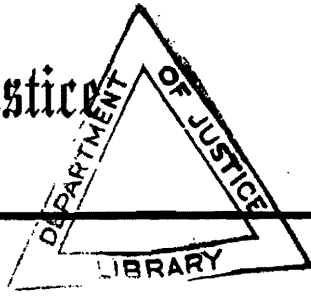


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Department of Justice



ADDRESS

By

HONORABLE ROBERT F. KENNEDY

ATTORNEY GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES

at the

Graduation Ceremonies of the 67th
Session of the FBI National Academy

June 7, 1961

Mr. Hoover, Senator Dodd, Congressmen, graduates, ladies and gentlemen:

I wish to pay my respects to you gentlemen upon completion of your work here the last four months. The FBI National Academy is one of the most significant of the many contributions which Mr. Hoover has made to strengthening law enforcement in our Country. Many well-deserved tributes have been paid to Mr. Hoover throughout the years. I think two things stand out as I look at his record and at the record of the FBI. One, of course, is the Bureau's matchless efficiency in getting a job done. The second is that Mr. Hoover through the years has been extremely careful to see that the Bureau remained exactly what it was intended to be -- a highly-trained investigative force, capable of meeting many of the Federal Government's responsibilities in law enforcement. Mr. Hoover himself has exercised restraint and sound judgment in the use of the power that goes with his office. I salute him for this and for the unchallenged record which he and the FBI have made.

I would also like to pay my respects to Special Agent Cecilio Santiago Soliman, of the National Bureau of Investigation of the Republic of the Philippines, who is the 4,000th law enforcement officer to graduate in the 26th year history of the National Academy. We have been very pleased to have Special Agent Soliman and his fellow officer, Senior Agent Jose F. Delos Reyes, attend the School and we wish them good fortune upon their return to our sister republic.

Over the last ten years, in the work that I have undertaken, I have been in contact almost continually with law enforcement officers. And I have come to have great respect for the thousands of honest law enforcement officers -- for their skill, for their devotion to duty and their willingness to undertake a job that is difficult at best, often dangerous and often unpleasant. Since coming to the Department of Justice, I have become quite aware of the fact that the job of law enforcement in this Country is not getting any easier. It is, in fact, becoming more difficult.

We, in the Department of Justice, have become increasingly concerned about organized crime. It has become so rich, so powerful and so well-entrenched that it is often beyond the reach of the law. We submitted eight bills to Congress early in April which we believe are extremely important, if the Federal Government is to meet its responsibility in combating organized crime and racketeering.

Very frequently, the newspapers and magazines carry a boxscore of the "important" bills before Congress to show what progress they are making. I have yet to see a boxscore which shows the status of our crime bills. Some of them are very far-reaching and have been endorsed at least in general terms by most of the leading newspapers in the Country.

However, we need more than talk; more than general references. We need action.

We in the Department of Justice think these bills are extremely important. As I testified before the Senate Judiciary Committee yesterday, the kingpins of organized crime are able to operate beyond the reach of local authorities; they are able to reap millions of dollars in profits and use these profits to cheat honest Americans to corrupt officials and to undermine our national strength.

These bills seek to strike blows against organized criminal activity which has been brought to public attention effectively by committees of the Congress, by several of my predecessors, by Mr. Hoover, and by many state and local law enforcement officials for more than 10 years. So, frankly, I think it's about time action is taken. The fact is that tools which were adequate in the days of Al Capone are not adequate today.

In general, the purpose of these bills is to deny organized crime the use of interstate commerce, and communications, and to give FBI agents more tools to aid their fellow law enforcement officers.

I am going to seek your help in this effort. I think the choice is between taking action soon or seeing the racketeers and hoodlums tighten their hold on illegal enterprises and move more and more into legitimate business and labor. I ask you to join Mr. Hoover and me in strengthening law enforcement in this Country, in preserving its vigor and vitality. I ask that you look closely at these bills and if you think they are worthwhile that you give them your active support.

