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DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

LESSONS OF THE CRIME CONFERENCE

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ADDRESS BY

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Delivered at

Memorial Continental Hall

Washington, D. C.

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Thursday, December 13, 1934,

8:15 P. M.

Ladies and Gentlemen of the Conference:

For many months I have been looking forward to this Conference. The results have exceeded my highest expectations. The problem of crime, as it confronts our people today, has been dwelt upon by the speakers who have addressed you in such vivid and effective fashion, that there is no occasion to attempt to restate it. It is enough to say that it is impossible to over-emphasize its importance or to depict, in adequate manner, the devastating effect of criminal activities as they affect practically every aspect of American life. If this Conference merely focuses the attention of our people upon the character of this menace, it has served a purpose for which all honest citizens should be grateful. But fortunately, it has gone much farther.

I think it may truthfully be said that the Nation as a whole has awakened from a strange sort of torpidity and, like an aroused giant, is shaking off the chains in which it has been bound. The plain fact is that our country has been a laggard amongst Nations. in dealing with this matter. The vehement agitation of a few, or the righteous indignation of a small minority, may stir limited groups and exercise a healthy and stimulating influence, but accomplishments of a real and permanent character can never be achieved without a stout-hearted public sentiment supporting the forces of law and order in every nook and corner of our land.

It is only fair to say that the vast extent of our country, the existence of state lines, and the complicated and antiquated character

of our law enforcing machinery have presented problems of peculiar difficulty, especially in the face of an increasing population, with constantly multiplying social and industrial problems, and inter-related in its contacts by the amazing developments in transportation and communication. To put it another way, America has outgrown its penal system. The difficulty all along has not been to diagnose the disease, but to find and apply the remedy. Much good work in the past has failed of its purpose, because of the lack of an adequate follow-up system. Different groups have approached the problem from different angles. Progress has been made in one spot only to be counter-balanced by losses in other places. The whole movement against crime, in any national sense, has been sporadic, intermittent, disjointed, and totally lacking in correlation. With the amazing development in recent years of crimes of violence, perpetrated by criminals of a roving character who pass rapidly from the scene of their crimes into other jurisdictions, there has been presented, in very acute form, the question of the duty of the Federal government.

More and more it has become apparent that the Department of Justice, not only in the matter of discharging its own obligations, but for the purpose of securing some sort of national leadership in a national emergency, has been brought into a position of especial prominence. I have conceived it to be my duty to do all that I possibly can to make the Department of Justice an efficient arm of the Government, strengthening its morale, improving its personnel and presenting it always as it ought to be, and as I hope it will increasingly become, the friend and servant of the people of the United States who brought it into being.

It is relatively easy to deal in words, and words charged with sufficient import are often necessary to stir men to action. But more than words are needed.

It would be idle, of course, to expect that the problem of crime could be solved by a single conference or, indeed, by a series of conferences, or, for that matter, in our generation. Crime Conferences have been held before, bringing together people of high moral purpose, engendering enormous enthusiasm and leaving behind but little in the way of tangible results. I do not under-estimate the value of such conferences as I have just described. They have been of inestimable service. I pause to pay a heartfelt tribute of admiration, of respect, and of gratitude to those who have preceded us in this field, who have labored diligently and intelligently; and whose efforts, while in large part forgotten or overlooked, still are remembered by those of us, who are interested in these subjects, as we turn again and again to the great reservoirs of information which they have opened up to us, thereby refreshing our spirits and taking advantage of the material they have gathered, to carry on the great work they have done so well.

As I see it, many of these efforts have been relatively ineffective because of conditions over which their sponsors had no control. There was not available any clearing house for information, or any authoritative moving force for continued activity. It is this missing element which I believe it to be our duty to supply. It is an enormous responsibility; but, if I do not mistake the temper of this Conference, it is a responsibility which its delegates desire the Department of Justice to assume; and, in behalf of that Department, I accept the responsibility.

It is not the purpose of the Federal Government to usurp the functions of the State and local police units. It is not the desire to extend activities in violation either of constitutional limitations or the customs of our people. The motive is to attempt to meet a need which long has existed; and to assist, complement, and serve the law enforcing agencies of America.

When this Conference passes into history, it will leave behind it concrete practical results that can be translated into effective action.

