



# Department of Justice

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BY

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ATTORNEY GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES

AT

MAJOR CITIES CHIEF ADMINISTRATORS' CONFERENCE  
ON URBAN CRIME

12:00 NOON  
TUESDAY, AUGUST 27, 1974  
CONRAD HILTON  
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

I very much appreciate the opportunity to be with you at this important conference.

As policemen, you occupy a position of unusual significance in our effort to reduce crime.

It is the sobering--and some might say frightening--magnitude of the crime problem I wish to discuss with you.

Since I became Attorney General seven months ago, I have faced a number of serious problems and new responsibilities.

Perhaps the most disheartening task that I have had so far was to announce to the Nation last March that preliminary crime statistics collected by the FBI showed that serious reported crime had increased five percent over 1972.

What made it disheartening was that in 1972 there was an actual reduction of crime for the first time in 17 years. Many observers viewed the four percent decline as evidence that the crime problem was being overcome at last.

Few such illusions exist today.

Final statistics to be released shortly will show that crime actually increased during 1973 by six percent, not the five percent that was earlier predicted.

As many of you know crime rose 16 percent during the final quarter of 1973, and 15 percent in the first quarter of this year.

No one can accurately predict the crime rate for the remainder of 1974. I would like to be optimistic and say that we have seen the worst of the increase, but in the face of those statistics, I cannot be.

We can now perceive with shocking clarity that we have suffered a severe setback in the concerted effort to alter one of the Nation's most agonizing facts of life.

It is a failure of substantial dimension--harsh bitter, and dismaying. For the long run, it may prove to be the prelude of worse things to come unless we again find the way to gain the upperhand.

I do not mean to suggest that the total crime control efforts during the past five or ten years have failed. Nor do I believe we are necessarily doomed to future chaos.

But the fact is that for at least a brief period, we have lost our initiative and are back on the defensive. The implications of this are of the utmost gravity to every citizen. The situation should compel us to look at the somber facts and begin making a series of rational decisions on how we are to proceed.

As Attorney General, I have been growing increasingly concerned about this situation for a number of months. I think it is about time some unvarnished facts are placed squarely on the table.

The Nation is in deep trouble in its effort to reduce crime.

The Federal government must shoulder part of the blame for the crime problem. There have been too many grandiose promises and too much patch-work performance in Washington.

After years of struggle, after spending billions of dollars, it should be clear to everyone that there is no touchstone to be invoked in crime control.

There are no more rabbits to pull out of the hat. If we are realistic, we have to admit now that there never were.

Most crime occurs at the state and local level. I know from long personal experience that the criminal justice system there is in the hands of dedicated and capable people.

The quality of policemen is rising--as is their equipment, particularly in communications.

Corrections programs are gradually improving, though a great many weaknesses still exist.

Courts and prosecutors have improved, especially in the processing of cases and training of personnel.

Even as crime increased nationally in the first quarter of this year, 33 large cities still were able to show a reduction in their crime rates.

But the criminal justice system continues to face major handicaps.

Part of the problem rests with the Federal grant-in-aid program operated by an agency in the Department of Justice--the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration.

Since most crime control responsibilities rest with states and localities, the Federal role is limited. We can provide funding, research and development, and hopefully a degree of leadership.

However, I would be less than frank if I did not begin my discussion of the overall problems with an account of Federal shortcomings.

In its first six years, the LEAA budgets have totaled \$3.2 billion--and nearly \$900 million is expected for the current fiscal year.

When I came to Justice, I said this money had to produce more results. I feel even more strongly about it today.

In six years, LEAA has had four Administrators--and the appointment of the fifth was announced recently. During that period, there was no Administrator for nearly 18 months. Such turnover hardly enhances efficiency.

In this context, let me tell you of a new LEAA project now getting underway.

It is the agency's first structured program to evaluate the effectiveness of projects funded by LEAA, and up to \$20 million will be expended in the next two years. Though some evaluation has been done before, this is the first consistent effort.

You may well wonder, as I do, why a real evaluation program is only beginning now--six years and \$3.2 billion later. One reason is that Congress last year insisted that this step be taken. But it is a sobering commentary on the level of Federal vision that it was not started years earlier--and before Congress was forced to act.

Things will not change overnight, but I assure you that I will do everything within my power to see that LEAA becomes the most effective crime reduction instrument possible.

