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# Department of Justice

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ADDRESS

BY

THE HONORABLE WILLIAM B. SAXBE  
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES

BEFORE

THE ANNUAL AMERICAN-ITALIAN GOLF ASSOCIATION DINNER

HONORING

EUGENE C. D'ANGELO, JR.

8:00 P.M.  
MONDAY, OCTOBER 14, 1974  
RIVIERA COUNTRY CLUB  
COLUMBUS, OHIO

I appreciate this opportunity to be with you here tonight.

The observation of Columbus Day is always a proud and happy time -- and it can also provide a moment for somber reflection on where we are as a Nation.

Perhaps there is no better way to begin than by sharing these thoughts with you:

"Most men felt exceedingly gloomy about the future . . . Institutions were decaying, well-meaning people were growing cynical or desperate, and many intelligent men . . . were endeavoring to escape the present . . . ."

As contemporary as they sound, those words were not meant to describe our time. They open Samuel Eliot Morison's biography of Christopher Columbus, Admiral of the Ocean Sea, and describe Europe in 1492.

From that dark environment, Columbus set sail on his voyage into the awful unknown, and calmly wrote in his journal:

"I have the intention to . . . place the whole sea and lands of the Ocean Sea in the proper positions . . . and above all it is very important that I forget sleep and labor much . . . because it is necessary . . . ."

Those words -- "labor much . . . because it is necessary" -- constitute an important legacy as we struggle to resolve monumental problems facing the Nation.

The voyage of Columbus not only discovered a new world -- it generated a new hope. For as Morison says, men no longer yearned for the imaginary golden age of the past but began thinking a real golden age might be carved out of the future.

What the future holds for us depends on no one but ourselves. And whether we are willing -- like Columbus -- to labor much.

Pessimism grips many today. Inflation picks our pockets. Unemployment rises. Dire predictions erupt on the fate of Western civilization. We seem at the mercy of oil barons -- both at home and abroad. The economy is manipulated in ways that go against the American grain. And on top of everything else, we face the worst level of reported serious crime in our history.

I have no solutions to offer tonight. But I do offer one piece of advice to any who would attempt to sap the strength of our democracy. As a people we are generous and forgiving to a fault -- but our patience is not endless.

In describing the great migrations that filled America, Winston Churchill once said: "We have not journeyed all this way across the centuries, across the oceans, across the mountains, across the prairies, because we are made of sugar candy."

It is an admonition that also might be taken to heart by all who break our laws -- or who are thinking about it.

In the first half of 1974, serious reported crime rose 16 per cent. This represents a shocking setback in the struggle to deal with one of the most grim, agonizing facts of life in the Nation today.

As a people, as a Nation, we shouldn't have to stand for it. And it is time that something was done about it -- once and for all.

Crime is incredibly complex, and springs from many causes. I have maintained for 30 years economic and social conditions do contribute to some crime. And let me stress that I still believe this, because some people seem to think that I'm taking off on some repressive hard line. I also want to point out that an enormous amount of crime is committed by people who want to break the law -- who find it rewarding and exciting.

They even find that they have unwitting accomplices -- a society that often is strangely apathetic, a criminal justice system often strangely ineffective.

And one thing now seen more and more is that criminal justice often deals ineffectively with the dangerous offender, the repeated offender. While many are arrested by police, not all are tried by prosecutors; of those convicted, even less are sent to prison by judges; and of those who do go to jail, many are released by prison officials while they are still dangerous to society. And then more victims are claimed.

The crimes of Jack the Ripper -- who killed seven women in Victorian England -- have become a bench-mark of horror known to all. Yet crimes of comparable or greater magnitude occur in the United States all the time. And one of the awful things is that somehow the Nation seems to have gotten used to it, to take those things in stride -- to accept crime as almost a routine fact of life.

As I noted before, I have been recently asked if I was taking a hard line on crime control. I think that such phrases as hard-line or soft-line are essentially meaningless. What I want to see developed is the effective line. What I want to see is the reduction of crime -- and in ways that are fully consistent with our system of justice and concepts of fairness.

At present, government at all levels is derelict because it simply is not protecting its citizens against crime. And the criminal justice system is not being fair. It may pride itself on making certain that the accused has all of his rights -- and that is proper. But the system is grossly unfair because it is failing to protect the decent and law-abiding citizens. And no amount of excuses will wash away that fact.

The bulk of law enforcement responsibilities rests with state and local governments, and one of the Federal government's priority tasks is to aid them in every responsible way.

Programs of many facets must be devised to attack all aspects of crime -- violent crime, street crime, organized crime, white collar crime. And in that context, I wish to announce tonight the formation of a new effort to attack a problem which contributes to a wide range of crime.

