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THE CAMPAIGN AGAINST CRIME

ADDRESS BY

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ATTORNEY GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES

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LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

The Department of Justice, in its activities relating to crime, has constantly stressed the necessity of the constant and wholesome cooperation of Federal, State and local police agencies. Remarkable progress has been made along these lines and the results now being achieved are encouraging to all friends of orderly government. This program has the whole-hearted support of the public. In very truth the Nation has embarked upon a war on crime. It is an undertaking of the most serious and widespread character and will constitute a test of our citizenship and our capacity for successful self-government. A very large number of individuals and organizations are giving intensive study to the problems involved. Many of these groups, including the one under the highly intelligent and skillful leadership of Senator Copeland, are considering, amongst other matters, proposed Federal legislation to be submitted to the incoming Congress. Here is a field which will reward the most diligent and intensive study.

Senator Copeland is rendering, in this matter, a public service of the highest order. Crime, in its wider aspects, requires consideration of the whole structure of our social life. For instance, a study of the records of more than one quarter of a million arrests for the year 1932, as evidenced by fingerprint cards received by the Department's Division of Investigation, reveals

the menacing fact that there were more arrests at the age of nineteen than at any other age; and that a startlingly large percentage of serious crimes were committed by minors. Manifestly the problem of crime is not limited to detection, arrest and punishment. It is a social question, with manifold ramifications touching environment, heredity, education, the home, the school and, indeed, almost every activity of life. Prevention is even more important than punishment.

The framers of the Federal Constitution regarded law enforcement as inherently a local power. Such offenses as murder, burglarly, robbery and arson, unless committed within Government territories or jurisdiction, are prosecuted in local Courts. The interstate character of many forms of crime, however, is a factor of constantly increasing importance. The modern criminal has learned that there is a certain security in the Twilight Zone between State and Federal jurisdictions. Pressure of necessity is constantly widening the field of Federal activity. The operations of the Department of Justice, however, are limited not only by law, but by its budget. By way of illustration, permit me to state that it costs the city of New York for the maintenance of its police force about twenty times what it costs the United States to maintain the Division of Investigation in the Department of Justice. Despite these limitations our activities are wide-flung and highly effective.

Among the criminal statutes we are called upon to enforce are the White Slave Traffic Act, the National Motor Vehicle Theft Act, the Antitrust Laws, the Income Tax Laws, the Federal Kidnaping and

Extortion ~~Laws~~ and the Acts dealing with the protection of the mails. Violators of these laws have been relentlessly pursued and vigorously prosecuted.

No doubt you are aware of our activities in the recent series of kidnaping cases, but perhaps you are not familiar with the less spectacular, but equally menacing, crimes of extortion by threats to kidnap or inflict bodily harm. Only last week the Division of Investigation, in cooperation with the New York City Police, apprehended two extortioners who had attempted, through anonymous communications, to obtain a large sum of money from a resident of that city under threat of personal injury.

A short time prior to this, a prominent citizen of North Carolina received several anonymous communications threatening the kidnaping of a member of his family in the event of failure to accede to the demand for the payment of tribute. Agents of the Division of Investigation, together with police officers of that locality, quickly solved the case and apprehended the extortioner.

Similarly, in California, in Massachusetts, in New Jersey, in Missouri, in Kentucky, in Illinois and in Texas, the disturbed firesides of law-abiding American citizens have been comforted as a result of the combined activities of local officers and representatives of the Department of Justice in detecting attempts to extort money under threat of injury or kidnaping. In each of these cases

the effective results were speedily accomplished because of the fact that those receiving the threats promptly communicated with the Division of Investigation of this Department and the local enforcement officers, who, through friendly cooperation and vigorous effort, were able to effect a solution of the offense and bring to justice those who were menacing the welfare and safety of their selected victims. I cannot stress too earnestly the duty on the part of our citizens to report immediately to the responsible officers of the law any attempts of this nature.

The Department's investigative division is also aiding local law enforcement agencies by maintaining what I regard as the largest and most valuable collection of fingerprints in the world, now numbering almost 4,000,000; and by offering its facilities to law enforcement agencies. This service results in the daily identification of approximately 1,000 arrested persons.

The Statistical Section receives reports of crime conditions from the police departments of more than 1,600 cities, and, after compiling these records, furnishes them to police departments, thereby enabling them to study crime trends and fluctuations.

A technical laboratory is maintained by the Department at Washington. This laboratory not only permits an analysis of latent evidence, but it likewise affords an excellent school for the study of the use of the latest scientific equipment. This is an invaluable opportunity for our Special Agents who, before they are assigned the duty, are trained in

the problems of crime detection.

Serious study is being given to the suggestion that there be established at Washington a national institute of criminology, which will concern itself not only with the study of crime problems, but also with the practical side of police work. Facilities for the establishment and development of this project, if it is adopted, will be available in the new Department of Justice Building, which is nearing completion.

Through the efforts of the National Recovery Administration provisions calculated to restrain racketeering have been inserted in the codes of various industries which in the past have been subjected to this form of conspiracy. You will also be interested to know that an agreement has been reached between the National Recovery Administration and the manufacturers of firearms, whereby there will be a restriction and supervision of the distribution of machine-guns. This is a part of the movement to disarm the underworld.

The efforts of the Federal Government to reduce unemployment through the National Recovery Act, the Public Works Administration, the Civilian Conservation Corps, and allied measures, have a collateral and helpful effect in the matter of crime prevention. The public, in supporting these measures, not only is contributing to economic recovery, but is also placing a further limitation upon crime conditions.

No single action on the part of an individual citizen could prove more effective in the fight on organized crime than the effort to elect competent and honest officials. So far as it is humanly possible to do so, the police forces of the Nation should be relieved of political

domination. It is estimated that hundreds of Chiefs of Police lose their positions in the United States at every revolution of the political wheel. No one has a right to expect a stable and efficient police organization in any locality where it is customary for the law enforcement personnel to be ousted with every change in political administration.

The public, likewise, can play its part by imparting information as to known fugitives from justice and by courageously performing its duties in giving testimony without attempting to evade such a primary responsibility of citizenship. Moreover, it can join hands in this warfare against crime by willingly rendering jury service when an opportunity is afforded to perform this high function of American citizenship.

And now one final word. The time has come to call a halt upon the glorification of the criminal classes. Far too often, in motion pictures, upon the stage, and in current literature, the gangster is depicted as a hero with fine qualities of mind and spirit, while the police officer is represented as a mean or heartless individual, gluttoned with authority and stupid in the performance of his duty. Such distortion of the truth cannot fail to have an injurious effect, especially upon the plastic minds of the younger generation. The gangster is not a hero but a public enemy. His distorted mind is bent upon injuring, maltreating, preying upon or destroying the innocent and the helpless. In an emergency he is almost invariably a coward. The real heroes are the courageous judges and public officials and officers of the law, throughout our land, who, in the line of duty, are performing their dangerous and necessary tasks

with devotion and zeal. These men are the veritable peace time soldiers of the Republic. They are entitled to our confidence and support; and they need our help in the essential matters relating to the improvement and upbuilding of the service.