For their part, states and localities also must work much harder.

Let me reiterate I believe the vast bulk of their criminal justice personnel are dedicated and capable. Many put their lives on the line daily--for scant rewards and skimpy thanks.

However, much more can be done. Where efficiency flags, it can be bolstered. Where corruption exists, it must be rooted out. Cooperation can be enhanced, for piece-meal approaches aid only the criminal. Every agency is obligated to make community relations programs an every-day fact of life, for if the community is not on your side, nothing you do will succeed. And I repeat: Nothing.

Criminal justice needs are still substantial. Government at the state and local level too often does not provide proper resources. The Federal government also was notably late in developing its grant program, and there is some question whether current funding is adequate.

Criminal justice still needs more skilled personnel, better equipment, and better techniques to prevent and control crime. In some instances, more manpower may be required. In others, it may be a matter of better utilizing existing personnel.

Whatever else the system does, it must grapple more firmly with the worst crimes--the violent crimes and those that contain the threat of violence.

Criminal justice can develop techniques to prevent more of these crimes. It can concentrate enforcement on the crimes of violence and concentrate more on the repeat offender. Those who are dangerous can be kept in custody rather than being frivolously released. While many may be rehabilitated, many cannot--and they should be kept in prison to protect society.

Substantial resources have been used to improve criminal justice throughout the nation, and that is a proper effort.

At the same time, it would be grossly unrealistic to suggest that the crime problem can be controlled by criminal justice alone--even if it attained absolute perfection under our system of laws.

During my 20 years of work relating to criminal justice, I have at one time or another supported nearly all of the panaceas offered for crime reduction: More policemen; more prosecutors and judges; rehabilitation of offenders; and, if all else fails, paying them to be good.

But I now feel we do the criminal justice system--and the nation--a disservice by proposing any one of those things as the answer, or even that taken together they represent the solution.

Crime springs from causes still imperfectly perceived.



We do not even know with any certainty why crime has started rising again. Many theories have been put forward. Some say it is the result of better crime reporting. Others contend that economic problems have contributed. But even if the rates had remained stable, or declined slightly, crime would still exist at inexcusably high levels.

We do know that criminal justice can do only so much. It has little or no control over the incredible variety of circumstances that may contribute to crime. For answers to those nagging questions, we must turn to the entire society--and to the criminals themselves.

Much crime develops from poverty and deprivation. Most victims of crime are the poor themselves. There will be no marked crime reduction until we understand that--but, more importantly, until we act upon it.

Crime also develops as our institutions--traditional sources of stability--begin to break down.

The home, the school, the church--all play an important role. As their influence wanes, so does the concept of self-discipline--or, to put it another way, self-policing.

For a good long time, the nation was fortunate because we did discipline ourselves to a substantial extent, and we did police ourselves. As a people, we took enormous pride in knowing what was right and wrong.

All of those things now appear to be in disrepair. Growing numbers of Americans feel freedom means license. They do not seem to understand that license has a price-- and in most instances it is a staggering price.

For decades, the nation was fortunate in other ways. There was a frontier into which we could expand. Even after it was settled, a sense of responsibility and adherence to the work ethic continued to propel us forward.

So much of that has changed. And so has the superabundance that also tended for a time to dilute tendencies toward crime.

But we are still faced with a large number of poor people, despite the billions of dollars spent to eradicate poverty. Too much poverty still exists, along with the other horsemen of hopelessness and discrimination. Government and business and our institutions simply have not met the challenges.

The nation has tried. But the needed results have not been achieved.

In addition to everything else, the state of health of the economy has an effect on crime and its causes.

While there are no panaceas in reducing crime, one area where renewed emphasis must be placed is on crime by the young.

Current efforts have not been adequate--a fact recognized by Congress in new juvenile delinquency legislation it has fashioned.

It is not enough to rehabilitate youthful offenders. We have to work harder to prevent them from turning to crime in the first place.

The prospect for that is uncertain--as we see from FBI statistics on the seven major index crimes.

In 1972, about 44 percent of arrests for those crimes were of persons 18 and under. When you enlarge the age group to those persons 21 and under, you find they accounted for 61 percent of the arrests. But when you look at the 25 and under category, the cold statistic reveals that three out of every four persons arrested for committing a serious crime fell into that age grouping.