I am establishing for the first time a Federal Advisory Committee on False Identification -- a joint Federal, state, local effort to bring greater resources to bear on offenders, ranging from terrorists to narcotics dealers who scheme to phony up their names and backgrounds to swindle you, to terrorize you, to victimize you in many, many ways.

No one knows today the exact extent of the use of false identification by criminals but initial studies indicate it is a substantial and growing problem.

The Advisory Committee's first task will be to pinpoint the extent of the problem, the types of offenders using false identification, and the types of crimes carried out with false credentials.

A coordinated plan will then be developed for Federal agencies -- possibly including new statutes and enforcement efforts.

Finally, the Committee's work will be of substantial assistance to state and local governments -- whose record-keeping agencies are most often victimized by offenders seeking false identification.

All of this work will be carried out in the next year, and the committee's first meeting -- to be open to the public -- will be held in Washington on November 14.

Faced with the over-all severity of crime, the false identification problem may seem like a low priority to some. But state and Federal agencies know the problem has become serious.

Last May, the FBI held a conference for 14 Federal agencies as well as state and local organizations -- and their consensus was that a high-level study be started at once. And it is the beginning of that effort I am announcing tonight.

False identification is a common denominator in a wide range of serious crimes. Let me cite a few examples.

The Weatherman organization has taken credit for a number of terrorist bombings. False identification has been found on some of its members taken into custody. It appears that false identification may be a factor in the success of 23 others who have successfully eluded capture thus far.

But false credentials can touch virtually every aspect of crime. They are frequently used by narcotics peddlers. And by persons passing counterfeit checks and securities. By those who take part in bank swindles. And in Social Security and welfare frauds.

Car thieves often use false identification -- not only to thwart police but to rent or lease cars which are then driven off and sold.

The list of offenses could go on and on. They include widespread and costly frauds through use of credit cards. And another growing problem is the use of false identification by illegal aliens who insulate themselves from authorities as they settle into new jobs and new lives.

One of the most formidable obstacles the new Committee faces is the ease with which false identification can be obtained. At present, for instance, there are about 10,000 bureaus of vital statistics at the state and local levels.

It normally is very easy to obtain from them a copy of a birth certificate -- with few or no questions asked. And birth certificates are the foundation upon which the bulk of the false identification empire is built.

Bureaus of vital statistics require minimal identification from those seeking copies of documents -- and some permit doing business by mail. They seldom correlate death records with birth certificates. And exchange of information with other states is handicapped by staff and fund shortages.

Here is one way that the false identification scheme is often carried out: A man of 25 checks old newspaper obituaries of about the time of his birth to learn of a child's death. What the man is seeking is to have a birth certificate whose age will about match his own and -- ideally -- also match such physical characteristics as race and color of hair and eyes. He then requests a copy of the child's birth certificate -- either in person or in writing. For a tiny fee, he can obtain it -- and

often it is even mailed to him.

Let's assume the birth certificate is for a John J. Smith. The offender then uses it to obtain a driver's license in that name. And then uses both to get credit cards and other gold-plated credentials. He may use this approach to acquire several new identities, and may even obtain Social Security and Selective Service cards.

This may sound like a lot of trouble -- but it is a small investment if it results in criminal successes. And once armed with all of those credentials, the offender may be able to obtain a passport -- which he can use in his illicit enterprises or to flee the country.

One individual I know of is alleged to have followed the scheme I have outlined -- from birth certificate to credit cards -- and obtained an expensive sports car. And then a house. And then, yes, an airplane of his very own.

As I indicated earlier, no one knows the precise scope of the problem. But it is serious. It does contribute greatly to crime. And we must do something about it. One of the things the Committee members already are thinking about is to have vital statistics bureaus keep death records along with birth certificates. That way, if John Smith applies for his birth certificate, a quick check of the files will show something is wrong because he died 25 years ago. Another possible area of exploration will be new methods of interstate cooperation -- and there have even been suggestions of computerizing records of all vital statistics bureaus.

No single program will enable us to solve crime. But every step is important. And we must take this one at the same time we are taking many others.

It will take time to reduce crime -- time as well as funding and determination. But when we look at the options, we see that we have no recourse but to reduce crime substantially and rapidly.

We cannot continue to be a nation whose citizens are guaranteed freedom but who are terrorized by crime. We cannot be half free.

Solutions can be fashioned only if we have the dedication. Perhaps as a people we have forgotten that we have to roll up our sleeves and work like we have never worked before.

And we should constantly recall the words of Columbus in his Journal: "labor much . . . because it is necessary."

And in so doing, we can do what he did: in a sense, embark on a journey to discover America anew; to rediscover our roots; to find out what they really mean; and where they can lead us.

Thank you.