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Addresses of J. Strom Thurmond, Circuit Judge Eleventh Judicial Circuit, South Carolina, before the Sheriffs' Association of South Carolina at Wade Hampton Hotel, Columbia, S.C. 10:30 a.m., 22 January 1946, America's Challenge

Strom Thurmond

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AMERICA'S CHALLENGE

Mr. President, members of the Sheriff's Association of South Carolina, and distinguished guests:

I deem it a high honor to have the opportunity to speak to you on this occasion. As a presiding Judge in the courts of the state, I have had the privilege and pleasure of being closely associated in court work with a great many of you. No group deserves more sympathy in the performance of duty than your members. You have not faltered in your work nor ceased to battle for the cleanliness, happiness, and welfare of the citizens of your state. I congratulate you upon your burning desire to make South Carolina law abiding and law respecting.

The topic I have chosen today is a timely one, the solution to which can only be achieved by clear thinking and positive action. The firing has ceased on the battlefronts, but it is still being resumed on the homefronts. The post war crime which we feared is upon us, and is mounting in severity. Other countries report similar experiences and it appears to be nationwide.

There have been few times, if any, in our history when law enforcement faced a more serious ordeal than today. Not in the history of this country has law enforcement had such responsibilities or opportunities, or faced a more difficult and exacting future. There has existed throughout all time a warfare between crime on the one side and the forces of law and order on the other, between good on one side and evil on the other, and there exists today ceaseless conflict between inefficiency, corruption and the forces of the underworld on the one hand and the forces of decency,
truth and honesty on the other. If the forces of decency do not prevail, we shall find ourselves bogged down in corruption, vice, and crime. This country must at all times be ready to meet any attacker and be prepared against foreign invasion, but at the same time we must remember that the basic cause leading to the decline of all civilizations in the past has been debauchery of law and order. The leading objective of society today is to insure that law and order shall reign supreme.

After every acute national emergency and great war there has been a recession of moral fortitude. This one is no exception. This country is seriously threatened by lawlessness and the happiness, welfare and very security of our people are menaced. These forces of crime seek to plunder, destroy and kill. Where crime attains definite proportions the state itself deteriorates.

The war has left us a heritage of delinquency among youngsters unparalleled in our nation's history, as well as tremendous opportunities for increased crime among adults. Hundreds of families have been broken by the loss of the father in action, leaving the mother to rear her children alone. Divorces are increasing in an unprecedented manner, many of which were born of hasty and ill-planned marriages. Thousands of men and women have been released from the armed forces or from their war jobs and seek new positions. There is a widespread feeling of economic insecurity. Large numbers are migrating from the places of their former jobs, back home or to unfamiliar places, with the hope of getting a fresh start.

In addition to these problems requiring adjustments, it will be necessary for law enforcement agencies to train new members, and retrain veterans and adopt much new equipment; so it can be readily seen that the task of law enforcement will be a heavy one.

A study of detailed reports on the extent of crime in 11 of our most important and largest cities for the first 10 months of 1946 reveals startling information. Six of the cities reported an increase in murders ranging as high 115%. All of them
reported increases in robberies ranging as high as 161%; 9 reported increases in assaults up to 94%; 10 reported increases in burglaries ranging as high as 74%; all the cities reported increases in larceny up to 26%; all reported increases in auto thefts ranging as high as 54%. The crime waves being reported in the daily press are not imaginary, but real. In October 1945, serious crime increased 19% over the same month in the preceding year. Of the more serious crimes, the increases reflect 32% more murders, 38% more auto thefts, 38% more robberies, 11% more larcenies, and 26% more burglaries. Crime rates are continuing to rise rapidly throughout the entire nation. The fingerprint files of the FBI reveal a criminal army of 6 million individuals who have been arrested and fingerprinted for violations of the law--one out of every 23 inhabitants in the United States.

