



# Department of Justice

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ADDRESS

BY

HONORABLE WILLIAM P. ROGERS

ATTORNEY GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES

Prepared for Delivery

at the

Annual Mothers Luncheon

honoring the

American Mother of 1958

and the

State Mothers of 1958

Waldorf-Astoria Hotel

New York City, New York

Friday, May 9, 1958

Madam Chairman, Mrs. Coker, State Mothers of the Year,  
members of the American Mothers Committee and distinguished guests:

The American Mothers Committee is to be congratulated for having taken the steps necessary to augment Mother's Day through your program of selecting the outstanding American Mother of the Year, by the selection of the outstanding State Mothers of the Year and finally by your year around efforts which emphasize the importance of parental responsibility for the rearing of children to take their place as useful citizens in our free society. Although we set aside a day in honor of Mothers, it was only to be expected that you, in turn, would use the occasion to rededicate yourselves to the difficult task of instilling spiritual and civic responsibility in your children and in the youth of America. May I extend my sincere thanks and again my congratulations to each of you.

Being here in the Waldorf-Astoria brings to mind a similarly pleasant experience at the beginning of the year. In January it was my privilege to be here and to invest 11-year old Jimmie Crinion of Manhattan Troop 320 into the Boy Scouts of America. At that time I discussed the challenges our free nation faces from the forces of international Communism and pointed out that this challenge must be met and will be met by the youth of this nation. Today, I would like to enlarge on this thought for a few minutes because the Mothers of America play a most vital role in preparing our adults of tomorrow to assume this responsibility.

Because the strength of any nation lies in its youth, let me cite some recent statistics which I believe should be a matter of deep concern to all of us.

It now appears that this year about 3 million major crimes may be committed in the United States. This means that in 1958 one major crime will be committed for ever 15 families in America.

One of the facts which stands out in bold relief is the alarming increase in the number of major crimes committed by young people. Almost half of the persons arrested for major crimes last year were under 18 years of age. This year, three out of every 100 children between the ages of 10 and 17 will become entangled with the law. And since 1950, arrests in this age group have increased at a rate 2-1/2 times faster than the growth of the population of young people.

These figures do not tell the whole story. But they do show that somehow there has been a failure properly to inculcate our people, particularly our young people, with a sense of moral values--with an awareness of how destructive crime is to them and to the country. These figures indicate that there is a tremendous job to be done by schools, churches, youth organizations, parents and committees such as this in the years ahead.

If we were dealing with polio, or some other crippling disease, there would be a great nationwide campaign to prevent it--there would be fund drives and great research programs to find the cause and destroy the disease. But in the case of juvenile delinquency we already know the

cause and we already know what is needed to curb it. What has largely been lacking is determination and sustained action on the part of those who must act.

In the Federal Bureau of Prisons we compile an exhaustive file on every boy or girl who runs afoul of Federal law. A study of these case histories is most revealing.

Car theft is the most prevalent crime among teenagers, yet rarely is the taking motivated by an intention to sell the car. In the overwhelming majority of cases "joy-riding" and a desire to escape from broken homes are the two main reasons that cars are taken.

In many instances we find that children deliberately set out to break the law, often Federal law, because their homes are so inadequate or so intolerable that they actually look forward to being placed in an institution where they will be provided for and where they can find security.

In addition, fully half of all the juveniles who come to our attention are known to the juvenile authorities in their home communities. But for lack of properly trained personnel and adequate facilities the local authorities have been unable to cope with the problem before it became serious.

We know, too, that over half our adult offenders have previous arrests as juveniles.

What must be done?

We must recognize that the key to the prevention of juvenile delinquency lies in the American home. There is nothing wrong with

the youth of our land, but young people need love coupled with discipline and understanding coupled with constructive guidance. This means that parents must understand and assume the responsibilities of parenthood. Pre-school years are the most impressionable years. Children should not be permitted to get the impression that lawlessness and immorality are commonplace or accepted standards of conduct. Young people learn the code of moral behavior through the example of their parents. We cannot expect our children to have respect for the law and an understanding of morality except as we set an example for them to follow.

We must instill in our children an understanding of the significance and true meaning of religion and the role of our churches of all faiths in our way of life. It is encouraging that the membership of our churches now exceeds 100 million Americans. But many most in need of spiritual help do not know what is meant by the Christian way of life.

We must also provide healthy recreational facilities in which our children can let off steam. Scouting provides constructive outlets for restless, surging energies of young people engaged in wholesome experiences. Many cities have active recreation centers sponsored by the local government or interested civic groups or youth organizations. Adequate recreational facilities are invaluable and are essential. Here again, the parents must take an active part. In those localities without such recreation facilities, parents should exert leadership to see that they are provided. Where they exist, parents should do their part to make them successful.

Last year, school enrollments hit an all-time high. This means that already overburdened teachers and facilities face even heavier loads. Yet any effective program to curb juvenile delinquency must take into account the schools of the nation. There is little doubt that we must improve our educational facilities and raise our educational standards if we are to equip our children to lead useful and productive lives.

What about the youngster who has gotten into trouble? I have already suggested that there is much room for improving our local facilities for handling the juvenile delinquent.

According to the latest information available from the Children's Bureau of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare most police departments do not have juvenile bureaus or juvenile officers oriented to work with children; more than half of the 3,000 counties of the nation are without juvenile probation services, thus hampering the work of the juvenile courts; less than two-fifths of the state training schools have a psychiatrist on their staff. The failure to provide our communities with the personnel and the facilities to work constructively with the youthful offender before he becomes a real menace to society is a serious shortcoming of our crime prevention program today.

Since 1954 the Department of Justice has placed primary emphasis on expanding our facilities for rehabilitating youthful offenders. We have implemented the Youth Correction Act, and now have correctional institutions at Ashland, Kentucky; Englewood, Colorado; Chillicothe, Ohio; El Reno, Oklahoma; the National Training School for Boys in Washington, D. C.; and forestry camps at Natural Bridge, Virginia,

and Tucson, Arizona. We invite you to come to these institutions, to see how they operate and to urge upon the people in your home communities the need for similar services at all levels of government.

In closing, let me quote briefly from a statement made by Abraham Lincoln over one hundred years ago. He said:

"Let reverence for the laws be breathed by every American mother...; let it be taught in schools, in seminaries, and in colleges; let it be written in primers, spelling books, and in almanacs; let it be preached from the pulpit, proclaimed in legislative halls, and enforced in courts of justice. And, in short, let it become the political religion of the nation..."

Assembled in this room are the mothers who exemplify our very best. Your accomplishments have been recognized in your communities and at these impressive ceremonies. Through your positions of community leadership you are in a unique position to marshal the strength of our schools, our churches, our many great youth organizations and the parents of our children in a sustained, constructive program to insure that the future strength of our nation will be in good hands. I can think of no cause more worthy of your attention and wholehearted support.