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AN ADDRESS

By

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Delivered Before the

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Mr. Chairman, Governor O'Connor, Members of the Supreme Court of Maryland, Distinguished Guests, Members of the Baltimore Criminal Justice Commission:

I come to you today bearing good news, as it were, to make a special plea as The People's Lawyer for your consideration of a problem which I believe ranks among the first of those vexing us in America today.

I refer to the juvenile problem; and I am primarily going to discourse upon some of the thoughts and actions which have taken place recently in our activities in this field.

As you probably know, for many months I have been deeply concerned with the task of attempting to set up machinery on a national scope to combat what was until recently a rising tide of juvenile crime.

Only the other day, after months of work in a sort of extra-curricular activity on the part of myself, my staff, and interested persons in all walks of life throughout the country, the first ray of hope and success came to us in the Uniform Crime Report of the FBI, in which finally the figures of juvenile crime showed a decline.

However, despite this decline, the arrests of persons under 18 years of age still were 11 percent above the number of arrests in the same period of the last peace-time year - 1941.

We note in these figures, which are gathered generally throughout the United States, a rather dismaying trend, in that there has been a 13 percent increase in general crime during the first six months of 1946 over the same period of last year.

While we seem to have had some effect in deterring very young boys and girls from the paths of crime, we have not been so successful throughout this

country in preventing the spread of crime.

One of the most remarkable figures to come to light is the spread of crime in rural areas.

It has been our habit for many years to attribute to the big cities, their crowded conditions and the greater opportunities they afford for temptation, the production of more criminals per capita than to the serene life of the small towns and the farms.

The latest figures show that crime in rural areas has increased almost 20 percent in the first six months of 1946 over the same period of last year.

According to J. Edgar Hoover, this is the highest rate of increase in crime since national figures were first compiled by the FBI in 1930.

Another interesting phase which has come to light is the age of 21.

In the past six months it has supplanted age 17 as that of more probable crime incidents.

I have given you these latest figures at the outset, because they are most emphatic in their story, although they are just figures.

The juvenile problem, about which I intend to speak primarily, came to me as a work of the heart as well as the head.

Let me describe how that came about.

One day my secretary told me that a well-known manufacturer in a Middle Western city was calling me long distance, saying that his message was urgent.

When I took the call, he told me that he wished to come to Washington to see me in the interests of his seventeen-year-old son.

That son, he said, had gotten into some serious trouble with the FBI.

He was a student in the University, and had fallen under the influence of an ex-convict.

The ex-convict was using him as a tool to obtain money on stolen tickets of a transportation company.

I told the father that I would be glad to hear what he had to say, and the next day he walked into my office.

In the meantime I had checked up on the boy and found that what the father said was true.

The boy was a good student and was not vicious.

The father's face was pallid and drawn as he sat before me.

In a low voice which was shaking with heartfelt sincerity he said, "Mr. Attorney General, I want to go to jail in place of my son because I am the real transgressor."

THE REAL TRANSGRESSOR - those words remain with me still.

I can see the distraught father seated in the high-vaulted room which your Government provides for the use of the Attorney General.

The real transgressor was there, present in the highest office provided for law enforcement under the Constitution.

He went on in this drab monotone, telling me how he had been busy with war work and how his wife's time had been taken up with charitable and other activities.

The boy for the time being was a tragic victim of the exigencies of war.

I investigated the case further, and I am happy to say that we were able to help that father and that mother, and that today the boy has come to the realization of the error of his ways, and is a fine student and has left all vestiges of transgression behind him.

After the father had gone I asked Mr. Hoover to come into my office, and he told me of his concern about the delinquency of teen-age boys and girls.

The figures which he produced were startling, and you have all heard them over and over again.

Some of them stood out in my mind.

The figure of the increase by 101 percent in arrests of boys under 17 years of age for drunkenness -- the increase of 375 percent in the number of arrests of girls and young women in certain categories. Those figures now have improved.

In all my experience I have found that the American people in general are pretty decent people, and that the children are very decent children.

Naturally, having children of my own, I was shocked; and I believed I would be remiss in my duty if I did not devote as much time as possible to the stamping out of certain trends among our juvenile population.

As you know, the Federal Bureau of Investigation is one of the parts of the Department of Justice; and Mr. Hoover, its Chief for years, has pointed out that once a misstep is taken -- that once a boy or girl goes wrong -- the chances are even that he or she will continue to go wrong.

Over 50 percent of our first offenders are returned to prisons and reformatories.

Over 60 percent of the second offenders are returned; and over 70 percent of the third offenders.

I sought the help of leaders in various civic organizations and in the child welfare field.

In the Department of Justice we have direct contact with a certain number of juveniles who run afoul of Federal laws.

They come from all parts of the country and are victims, generally, of home failures.

I called together in Washington on February 11 and 12 of this year a group of leaders from the civic, educational, religious and social work fields

But not only must the present emergency be met; long-range plans for the future must be made.