What is the cause of crime and why the upswing? Numerous answers have been given, some complex and some simple. People generally commit crime because they do not have the moral stamina and the traits of character to withstand temptation. There is little more to the cause of crime than the exercise of free will by intentional wrongdoing. In periods of great national stress, such as we have just experienced, we know that human nature reacts to the tempo of the times. The spirit of wartime abandon with its last fling philosophy was prevalent. This provided justification to weaker wills to violate the convention of society. Established values disappeared and an attitude of impermanence superseded individual responsibility with those who were not grounded in fundamentals. Personal responsibility in many homes apparently has become archaic and old-fashioned.

It is important for us to remember that it is better to prevent than to detect crime. The 3 time-proven ingredients which constitute deterrents to crime are sure detection, swift apprehension and certain punishment. However, there should be a rededication to not only fight crime but to also prevent it.
Any law enforcement officer worthy of his trust knows full well that his efforts in apprehending crimes are at best a temporary expedient. They can apprehend hardened criminals, bank robbers, murderers and kidnappers, and such action is essential, but this treatment is only temporary in solving our crime problem. The solution of the crime problem is comparatively simple of statement, but the most difficult of all human problems in execution. It is simply this: The rearing of law-abiding youth. The most effective manner of accomplishing this goal lies in improvement of the home, the greater effectiveness of the church. The home, the school, and the church should unite in this common purpose.

The youth problem in crime is a national disgrace. The figures compiled by the Federal Bureau of Investigation should cause one to stop and think. They point to a definite increase in youthful criminals.

The most recent figures reveal that 21% of all arrests are of persons under 21. More persons aged 17 are arrested than in any other age group. Those under 21 years of age represent 15% of all murderers, 36% of all robbers, 51% of all burglars, 34% of all thieves, 26% of all arsonists, 12% of all car thieves, and 30% of all rapists.

17-year-old boys and 18-year-old girls committed more crimes during the war years than any other age groups. 40% of the crimes against property during this time were committed by persons under 21.

Among girls under 18 in the wartime years, arrests for prostitution increased 375%, disorderly conduct 375%, and drunkenness and driving while intoxicated 174%.

The youth of today are advanced mentally over those in any other generation, have lived more, and are better informed, but physically and spiritually they deserve pity and sympathy. It is interesting to note that one-third of the available manhood in the draft age were unfit to fight for their country
because of physical, emotional or moral deficiencies. It is not a pleasant picture, a healthy outlook, or a normal condition when a country like America must bow under the disgrace of a set of circumstances in which over one-fifth of our most deadly outlaws, our murderers and machine gunning desperadoes have not yet reached voting age. The responsibility for infraction of law by youth today rests more upon the shoulders of the adult than those of the youth. This condition exists largely because of lack of discipline. The 30 million homes in this country hold the solution. If the youth are properly trained and proper examples set forth, the safety of tomorrow is assured. The time has come for this Nation to restore that standard of parental guidance and discipline which was the key to creating law abiding, forward-looking, and successful citizens, in the past. It appears that in many homes parental responsibility is no longer in style. If this condition continues, the time will soon arrive when parents will have to be held responsible, not only to their own consciences, but also to society, for the crimes of their children. Adults first become delinquent before children do. Law enforcement will render a magnificent service if it can find a way to do more to alleviate this problem. Another important activity of law enforcement is the building of a closer bond of friendship and of understanding between the law enforcement officers and the youth. With a potential of 5 million young Americans in the age group from 10 to 20, the opportunity of properly influencing the youth and reducing crime is great. No person interested in law enforcement should overlook these things: affording youth the opportunity of developing athletic skills in all kinds of sports, providing for supervised recreation, assembling them for decent social diversions, permitting them to associate with adults whom they admire and who can instill in them high principles and ideals.