These statistics should be placed in tandem with Department of Labor statistics on unemployment among the young.

In 1973, white males in the 16 to 17 age group had an unemployment rate of 15 percent, and minority males 34 percent. In the 18 and 19 age group, the white rate was 10 percent and the minority rate 22 percent. Those figures declined slightly from 1972--but they are still awesomely high.

In the 30 largest metropolitan areas in 1973, whites of both sexes in the 16 to 19 group had a 14 percent unemployment rate. For minorities of both sexes, it was nearly 33 percent.

One lesson is that we are not going to solve the crime problem among the young--especially in the cities--until they are brought into society's mainstream.

To do that, a basic step is to impart educational and employment skills--and couple it with actual jobs. This is not only needed to help control crime. It is also the decent, the humanitarian, thing to do.

This approach alone will not solve all crime problems related to poverty and discrimination. But unless we succeed in this, other efforts have little potential for lasting success.

Some observers have said youth crime will tend to automatically diminish as the number of young persons in our population declines.

However, Census Bureau estimates are not promising.

Statistics show there are now an estimated 38.9 million persons in the 15 to 24 age group. By 1979, projections show the number growing to 41.5 million. It is true that by 1984--10 years from now--it is expected to dip to 38.6 million. But longer-range projections show there will be some 47 million persons in that age group by the year 2000.

Time is not exactly on our side in the struggle against crime--no matter what factors are considered.

A thorough evaluation of everything that has been done so far is badly needed. And then we must devise better ways to accomplish the manifold tasks.

It will require money, manpower, better planning, better thinking, more dedication, more staying power--and a hell of a lot of luck.

Serious thinking will be required beyond government programs and other traditional approaches--extending into how we live both individually and as a people.

The young learn from us--and what they see and what they must be learning are sources of growing dismay.

It is not just a matter of some young people committing crime because they think they can get away with it, although I personally think that the low risk involved stimulates greater interest. Nor is it merely a matter of some being turned off by the criminal justice system because it is sometimes unfair.

Permissiveness of all sorts has permeated our society at virtually all levels.

Parents, too, often fail to teach or to properly discipline their children. Beyond that, as a society we seem to have absolutely lost our perception of a variety of things that can corrupt and distort the young.

Alcoholism has become perhaps our major health problem, and contributes to a substantial amount of crime. Parents who drink excessively are openly inviting their children to follow suit.

Pornography has become as widespread as baseball. Adults may think it is fine for themselves. But they forget that there is no way to keep it from filtering down to children not equipped to handle it. Just as there is no way--with such widespread adult use of alcohol and drugs--to keep those things from filtering down to the young.

In addition, the average eight-year-old has seen more violence on television than the average soldier encounters during a hitch in the Army. The violence pours on in an endless torrent. Anyone complaining about it hears from the purveyors of that violence that their freedom of speech is being encroached upon.

Mr. Justice Holmes once said that freedom of speech does not entitle anyone to falsely shout "Fire" in a crowded theater. I do not think that those who reap fortunes from violence on television and in the movies are totally immune from the Constitution to twist the minds of generations of children. It is equally discouraging that so many parents simply don't forbid their children to watch the unending deluge of such garbage.

The tolls are now being paid for all of the license.

As a people, we seem to sit like zombies while these and other problems spread. A major response is to demand that the police do more. Well, the police are doing about all they can. The police cannot legislate morals--let alone enforce them. That can only be done by the society.

Once upon a time, most people looked upon the criminal as unsavory. Today, he is increasingly being portrayed as a hero--not just in the arts but on the streetcorners, too.

Killers and rapists and robbers now are often looked upon as political victims. The impulse by many is to say that they are only getting their fair share.

After all the causes and possible causes of crime are considered, one fact begins to emerge with some precision.

We simply must be more realistic in our approaches to solving the crime problem.

No one approach will work by itself. As I indicated earlier, it is essential that we re-think everything we have done to date. And then crime reduction programs must be developed that have a high probability of success.

Among other things, there has to be a re-examination of a tendency by some to blame crime on everything but the criminal.

It may be that it is not possible to discover every last reason for crime--though we should try very hard to do so.

But the manifestation of the results of all the causes--the criminal himself--is very, very apparent. And we should begin dealing with the offender in much more effective ways.

