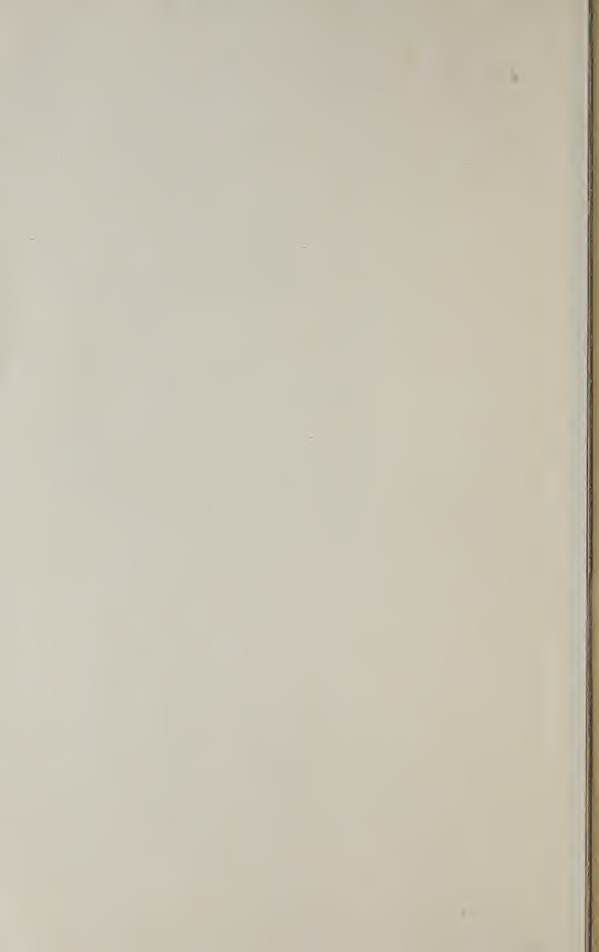


J. EDGAR HOOVER

on

*Juvenile Delinquency*





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# JUVENILE DELINQUENCY



*by*

JOHN EDGAR HOOVER

Director, Federal Bureau of Investigation  
United States Department of Justice

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# JUVENILE DELINQUENCY

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ON the tally sheet of accomplishments for youth in 1945, there are many marks that besmirch the record. The many fine attainments of American youngsters in their eager preparation to assume adult responsibilities have been smeared by the dishonest, antisocial behavior of boys and girls who seek happiness by illicit means.

There necessarily must be an answer to this problem of illegal, un-American behavior. An analysis of the structure of society inevitably includes a survey of man's attitudes and actions with relation to his fellow man. The progress of society depends upon man—its downfall is his responsibility. A nation's rise to great heights is based upon law and order. A nation's downfall, therefore, results from lawlessness and disorder.

Is it any wonder that right-thinking Americans are anxious to preserve law and order to insure a continuance of free, democratic principles. The Nazi madmen plunged Europe into disorder. Their regime reaped a harvest of horror and death.

We should have great concern for our own home front because there is every indication that lawlessness and disorder are attempting to sink their fangs into our daily life. Crime is the offspring of these vicious evils and the records clearly indicate it is on the upswing.

A grand total of 1,565,541 major crimes were registered for our nation in 1945. This represented an increase of 12.4 percent over the 1944 figure. The crime increases were more pronounced and widespread in 1945 than have been recorded in many years. Sharp rises were noted in many crimes of a serious nature. Robberies led with a 23.6 per cent jump followed by increases of 18.7 per cent in auto thefts, 17.0 per cent in burglaries, 16.2 per cent in negligent manslaughters, and 10.1 per cent in murders. Aggravated assaults rose 8.7 per cent and an 8.6 per cent rise was recorded for larcenies. Offenses of rape, which for a number of years have been on the upswing, rose 5.7 per cent in 1945.

Crime with all its horror reaches its depths of despair in recounting the acts of boys and

girls under 21 years of age. While only 21 per cent of the total number of persons arrested last year were youngsters under voting age, nevertheless they accounted for more than 40 per cent of the burglaries, 61 per cent of the car thieves, 30 per cent of the rapists, more than 33 per cent of the thieves and 35 per cent of the robbers arrested. The greatest increase in the arrest of boys was for criminal homicide and other assaults, such arrests increasing almost 17 per cent during 1945 compared with 1944. There was also a rise of almost 11 per cent in arrests of boys under 21 for offenses against common decency. The number of arrests of girls in the same age group for criminal homicide and other assaults showed a smaller upswing of almost 3 percent. Compared with 1941, arrests for females under 21 during 1945 increased more than 109 per cent.

