

### Justice For America

Today the concern created by our rising crime rate has forced nearly half of our people to alter their life-styles in one fashion or another. The watchdog and the double-latched door have become the signs of the times. The President's Commission on Law Enforcement has revealed that nearly half the population are afraid to set foot on the streets of their own communities after dark.

Loss of life and damage to property, tragic as these may be, are not the most disturbing aspect of crime in this country. Rather it is the terrible unease that the frequency and severity of crime brings to the hearts of many Americans. The contemporary legacy of crime in our nation has come to represent a real threat to the quality of American life. It has created divisiveness and hostility among our people, dividing rich and poor, white and black, urban and rural dwellers. At the same time, it has served to drain public confidence in the credibility of the law in our political system. Since the court has no armies, it is essential that we rebuild the public confidence in our systems of justice.

#### INDIVIDUAL ACTION

The question that many Americans ask most often is, "Why isn't something done about the crime situation?" Such a reaction is understandable but, in and of itself, doesn't lead to solutions. We should, instead, be asking ourselves, "What can we, as individual citizens, do about it?"

A bumper sticker which says, "Support Your Local Police," is not the answer. What is needed is money to pay for the kind of professional law enforcement this country needs and deserves. It is disgraceful that a man with the responsibility of a police officer is forced into a second job in order to live a decent life.

There are other important areas which we must become concerned about if the criminal justice system is going to work effectively. One of these is criminal rehabilitation. During a typical year, the U. S. correctional system deals with approximately three million people — half that number are under

its authority on any given day.

Unfortunately, today too many penal institutions around the country have become revolving doors for prisoners. A substantial section of the correctional population is being "corrected" for the third and fourth time. What does all this mean? It means that, for our safety, and theirs, we must insure that prisoners are in fact rehabilitated before returning them to society. To do this the public must become involved. Each of us must demonstrate our willingness to provide the funds to secure and maintain more and better qualified prison personnel, capable of administering the necessary rehabilitative programs.

There is, too, a great need for more meaningful vocational programs in our prisons and jails. A man who serves his time manufacturing license plates, or who merely sits and does nothing, will not learn a trade which will help him become a productive part of our society when he is released. This is the man who, more probably than not, will return to a life of crime.

#### LEGITIMATE AUTHORITY

Many other areas in our legal and correctional systems will require reform in order to reestablish the broad acceptance of the authority of our legal structure that is so fundamental to our government. For instance, our parole and probation systems are overburdened, and too many of our courts are understaffed and clogged with backlogs.

If we care enough, then we, as individuals, must be willing to engage in the kind of personal commitment necessary to create the changes that we seek. We must be willing, in addition, to assume the necessary collective financial burdens — though, in the end, we may be pleasantly surprised to find larger financial benefits from these programs. We must shift our individual and collective attention to devising new strategies of attack on crime, without allowing our emotions to lead us toward repression of constitutional rights.

I agree with the President's Crime Commission which has stated: "No system, however well-staffed or organized, no level of material well-being for all, will rid society of crime if there is not a widespread ethical motivation, and a widespread belief that by and large the government and the social order deserve credence, respect and loyalty."

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#### THE AUTHOR

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