I believe that a great many offenders commit crimes because they want to commit them. A great many feel that the risks of apprehension are low--and the risk of going to prison, even if caught, are even lower. Some commit crimes for gain, others for personal satisfaction, thrill, adventure--general hell-raising.

It is time that we quit beating around the bush and frankly faced one of the realities of crime. And it is simply this: Some crime--perhaps a great deal of crime--will not be cured by simply removing conditions that many have come to accept as the root causes of illegal behavior.

Let me emphasize it again. Many criminals violate the law because they want to. And the starting point in dealing with them is to increase the odds against them. We must make the risks of criminal behavior much greater. We must make certain that the odds are on society's side, and that when somebody commits a crime he is then going to be caught. After he is caught, he is going to face the certain prospect of swift and sure justice. And after he is convicted, he is going to be placed in prison.



We also have to face another reality.

Everyone who breaks the law--or condones it--helps breed contempt for all laws and encourages all lawlessness. And that goes for placing a bet with a bookie or cheating on taxes or violating the antitrust or securities laws. White collar crime is a major problem--but too little enforcement effort has been placed in this area.

The setting of the proper example must begin with the leaders of government. In recent years, the spectacles we have seen are appalling, and I am not talking only about Watergate now. The list of state and local officials convicted of federal crimes--usually for violating their public trust for an illegal buck--is scandalously long.

Disrespect for the law by those sworn to uphold it can only encourage a tendency toward lawlessness in others.

Each should examine his own conscience and his own conduct to see if he contributes to the breakdown of our laws and our ethics.

Those who cheat, those who are dissolute in their own conduct, those on the make or on the take--all contribute to a climate where the worst things gradually become an ingrained part of every-day life.

I do not suggest that as a nation we should sink into a morass of self-pity or enfeebling shame. But what I do suggest is that we begin to fully accept, during every waking hour, a set of deep and abiding responsibilities to help shape a future filled with hope and decency.

We can no longer say that the job of crime control is solely the preserve of the police or courts or corrections.

It is also partly the job of every citizen, of every institution, of every business. Because if they fail, then our present system of criminal justice simply will be unable to hold back the tide.

The options are very limited as we face the future. If we go on as we are, there is every possibility that crime will inundate us.

The nation would then be faced with the prospect of falling apart or devising a national police force in one final effort to restore domestic order.

We should never doubt for a moment that there are men and forces at work in this country eagerly awaiting an opportunity to devise such a program as the first step toward total control over our lives.

Already we hear many say the answer to crime rests solely with more police, tougher police, more judges, more prosecutors, more prisons. If such a buildup should occur on a massive scale--beyond what may be reasonably needed--then we would see basic freedoms begin to dissipate. Some even suggest that we really should give up a portion of our freedoms so that more criminals can be jailed.

The trouble is that such a trend would be progressive. And if history teaches us anything, it is that freedoms willingly surrendered for any reason are never returned.

As other countries have learned, a police state can control common crime. But that is not our way. And it would be a dreadful mistake to slide inch-by-inch toward that chasm, centralizing the war on crime in the name of efficiency while meekly accepting a national constabulary.

National police can be used as an instrument of national repression--and they always wind up being run by somebody else.

Any nation can stop crime if it is willing to have an internal army of occupation. But there has never been a government which stopped crime by oppression that eventually did not live to regret it.

The nations that have survived and flourished have done so by developing an inner strength in their people and in their institutions--not by trying to develop morality at the point of a rifle.

Crime has already taken some of our freedoms--but by default, not by design.

It is a symbol of our maturity that we have not turned to repressive measures to combat crime, as bad as the situation is.

The option we must take is the one that provides for the control of crime within our framework of laws.

Neither the submission to crime at its present levels nor a descent into repression can be tolerated.

But every person who cherishes democracy must understand that our system of justice--perhaps our very system itself--is a thin and fragile reed.

The resolution to support it must begin now. We cannot wait forever to embark upon the enlightened steps needed to restore decency and security.

There is a great deal hanging in the balance in this effort to fashion more mature individual action and in turn a more mature society. If we do not succeed, then sooner or later we will have to face the prospect that there are a great many others--both at home and abroad--who would eagerly move in on such a demoralized people.

Thank you.