There can be no doubt that juvenile delinquency persists as one of our most serious social problems. We can be secure in the conclusion that the problem is local and must be defeated in the community. It is obvious that the question of delinquency may differ in each community because of varying causative factors. Any approach to a solution of the question must first, I am certain, be a study of existing conditions which need to be remedied before an effective cure can take place. If we begin to dispense some type of treatment before we

know what kind of conditions need to be remedied, the approach will, in all probability, be unsuccessful. In dealing with the personality and behavior of a delinquent, the community should get pertinent data which would yield the best picture as to why a youngster chose antisocial behavior, which in a majority of cases might ruin his chances for a healthy adulthood, over normal conduct.

Teen-age offenders, it is true, had the misfortune to grow up in a world unsettled by war. Our Country, during the past few years, was affected by a spirit of wartime abandon. Young people were left to shift for themselves, in all too many instances, as families became separated and homes were broken. Community services and activities suffered a breakdown. Maladjustments in society influenced our youth to the end that juvenile delinquency increased tremendously during the war, and it has continued at a record level into the postwar period. The evidence is clear that we adults have been remiss in our duty to provide youth with an environment which will insure their development into decent, law-abiding citizens.

More often than not, lack of parental care and guidance permeates the stories of the youngsters who have fallen into antisocial ways. I cannot be convinced that juvenile delinquency, in the majority of instances, arises from inher-



ent evil tendencies on the part of children. Caught in the web of neglect, the youngsters are bitter examples of our failure as adults.

Parents who neglect to train their children in their fundamental obligations to society have violated the dignity of their parenthood and constitute a threat not only to their own family but to every man, woman and child in the community. I recall one case when an innocent, respectable citizen—the father of two young children—was murdered as the result of delinquency existing in other homes.

This man, his wife and children returned to their home one evening and noticed that the light was burning in their living-room radio. At that precise moment, noises were heard in the rear of the house. The husband went to the back part of the house to investigate and was shot and killed by two young hoodlums. Investigation revealed that two juveniles had entered the home through an unlocked back door and had tuned in the radio to the local police broadcast so that they could be forewarned if a squad car was dispatched to the residence. The youths ransacked the house and stole miscellaneous jewelry, a child's bank and a .22 caliber rifle.

The two boys responsible for this dual crime were 12 to 15 years of age. The failure of their parents to train them as good citizens resulted

in ruining their lives and imposed agonizing grief on a law-abiding family. The twelve-year-old boy came from a home where discipline was unknown and the children were left to their own pursuits. The other lad came from a broken home where brutality had twisted and warped the minds of the children.

The problem of juvenile delinquency is not confined to any particular economic or social level. Like disease it strikes at the homes of the poor and rich alike. Neither is the problem limited to any certain section of the country nor to the larger metropolitan areas. It exists any place where indifferent and self-centered parents, and short-sighted communities fail to discharge their obligations to the younger generation. A home which fails to reflect proper training, discipline, love, care and guidance is a source of infection and the children within it are mentally starved.

In attacking the problem of juvenile crime, much emphasis must be placed on the home. If the spiritual structure of the home is weak, decay will result to the nation. It is fundamental, therefore, that the moral stamina of our country depends upon our homes. In discussing the social importance of the home, it is necessary to recognize and understand the position of the family unit and the responsibilities of the parents in this bulwark of society. It is

shockingly evident, when one reads case after case of youthful delinquency, that decay has hit the home and that parents have tossed their children upon the tempestuous waters of life unprepared to face the eddies and hidden shoals that lead to destruction.

It is difficult to realize why parents fail to shoulder the responsibilities of their parenthood. Children who are forced into the back alleys of the community because a father or mother, or both are guilty of neglect, greed, selfishness, immorality or a score of other reasons, usually lack the moral fiber to offset temptation. I recall the case of Allen and Bill.

One winter evening while idly chatting to pass the leisure hours, Allen, age 17, confided in his 16-year old friend, Bill, that he was "broke" and would like to make some money. Burglary, they decided was the answer to their problem. They gained entrance into an electric service company in the neighborhood by forcing the rear basement door with a screw driver. Finding nothing of value in the office, the boys broke into the safe and removed several rolls of money. Before making their exit, at Bill's suggestion they set fire to the building since they had been unable to find anything of real value. Police picked up the youths before they had gone a block. The amount of loot was inconsequential, but the damage to the establish-

ment by fire amounted to several thousand dollars. Both boys were armed at the time of the robbery.

Bill was turned over to juvenile authorities. Because of his record, he was sent to the State Training School for an indefinite period. Allen was indicted by the Grand Jury on two charges of burglary and one charge of arson, and was sentenced to two years probation on each charge, the sentences to run concurrently and the first five months to be spent in the county jail.