We should always remember that juvenile delinquency requires the same kind of coordinated effort for its prevention and control in normal times as in times of special stress such as we experienced during the war, and are now experiencing.

As was brought out by the Attorney General's Panel in its February meeting, the causes of juvenile delinquency are found in all aspects of our social and economic life.

The problem must not, therefore, be approached on a narrow basis.

Speaking of the present serious juvenile delinquency problem, the chairman of the program committee of the Panel said: "The causes for this condition are manifold. To combat these causes, there is need for complete coordination among interested agencies, both governmental and private, in the community, the state and the Nation."

In planning for the Conference on delinquency problems to be held in October, the Panel recognized that all children are entitled to happy, wholesome home life.

The right kind of home life is vital to the welfare of the child.

It is also vital to the strength and growth of the nation.

But the home is not complete within itself.

It must be implemented and supplemented by the school, the church, recreational activities, and other forces of the community.

Each and every child should be given an opportunity to grow up in the fine human way he should grow.

If every community in America strengthened and united its resources for all of its children, it would save many of them from the first stumbling

steps toward delinquency.

Delay in community action to mobilize resources to lead children into rich and purposeful living until some are already in trouble is more costly, more difficult, and often too late.

The Panel also took cognizance of the protection that should be afforded those children who are handicapped by conditions or circumstances conducive to delinquency.

The community, for example, should provide special protection for physically and mentally handicapped children, for boys and girls in employment, for children of working mothers, and for those who live in congested areas or whose families are in economic need.

In addition, each community should make a vigorous and forthright attack to control or eliminate community conditions or influence that are destructive to the health and welfare of children.

The control of such harmful or potentially harmful influences that lead children into delinquency is a public responsibility that should not be neglected.

Society cannot afford to contribute to the delinquency of its children by allowing spiritual and social education to lag behind economic and scientific development.

The church has primary responsibility for spiritual guidance.

Among many things, it can help children distinguish between fundamental values in human conduct and transient ideas as to acceptable or unacceptable conduct.

In essence, the church can help guide youth in arriving at a scale of values in keeping with democratic living.

Moral and spiritual values need reemphasis.

Religious leaders, therefore, will have an opportunity to give counsel in the conference to be held next month,

The school is in a strategic position to reach practically all children, and at an early period in life.

The school that sees the child's school experience as part of life, itself, as well as preparation for life, can develop healthful habits -- mental and physical -- proper attitudes and interests, and a sense of civic responsibility.

The school can assist youths to find their places in programs of community service so that they may learn citizenship responsibilities through actual experience.

The school can, and should, discover the students who are mentally and physically sick and emotionally unstable.

It should recognize attitudes and behavior that may be the forerunners of delinquency.

Unhappiness or poor adjustment in school, if not located and cleared up, may contribute to delinquency.

School leaders will have an important part in the coming Conference.

Recreation is an important element in combating delinquency.

Everyone, delinquent and non-delinquent, has need for fun, relaxation and release, and self-expression.

All youth should have the opportunity for well-rounded development.

The value of recreation was recognized by the Panel, and the subject will be adequately discussed by leaders of leisure time activities.

I have given you only a few glimpses of what is planned to meet the problem of delinquency.

The Attorney General's Panel on Delinquency listed for consideration the following objectives:

1. The establishment in the Federal Government of an interdepartmental committee, to make possible the current interchange of information and material relating to the various Federal programs, and to improve and implement the many relationships which the Federal government, through its agencies, has with the States and localities and private groups working in the field of juvenile delinquency problems.

2. Recommendations with reference to legislation dealing with or relating to juvenile delinquency problems.

3. Recommendation for the organization or continuation in the community of councils composed of governmental and private agencies to encourage cooperation in the field of juvenile delinquency problems.

4. The development of specific recommendations respecting standards for the creation and operation of correctional institutions, and establishment of minimum qualifications for probation and parole officers and the expansion of probation and parole.

5. The improvement of Federal, State, County and local detention facilities for children.

6. Creation in county and municipal police departments of special bureaus for the handling of juvenile delinquency problems and recommendations relating to the improvement of police facilities and techniques, and the training of personnel.

7. Recommendations relating to the establishment of community recreation facilities.

8. Recommendations relating to facilities, such as schools, playgrounds, housing projects, etc., in connection with Federal, State and local building programs.

9. Specific recommendations for participation by the juveniles themselves in all appropriate programs developed for their benefit, in order to ascertain, from the children themselves, their actual needs and to instill in them a sense of responsibility for the solution of their own problems.

10. Development and training of volunteer leadership.

11. Emphasis on parents' responsibility in relation to juvenile delinquency problems.

To summarize: Undoubtedly, if we are to help retrain the children who have become delinquent, a variety of resources must be drawn upon.

The delinquent child needs the basic services and resources that are essential for all children.

He needs the protections that are necessary for the child in danger of becoming delinquent.