The maintenance of law and order has always been one of our
most essential governmental functions, warranting the highest type of personnel and facilities that a community can provide, for only men who are honest, courageous, faithful, and efficient should be employed in law enforcement. Pull and patronage should have no part in the selection. Only merit counts and no man should enter without it. His character should be above reproach. He is the type who will not compete between righteousness and venality. No favored friends of the underworld will desire to make appointments with him. No power is great enough to swerve him from the path of duty. He posses a spirit of self-sacrifice, unrelenting persistence, and unwarranted faith and courage to dig in and fight for that which is right. He is imbued with the principle that no case is closed until the wrongdoer is brought to justice. He will oppose outside interference and constantly battle for the better things in enforcement. He will have contempt for the corrupt officer, the cheating officer, the lazy officer, and the ignorant officer, and insist that officers of this nature be eliminated. He realizes that only men of integrity and character can shake the complacency of the underworld, and he will strive at all times to place the profession of law enforcement upon the high plane of honesty, fidelity, and efficiency. He is the type who will be more eager to capture the criminal instead of the headline. He is a man of unquestioned integrity and will not tolerate crooked politics and dishonest elections, nor indulge in any type of corruption, whether it be of petty graft, the acceptance of bribes for the freeing of arrested men, or the weakening of testimony in courts, or commit any other act unbecoming a loyal and true law enforcement officer.

In this modern age it is essential that law enforcement officers be properly trained. To catch a criminal is one thing; to convince him is another. No real law enforcement officer can consider himself an efficient one if he cannot follow through in court what he has begun in the field of detection and apprehension. It is my opinion that your group could undertake no
more important program in the post-war years than a widespread campaign of training law enforcement officers in this state. This training should be conducted by professional law enforcement men who have dealt in the realities of the problem. The FBI conducts a National Police Academy for every law enforcement officer in America who desires it. This splendid organization, which has done such a magnificent work in the field of apprehension and punishment of criminals in this country, has thrown open the doors of its police academy to every community in the nation and placed its entire facilities at the command of American law enforcement. It is suggested that full advantage be taken of the opportunities offered by the FBI, and especially the opportunity to send officers to its Academy; and further, that the graduates of this Academy be utilized to the fullest extent possible as instructors in classes conducted for the benefit of officers who have not yet had the opportunity of attending such a school.

Crimes, which a few years ago would have baffled even the fictional Sherlock Holmes, are being solved today as routine matters. A flake of paint, an almost invisible bloodstain, a tiny particle of dirt, a flattened bullet, or a scrawled bit of handwriting—all have a story that becomes apparent in the light of science. The accomplishments in the field of law enforcement, like those in the field of war, are almost like modern magic.

The release of murderers, robbers, burglars, sex-crazed degenerates, outlaws, and bandits from penal institutions is a matter of great concern to the courts and law enforcement officials. Law enforcement officers some times spend not only hours and days, but weeks and months, at times injuring their health by over-exposure and over-work to apprehend a guilty party. The courts may spend a number of days trying him and after due deliberation, a jury may convict him and a trial judge who heard the evidence imposes upon the accused a carefully considered sentence, designed to mete out justice in the particular case. It is discouraging to say the least for an
official, who participated in the apprehension or trial of the guilty party, to suddenly learn that the convicted person has been indiscriminately pardoned, paroled or granted "leave of absence." The FBI is authority for the statement that a large percentage of the fugitives being sought by law enforcement officers throughout the country have been the recipients of ill-advised clemency. The main consideration, the guiding principle, in judging each and every case in which release may be administered, should be the protection of the public. Pull, money, or favoritism, should never be the basis upon which a person is released from a penal institution. Other inmates of the institution without such may be more deserving of consideration. To discriminate in such cases would be unjust. When justice is not real, is not fair, is not honest, is not the same for all peoples, the democracy not only fails to function but does not exist. The true motivating spirit of our civilization must ever be justice.

In closing, I again wish to commend you on the fine service you have rendered. All honest citizens in this state should aid the law enforcement officers who have dedicated their talents to the public welfare. It is my hope that you will be able to enlist the aid of the public in improving conditions, in providing better facilities, and in securing modern implements of law enforcement. It is false economy and a flagrant disregard of society's rightful protection to reduce essential law enforcement services. Law enforcement agencies exist for but one purpose, namely, the protection of society. Every boy you teach to hate crime is a victory for your side; every person you interest in a desire for clean politics, good government, and honest administration of justice is another supporter for law enforcement. We can win this contest for the right by the building of a mental attitude which will instinctively hate crime and every element which fosters it. The minds and hearts of our citizens must be enlisted in the battle. It is a great challenge that is afforded the law enforcement officers throughout the country in the fight against crime. I know you will do your full part in this great struggle.