It is not our purpose or desire to interfere in any way with the traditional responsibilities of local law enforcement. But we wish to meet our responsibilities. We know that the record of Federal and local law enforcement officers working side by side has been most effective against narcotics, auto theft, prostitution, bank robberies, kidnappings and other crimes. These bills have been drafted so this same kind of effective cooperation can be carried out against organized crime which operates on an interstate basis.

Of course these bills are not enough and they are only as good as the men who enforce them. This nation became great because it was led by tough-minded men. They risked their security and their futures for freedom and for an ideal. This is a time that demands a new toughness -- new only in the sense that we have not been tough-minded enough in recent years. If we -- you and I -- are not going to be relentless and unyielding in dealing with the hoodlums, racketeers and the vice overlords, then these people will continue to dishonor and weaken our Country and these laws will not be effective.

For our part, here in the Department of Justice, we have taken certain steps to coordinate all Federal investigations into organized crime and racketeering. We are pooling all available information about known hoodlums and racketeers. We are not making any big promises. In fact, we haven't said much about what we are doing. We will let the records speak for us, but we will meet our responsibilities, and we will try to get the job done.

I can report to you that there is a new awareness in law enforcement throughout the Country of a greater willingness, a greater need and a greater means for cooperation -- by the Federal and local authorities in combatting the underworld. We will give information to local police whom we know to be trustworthy. And, of course, this exchange of information works both ways.

I think everyone in this country and certainly you gentlemen are aware that for the past three weeks our immediate concern about local law enforcement has not been in the field of organized crime. Very reluctantly, we had to deputize some 600 Federal officers as U. S. Marshals and send them into the State of Alabama to guarantee the safety of interstate travel and to restore law and order. I hope that out of the tragic events in Alabama there will not again arise in this Country of ours a time when local law enforcement officers will not do their duty to preserve law and order no matter how unpleasant the job.

You and I and all of our fellow law enforcement officers have sworn to uphold the law and we have a duty to enforce the law, and to protect the rights guaranteed by our Constitution. It is not our job to make or interpret the law. It is our job to enforce the law and there is only one way which we can do it and remain true to our oath. That is to enforce the law vigorously, without regional bias or political slant.

The ramifications of the violence in Alabama are far-reaching. The reputation of Alabama -- Birmingham and Montgomery -- have been needlessly harmed. The record shows that in situations like this, recovery is neither quick nor complete.

The United States has been harmed in the eyes of people around the world, and while this is no reason in and of itself to do or not to do something, it is a fact of which we must be very much aware in these times.

We cannot expect that our problems and difficulties in connection with civil rights in the South will be solved without discord and disagreement. But we do have a right to expect that local law enforcement officers will do their jobs at all times; that they will preserve law and order.

That is true whether it is in Montgomery or Birmingham, Alabama, or in cities where gangsters and corrupt officials have gained control as in Beaumont, Texas; or where there has been a corrupt district attorney, as in Lake County, Indiana; or where organized crime has an inordinate amount of power as it appears to have in some cities in the United States. Various cities have different problems. Only where everyone exercises their duties and obligations as citizens and law enforcement officials can we make progress.

One of the most difficult tasks for local police in this connection is to give protection to people advocating unpopular causes. However, free men have struggled to create a system of law and of government in which fundamental freedoms would be linked with enforcement of justice. It is the law which enables us to live together. When law and order break down our system fails. But, as I said, I hope that the lessons of Alabama will be learned and learned well. If so, we will have passed through a period of travail and we will have made progress for the attainment of equal rights for all our citizens.

During the American Constitutional Convention, there was behind the desk of General Washington a picture of a sun low in the horizon and many of the delegates wondered whether it was a rising or a setting sun. At the conclusion, Benjamin Franklin stood up and said:

"Because of what we have done here today, we know it is not a setting sun, but it is a rising sun and the beginning of a great new day."

We face a difficult and dangerous time, but if we are tough-minded, if we are strong, and if we are dedicated to the ideals which have made this Country great, we need not fear for the future.

Great responsibility has been placed on your shoulders. I wish you good luck and Godspeed.