

Address by

HONORABLE HOMER CUMMINGS

C. C.

Attorney General of the United States

Delivered Before

THE NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE'S FOURTH ANNUAL CONFERENCE  
(Women's Conference)

At the

Waldorf Astoria

New York City

September 26, 1934.

The Department of Justice, which I have the very great honor to represent, is a rather large department and somewhat intricate. It has been called the largest law office in the world, and perhaps that is true, with its personnel of nearly nine thousand. There are eleven divisions of major importance. Only one of these divisions deals with the question of crime. I may mention this so that while the dramatic features incident to the work of the criminal division are much in the public eye, there are ten other divisions doing work of almost equal importance.

Something akin to a national emergency confronted our people a year or more ago growing out of the extraordinary development of predatory crime having interstate characteristics. Realizing this situation, and realizing further that some agency with nation-wide approach must deal with this problem if it were to be dealt with at all, the Department of Justice undertook what is now generally known as its "campaign against crime".

At the very beginning the Department of Justice created a special division to deal with racketeering and kidnaping. We sought, also, to bring about a more intimate, friendly and co-operative spirit between the Federal and the local law enforcement agencies. We strove, also, to develop our own facilities and to strengthen our organization by improving its personnel and stiffening its morale.

It was manifest that additional legislation was imperatively required. This led to what has been generally described as the "twelve-point program" of the Department of Justice. These bills, originally twelve in number, ultimately resulted in the passage of seventeen specific

and important enactments. Let it be said most emphatically that these measures were not calculated to place the Federal government in control of the crime situation of the country. It was not our purpose to invite local organizations to turn over their problems to the Federal government. Law enforcement now and hereafter must, for the most part, be a matter of local concern. Moreover, there were constitutional limitations which had ever to be kept in view.

The bills, in general, deal with the menace of an armed underworld and with that aspect of the problem which has been brought so dramatically forward of late by roving groups of criminals passing and repassing state lines and bent constantly upon predatory crimes of violence. These laws were the result of very careful study, and while they have imposed greater responsibility upon the Federal government it was a responsibility which could not properly be avoided. Manifestly, the problem of crime is not limited to detection, arrest and punishment. It is a social question with manifold ramifications, touching environment, heredity, education, the home, the school and, indeed, almost every activity of life.

Crime, in its wider aspects, requires consideration of the whole structure of our social life. For instance, a study of the records of more than 250,000 arrests for the year 1933, as evidenced by fingerprint cards received by the department's division of investigation, reveals the menacing fact that there were more arrests at the age of nineteen than at any other age; and that a startlingly large percentage of serious crimes was committed by minors.

When I return to Washington, it is my purpose to call a crime con-

ference to be held in Washington during the early part of December. At that conference the whole problem will be studied in a manner not heretofore attempted. I am hopeful, also, that it will be possible to establish at Washington a national institute of criminology, which will concern itself not only with the study of crime problems, but also with the practical side of police work. At the present time we are maintaining a technical laboratory which permits of the analysis of latent evidence and is an excellent school for the study of the use of the latest scientific equipment.

Those who suggest the establishment of a system similar to that of Scotland Yard, speak without any comprehension of the situation. The structure and functions of that famous organization are hardly adaptable to our complex problems.

Scotland Yard, contrary to popular belief, is not a detective force and does not have jurisdiction throughout England or the British Isles. It is simply the Metropolitan Police Department of Greater London and is one of the 187 police forces in England and Wales.

While upon that subject I might mention Scotland Yard has a collection of fingerprints of about 500,000. The Division of Investigation of the Department of Justice in Washington has a collection of more than 4,500,000 fingerprints.

We are engaged in an undertaking of serious import. It cannot succeed without popular understanding and co-operation. You, my friends, can, if you will, direct your efforts toward the building up of a stout-hearted public morale which will cause citizens, as a matter of course, promptly

to furnish to the officers of the law the information that may come to them regarding known fugitives from justice, to give testimony freely in criminal cases, and to render jury service gladly when the opportunity is afforded to perform this high function of American citizenship. You can aid in speeding the activities of police and prosecutors, in enabling courts to establish proper rules and practices, and in securing desirable laws from state legislatures, local administrations, and, if the need should appear, from the Congress itself. You can lend your support to honest public officials dealing impartially with such public problems.

No more worthy enterprise could possibly engage your attention. Organized bands of criminals prey upon legitimate business, exact tribute from the timid or the fearful and constitute an everpresent threat, not only to property, but to the safety of our homes and the sanctity of life. I have said before and, because the accuracy of the statement has been challenged, I reassert emphatically that there are more people today in the underworld bearing arms than there are in the combined forces of the Army and Navy of the United States. This open challenge to orderly government must be met with courage and resourcefulness.

And now one final word: The time has come to call a halt upon the glorification of the criminal classes. Far too often the gangster is depicted as a hero with fine qualities of mind and spirit, while the police officer is represented as a mean or heartless individual, glutted with authority and stupid in the performance of his duty. Such distortion of the truth cannot fail to have an injurious effect, especially upon the plastic minds of the younger generation.

The gangster is not a hero, but a public enemy. His distorted mind is bent upon injuring, maltreating, preying upon, or destroying the innocent and the helpless. In an emergency he is almost invariably a coward. The real heroes are the courageous judges and public officials and officers of the law throughout our land, who, in the line of duty, are performing their dangerous and necessary tasks with devotion and zeal. These men are the veritable peace-time soldiers of the republic, who are entitled to our unwavering confidence and our undivided support.

- - - - -