Allen was the product of a broken home. His parents were divorced several years ago and his mother remarried shortly thereafter. Allen left home to live with his brother because his father drank excessively and was often abusive. Allen lived intermittently with his brother, his father, and at various rooming houses. Although his mother asked him to live with her, he resided in a hotel for two years and at the time of his arrest was living in a shabby rooming house. Allen admitted participating in four burglaries with Bill in addition to burglarizing a furniture store where he obtained a gun.

Bill resided with his parents until he was four years of age when he went to live with his grandparents. Upon his return home seven years later, his father had remarried and both parents had children by previous marriages to support. Bill's school records indicated that his

deportment was fair, his scholastic record poor and that he had many unexplained tardinesses and absences. He had a sullen temper, was addicted to lying and stealing and frequently fought with his brothers and sisters.

Several years prior to the instant offense, Bill was placed on probation as a dependent child. Shortly after his discharge from probation, complaints were received regarding his immoral acts. He was committed to a parental school where he remained until shortly before the instant burglary. The boy admitted participation in four other burglaries.

I have related this case in some detail to show the evils incident to broken homes. If we seek an effective remedy for the problem of youthful crime, we must strengthen the spiritual structure of our homes. Parents as the child's first teacher, must dispense along with love and affection, an overflowing measure of moral teaching and ethical values. We gamble away the future of America if we fail to instill in the hearts and minds of every child the necessity of placing the interests of the family and the nation above his own.

May I urge parents in America to give good example to their youngsters by their actions, attitudes and words. The mind of a child will receive impressions with ease. If these impres-

sions are good, they will form the basis for the ideals that will strengthen adulthood.

The saying, "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it," is as true today as it was thousands of years ago when it was written.

In the training of children, it would appear that there is a tendency to discount or eliminate the teachings of God. In their eagerness to prepare their children for the material things of the world, many parents miss the most important thing—religion. The failure to instill in youngsters the necessity to follow established moral and ethical teachings places their future security and ours in jeopardy. Their minds are void of reason as to why it is necessary to follow the moral law and man-made law. Their consciences will be warped and scarred and their will power will be exercised to satisfy their own selfish ends. The terrible consequence of that type of make-up is usually vicious criminal activity.

The awful gash which has cut into the surface of our society as a result of crime needs to be cured by a return to fundamentals and an abiding faith in God. No one can successfully substitute for parents in teaching a child the beauties of liberty and freedom as distinguished from license and anarchy. The lessons a child learns from his parents are absorbed with trust

and implicit faith. That is why there can be no suitable substitute for parents; no adequate substitute for the home.

Failure on the part of parents has made it necessary for our churches, schools and youth-serving organizations to do all they can to try to retrieve youngsters from the results of bad example. These agencies in our social structure are doing fine work to create solidarity on the youth front.

There are many distracting factors that influence the actions of youth in modern life. It is increasingly evident that all of us must contribute our thought, time and effort to the solution of a problem which presents a grave threat to our American way of life.

A study of the individual backgrounds of many youthful offenders reveals a complete lack of opportunity for proper recreation and worthwhile leisure-time activity. During the war, the facilities of nearly every community swung into action toward a common objective. Youth was left, for the most part, on its own and little was done to create wholesome opportunities for diversion and provide proper outlets for normal, youthful vigor. We cannot discount the fact that youths have the desire to do something. This desire cannot be misguided or uncontrolled or it will lead to ruin. Work, play and the utilization of youthful ambitions can be prop-

erly coordinated and directed. If a community is blessed with that type of activity, it is bound to give to America healthy, morally clean boys and girls who are ready and eager to inherit the responsibilities of adulthood.

We of law enforcement welcome the assistance of civic-minded Americans who are generously striving to prevent crime. Fundamentally, it is the job of law enforcement to apprehend criminals. We are also anxious to prevent crime. Our task is hopeless, however, unless every American is willing to help make available for our youth worth-while pursuits and leisure-time activities. It is of paramount importance that adult America not be charged with setting a bad example for youngsters.

The problem of delinquency in your community may differ in degree and kind from other communities. I strongly urge you to support any worth-while project which attempts to analyze the problem in your locality. Encourage and assist the youth-serving organizations which are, with success, devoting their efforts to channelizing youthful activity along constructive lines. Actively assist your church in its work for youth. The influence of the church is wide-sweeping. Its contribution toward society and its power for good are unlimited.

Decent, right-thinking Americans have every right to wish for a continuation of the prin-



principles that made this country great. All of us want a vigorous, healthy nation where the laws of justice and equity will prevail. We must firmly resolve now to enter the battle against crime and other vicious influences which tend to infect our youth and destroy their chances of becoming true Americans.

We cannot wait for tomorrow in seeking to improve the lot of youth. We must begin today.

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