I shall not deal in detail with the admirable resolutions which were adopted this afternoon. It is enough to say that they contemplate the development of a permanent structure which will permit and secure the concentration and cooperation of forces which will make themselves felt in behalf of law and order, not merely for a few brief hours, but for three hundred and sixty-five days in the year. It is not the function of this Conference to attempt to work out a detailed solution of delicate and intricate subjects. The time limit alone forbids such a course. It is, however, its province to suggest the erection of a suitable and permanent structure that will afford the means of working out these problems. Thus measured, this Convention is a triumphant success. The keynote is cooperation, with all that it implies, and a permanent structure, not only for continued technical training and instruction, but for the marshaling of the forces that affect and sustain public interest.

For convenience of thinking, and at the risk of laying myself open to the criticism for inaccuracy, the problem, as I see it, breaks up into four major topics.

First: there is the question of devising and securing a proper law enforcement system. This deals with Federal activities, state activities and local activities. It involves study and action in the whole field from the time a criminal act is perpetrated, through the processes of detection, apprehension, trial, conviction, punishment, probation and parole, to the time when the prisoner is returned to society. This includes, also, the matter of interstate compacts, legislation, and similar topics; as well as the scientific study of crime, methods of detection, schools of training, the improvement of our legal procedure, and the purging of the bar of those who debase its high purposes.

Second: there is the question of personnel. No matter how effective a system may be, it is worthless in the hands of those not competent to operate it. We have come to realize that those who enforce the law and undertake to represent the public in this high relationship of trust and responsibility, should not be men who look upon their occupation as a temporary job, but regard it in the high light of an important and, indeed, a sacred professional undertaking. Allied with this topic there will be the questions of training, qualification, character, methods of appointment, tenure of office, freedom from the blight of partisanship, or improper political, or other influences, and related questions.

Third: there is the question of crime prevention. Herein lies the problem of the treatment of the juvenile offender, the first offender, and children who have begun to fraternize with the so-called gang. It will involve also aspects of social questions, far too numerous to mention.

Fourth: there is the question of public support. This will involve the proper interpretation of the work of officials to the public, so that the people may be informed of what is going on, and why, to the end that a healthy morale may be developed which will strengthen the arm of the law enforcing agencies, encourage and stimulate the work of honest officials, and so affect the psychology of our people that there will be a universal abhorrence of crime and a fixed determination to eradicate it.

In connection with these and allied topics, civil and social organizations have a wide field for helpful cooperation; and the press, the periodicals, the radio, and the screen will have ample opportunity for constructive public service.

The immense difficulties inherent in these matters must be apparent to all. We are in for a long time program. It will require unremitting service, continued over a long period of years. The resolutions which have been adopted do not make the mistake of trying to do too much. They have the merit, however, of showing the way, and that is what we most imperatively need - a chart and a compass. You, who have assembled here as delegates, have rendered an unforgettable public service of the highest order. You have approached the problem seriously and understandingly.

This has not only been a conference, it has been a school. Review the program; read carefully the resolutions; note the names of those who have addressed you, both in the formal sessions and in the highly stimulating discussion hours; observe the wide range of topics discussed; consider the thought, and labor that have been devoted to these extraordinary addresses

and you will agree with me that when our records have been compiled in permanent form, they will constitute an unfailing source of authoritative information upon every aspect of our difficult problem.

As I look over the agenda and recall the stirring, as well as thoughtfully constructed speeches which have been delivered, I can truthfully say that there was not one single address that could have been spared from our program. Those who mistake noise for action, or who expect an over-night settlement of an age-long problem, may be disappointed, but no discerning person will be disappointed. Not only has this Conference performed the work allotted to it, but I am confident that the results here achieved will make themselves increasingly felt as time goes on.

And now, my friends, I cannot close this address without a personal word. My heart goes out to all of you in abundant gratitude for the sacrifices you have made, the time you have devoted to this subject, and the spirit in which you have discharged your obligations. I extend my thanks to each and every delegate, to all the able officials who have devoted so much time and labor to the details of this Conference, and to those who have addressed us, for what they have said, and the manner in which they have said it, as well as for the substance of their contributions. I salute, also, the organizations that have sent delegates here, and the representatives of the moving picture groups, the radio, the periodicals and the press, and all others who have contributed to the success of this Conference. Within the hour this meeting will have adjourned and this Conference will pass into history. If I mistake not, we shall go back to our respective tasks with a far better understanding

of the nature of the problem which has engaged our attention. Many of us came here last Monday to meet as comparative strangers. Tonight, we part as friends. As for myself, I shall be guided by the spirit of this fine gathering of splendid men and women and, even though we separate for a time, I shall constantly know the sustaining power of your comforting presence.