates have remained constant during the past five years. Most other states have had rising rates.

We should remember that these yearly figures don't give the whole picture. If 6% of a community's boys become delinquent in one year, a far larger number will become delinquent in the eight years from age 10 to 17.

One large city recently followed for four years the entire 9th grade class of its public schools. By the end of the four years, 41% of the 2,000 boys had a police record. Other cities have found that in high-problem slum areas, this figure reaches 75% or 80%.

For a national picture, we can look at the FBI's latest crime report, which shows that in 1962 there was no overall rise in adult arrests, but arrests of young people under 18 climbed 9% -- to over one million arrests. This youth crime increase included an 8% rise in the big cities and an 11% increase in communities under 25,000 population.

So you see we are not talking about a small, isolated problem. We are talking about a tremendous national problem which has its roots in such things as school dropouts, broken homes, racial discrimination, slum housing, and youth unemployment.

The President's Committee on Juvenile Delinquency, believes that the best answer to delinquency is for communities to mobilize their resources for massive, across-the-board attacks on all the sources of delinquency.

Grants are being made under the Juvenile Delinquency Act of 1961 to support local demonstration projects of this nature. One major demonstration project is now in operation -- the \$12 million Mobilization for Youth Program in New York's traditional melting pot, the lower East side.

This program offers more than 20 new services in youth employment, education, recreation, family services, and community development. The work programs include a subsidized urban work corps that is now employing more than 200 boys and girls. This program is open to all kinds of young people. One work supervisor recently found out that he had the former war counselors of three different street gangs working peacefully together repairing a settlement house roof.

Mobilization for Youth's education programs include a homework helper program in which several hundred bright students in slum high schools are paid to tutor failing elementary school students.

Many problems can arise when young teachers from middle-class backgrounds are assigned to teach in slum schools, like a young teacher, on his first assignment, who was talking to a Puerto Rican child. The boy kept looking down at the floor, and the teacher told him to look him in the eye like a man when they talked. The child ran away in tears, and the teacher later learned that many Puerto Rican children are taught to lower their eyes when they talk to adults.

In order to alleviate such problems, one of the programs in the Mobilization for Youth plan provides for slum school teachers visiting students' homes in order to learn more about their backgrounds and problems.

Another Mobilization Program uses qualified East Side women to teach their less experienced neighbors to cook, sew, budget, and care for their children. These women are called visiting homemakers. One of them recently encountered a 16-year-old mother who fed her baby bacon and eggs. She thought that was what the doctor meant when he said "solid food."

Another visiting homemaker met a woman who threw away powdered milk that the Welfare Department had given her for her children because she didn't know what it was.

The children in communities like this need help if they are ever to lead normal, decent lives. I've walked through the New York City slums and talked to idle youth who think the cards are stacked against them. Quite often they're right. They got behind in school and never caught up, so they dropped out. They found out that because of their lack of education, or their race, or their backgrounds, there were no jobs for them.

Many of them think that the only way they can ever achieve any success is by getting into the rackets. Their heroes are mobsters and racketeers.

Yet the vast majority of these young people want to live decent lives. When Mobilization opened the doors of its work program last fall it was swamped with applicants -- more than twice the number it had expected. Dropouts, boys with police records, gang members, narcotics users -- hundreds of them wanted to learn to hold a decent job if somebody would give them a hand.

Our communities have no greater obligation than to open opportunities for these young people. Our Committee is encouraging communities to start new programs, and 15 communities have been awarded grants to help them map out massive new programs.

The Youth Employment Act, which is now before Congress, would be an important step toward providing useful activity for unemployed youth. The proposed National Service Program, which would use the techniques of the Peace Corps in our own domestic problem areas, could also be of great value. This program would put volunteers to work, at local invitation, in such problem areas as slums, Indian Reservations, migrant worker camps, and Mental Health Hospitals.

In addition to these programs, every community has many worthwhile youth programs, directed by both public and private agencies, which do much good and deserve the support of every citizen.

The Federal Government can't solve these problems. Our role is to encourage, to offer assistance, and to try to stimulate new local action. The fight is going to be won or lost at the grassroots level, and to win it the communities need leadership from citizens like yourselves.

Henry Thoreau once wrote, "There are a thousand hacking at the branches of evil to one who is striking at the root."

The root is growing through the foundation of our society. Let me call on you today to strike at this root, to cut it back, and to help American youth realize the optimism and the opportunity both of being young and of being American.