He needs skillful handling of his special problems.

The home, the school, the church, the youth serving organizations, the social agencies, the law enforcement bodies, and all the other forces in the community that play any part in training, readjusting, and recreating the individual should be strengthened.

Most important, they should pull together.

The multiple approach to the problem of juvenile delinquency involves a community of social forces and a concentrated effort on the part of all in building a well-rounded and evenly developed program.

No fixed program to combat the juvenile delinquency problem can be laid down for all communities.

Hewing to certain fundamental principles, each community must study its problems, take stock of its resources, and chart its course of action.

With the assumption of local responsibility and the coordination of all the community forces for preventing or dealing with delinquency, both for the present emergency and for the long-range program of tomorrow, I feel sure the communities of America will not fail in their responsibility to the youth of our country.

Because I believe that each individual and agency has something to contribute, the Attorney General's office will cooperate to this end in every possible way.

The foregoing is in the nature of a report to you upon the practical aspects of the situation.

It is what the head, figuratively speaking, has produced.

But it does not touch the depths of the heart -- the great heart of America, which is big enough to encompass world ills and yet is not big enough to adequately take care of various young wanderers in our midst who are growing up without the great blessings of childhood, good parents.

Let me tell you, before I leave on my way back to Washington and my many other duties, a story about a young boy whom I shall call "the boy who never had a chance."

I went to the National Training School for Boys, outside of Washington, one morning recently with one of my assistants, because I was groping for inside knowledge of some of these young boys being held for Federal offenses.

I interviewed several of them, and was struck immediately by one -- a handsome youngster of seventeen, tanned from working in the hayfields, and obviously very unhappy.

I looked over his record before I talked to him, and to my surprise I saw that it included letters from people in his home community in

West Virginia, who universally said: "Here is a boy who never had a chance."

I will not go into the sordid story of his background.

This boy had no father -- at least none available to the authorities.

The mother was a person of low repute and neglected this boy and two other children.

They were abused by the frequent visitors in this slatternly house and the company that the mother kept.

This boy's chief concern was for the welfare of his little brother and sister, and he was fretting in this training school for a chance to return home.

To what? To a dissolute mother and to the effects of bad companionship which surrounded him on every side.

It was hard for me to realize that the Fates had conspired against one of our American children; that the dice were loaded for his defeat there in the days of his boyhood; that all the things that most children have as a matter or right were denied him, and that he was cast upon the stormy waters of life, like a rudderless craft, to drift and to pursue an aimless way.

In that boy's direct glance and fine carriage I saw the mark of character -- yet what character would there be left after such a boyhood?

It is useless, I know, to make deductions of fact from the particular to the general.

We hate to do it because it indicates that our hearts are ruling us, at times, rather than our heads.

Another boy in the group that I interviewed that day was obviously handicapped at the age of sixteen by lack of education.

Why was this so, I asked.

An orphan, he had been placed in an institution at the age of seven; and he proved a willing worker, so instead of sending him to his classes the institution had him tend the furnace when he should have been learning to read and write.

Here was another boy who never had a chance.

It is to give boys like these a chance that I am issuing my plea here and there throughout the country, and to you here assembled in Baltimore.

I want to hear your conclusions when you reach them; for I know that in the warm heart of womanhood in America there will eventually be found an answer, a solution of the rise in juvenile delinquency.

It must be indeed a moving question in the hearts of the American people, when such a gathering as this and an Association with such a distinguished record assembles to discuss this grave problem.

As you know, the Attorney General's office has no budget for juvenile delinquency.

We do our work upon it in our spare time, and above and beyond business hours.

Myself and my associates, and our aides among the citizens of the country, work on it because it has come to us that Youth indeed is the treasure house of America and must be protected.

As we look back we must realize that America was made by young men and women.

The sunbonnet as well as the sombrero helped win our West in pioneer days.

We are a young nation in years, and it is still a country of Youth.

Many of the scientists who produced the atomic bomb were in their thirties.

Many of the really great things that America stands for have been exemplified by the young people in Letters and the Arts.

America has passed through two great wars in which she leaned heavily upon her Youth.

Coming out of these wars we find ourselves more concerned than ever before with the problem of the peace; and we know that the peace, like the wars, must be won the hard way.

As I exercise the bit of foresight which was handed down to me, I can see clearly the goal to which I am striving; and I am sure all of you will join me on the way.

It is a goal toward the production of a clean, sound, moral and well-balanced Youth, continually coming up through the years in America to keep our Democracy inviolate and to continually refresh our ideas as long as we are a nation.

It is to build that treasure house as a shining structure as high as Mount Olympus that I have taken up the cause of Youth, in which I hope you will all join me.

We all appreciate suggestions in Washington, and I must confess that I am one of those who appreciate them most.

Whatever your thoughts are on the subject, I wish you would write to me and let me know.

Bless you one and all for coming here tonight.