



Department of Justice

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Address by

ATTORNEY GENERAL RAMSEY CLARK

Before the

AMERICAN CORRECTIONAL ASSOCIATION

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Americans are deeply concerned about the immense and rising crime in their midst. And well they should be. Prevention of crime is the first purpose of government. Crime and lawlessness measure the quality of a people, their institutions, their government, their moral fiber.

This concern spells opportunity: A new chance to bring excellence to the agencies of criminal justice. It is a chance we cannot afford to miss. It is imperative that we now perfect our police, our prosecutors, our courts and our prison systems.

Corrections is a key, a very major part, of our total opportunity to reduce crime. America must recognize this and lend its full support and all resources necessary to realize the full potential of corrections. Of all the statistics of criminal justice, none tells as much, or has such vast implications, as those which advise that four of five felons were first, usually while kids, convicted of misdemeanors; that up to half of the felons released from penitentiaries return convicted of subsequent felonies.

Here is the challenge to corrections. Here is society's chance to protect itself from crime which is controllable. Here we must mount a mighty effort to expand and improve treatment of offenders. Failure to advance now will compound the difficulties of a more difficult tomorrow.

OVER. . .

You are public servants whose mission is of the utmost importance to the public safety. Your vision and leadership today will make a safer America tomorrow. One dollar in four of our total national criminal justice budget is for services you perform. Our gross expenditure for corrections is inadequate to present and greatly expanding needs.

We who are involved in criminal justice, in law enforcement and corrections have a responsibility to help educate the public on the vital role of rehabilitation. The direct relationship between the policeman on the beat and crime is readily apparent to the public. Police are present and visible. The clear connection prosecution and courts have with the public safety is also obvious. Here society punishes offenders. Those who commit serious crimes are removed for periods of years from contact with the public and opportunity for further offense. But prisons to most are the stone walls and iron bars of days gone by. Remote places where prisoners isolated from society spend their days and years waiting for release. The major opportunity corrections afford to reduce crime, to protect the public is overlooked.

There are few better measures of the concern a society has for its individual members and its own well being than the way it handles criminals. No element is less deserving, easier to forget, or more difficult to work with. The history of penology is one of the saddest chapters in the story of man. Here, self inflicted, is an incredible amount of human misery. Perhaps not so much for the prisoners as for their subsequent victims and society as a whole. Intelligence and self interest tell us today that we must work diligently and effectively with those who commit crime. We must rehabilitate as many as have the capability for rehabilitation. The question is not whether to be tough or tolerant. The question is what is effective? What works?

Our great need is to find methods of treatment which will assist and motivate offenders to change their patterns of behavior. This will require use of the insights and knowledge gained in other fields; the development of specific correctional knowledge and skill. It will require research to develop techniques and measure program effectiveness and potential; and comprehensive planning, both short and long range.

To be effective, corrections must look not only at the crime but at the individual behind it. Who committed this crime? Is he a professional earning a living, a dropout impressing his gang, an unemployed father in desperate financial plight, a deviate fulfilling a psychological desire, an addict supporting an expensive habit? We need to know the offender

in order that treatment needs can be identified and programs and services applied with precision.

Coordination must be improved. Corrections cannot function effectively unless it is part of a continuous and closely interwoven process. Every aspect of the criminal justice cycle is organically connected and the quality of criminal justice in each jurisdiction affects all others. The policeman, the judge, the corrections official cannot remain isolated. They are necessarily related to and dependent on each other. Each are parts of the whole. Excellence in police, in prosecution and in courts will avail society little when prisons release inmates bent on further crime. We only speed the treadmill until recidivism is reduced.

Coordination is needed on two other levels: between the various agencies and jurisdictions in our fragmented system such as universities and business firms.

Our search for effective alternatives to confinement must be intensified. Prisons must look outside their walls to utilize the many resources available in the community. We are beginning to understand that the correctional process is not completed until we have succeeded in a gradual reintegration of the offender into full community participation. Community treatment centers, halfway houses and work release programs are evidence of the thrust toward community programs. Their potential is great. They are the future of corrections.

Now we are engaged in a great renaissance in crime control. President Johnson's Crime Commission has just completed the most comprehensive study of crime, its causes and cures, ever undertaken. This is the easy part. Implementation, as always, is the major task.

It is an appropriate time to recall an earlier study of crime only a generation ago; a time of comparative simplicity.

In 1931 the Wickersham Commission appointed by President Hoover concluded, in these words, "that the present prison system is antiquated and inefficient. It does not reform the criminal. It fails to protect society." The Commission added that if the system as then comprised were unable to rehabilitate, then it should be "so reshaped as to insure a larger measure of success." America failed to accept the challenge and 36 years later the field of corrections faces a crisis. It is not surprising that the challenge unheeded in 1931 is resurrected in 1967. Our reaction to the challenge will be crucial to the control of crime in America, to the quality of our lives and those of our children.

While corrections and criminal justice remain primarily a state and local responsibility, there is much that the federal government can and should do. The Safe Streets and Crime Control Act, now pending before Congress, would permit the federal government to lend its power immediately to the control of crime. It is the heart of President Johnson's national strategy against crime. It is the one appropriate way the federal government can make a major difference. The Act is based on the demonstrated need for more resources, better applied, to improve the estate of criminal justice. It seeks to create and guide new investment.

The Act would authorize matching federal grants to state and local governments for improvements in all aspects of criminal justice. This stimulation providing major new resources and increased commitment will put us years ahead.

Yet, no matter how sound the efforts of government, the outcome will depend on the public. The public must be willing to provide the resources and conditions necessary to success. Mobilizing public support is part of the challenge we face. This is particularly true in corrections, the least visible segment of our criminal justice system.

We must spread the word that the only sure way to protect society from the offender who will be at large again some day is to rehabilitate him. The purposes of corrections--protection of the public from further offenses and rehabilitation of the offender--must be recognized as one. Rehabilitation is protection. A society that fully realizes this will insist that its correctional system attain the maximum effectiveness, though the cost may be great.